

**EI-702**

**CHRIS BOCHES**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**RESIDENCES:**

- **ALBANIA: LIBOHOVË**
- **THE US: TORRINGTON, CONNECTICUT, NEW YORK CITY, AND CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

LEVINE: Okay, today is October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1995, and I'm here in Concord, New Hampshire with Mr. and Mrs. Boches, in their home on Franklin Street, and I'm about to interview Mr. Chris Boches, who came from Albania in 1929, when he was fifteen years of age. And today Mr. Boches is eighty-one years, at the time of this interview. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I want to say that I'm very happy that I was able to get to see you, and I'm looking forward to whatever you can remember. I'll start at the beginning: if for the tape, you could say your birth date, and where in Albania you were born?

BOCHES: I was born in Albania, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914, in the village named Libohovë.

LEVINE: Okay, and did you live in Libohovë until you left for the United States?

BOCHES: I left September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1929.

LEVINE: So up until that time, you were living in Libohovë?

BOCHES: Yes, I went to school there, up to fourth or fifth grade.

LEVINE: How could you describe the town? I understand it was a village?

BOCHES: It's a village, but they do have a church that was built in the year of 554. It was built by the name of Oustilianos, the same architect that built St. Sophia in Constantinople. Very museum place, one of the most beautiful things in the world.

LEVINE: Can you spell the name of the architect? Do you have any idea?

BOCHES: Oustilianos, that's in the Greek name! He was an architect, and he happened to be in our area, and he built that little church. But then he went to St. Sophia—Constantinople, and he built a bigger thing. And—

LEVINE: Yeah, when we finish, if we can figure it out, we'll do that, okay?

BOCHES: All right. What else do you want to know?

LEVINE: What was the name of that church in Libohovë?

BOCHES: I forgot now.

LEVINE: Was it--?

BOCHES: St. Mary's. Yeah, it's an Orthodox church, and the whole altar, because we have a closed altar. Like the Protestants don't have a closed altar. We have a closed altar with a door in the middle, the twelve apostles, six on each side, and then in the middle is the Last Supper. And the whole altar is built with white gold! And also we had a cross that someone in those days brought a piece of wood that the same cross that the Christ was nailed on. And they put it in there, and they made the cross with the white gold, and then they had velvet, which was also white gold. And the people used to borrow it, and go to the different villages—pray for it. Pray to get well, pray to [unclear]. They believed so much on it that it did help a lot of people.

LEVINE: You mean they would take the cross?

BOCHES: The cross was in a box, and then they'd take it home, and they'd open it up, and they'd pray. And then different people brought it home for sickness, or different things. They believed in it so much, you know, real, real good Christians.

LEVINE: So that this cross would have the piece of the cross from the cross that Christ was nailed to, and then the white gold?

BOCHES: The rest of the cross was made with white gold, but this piece of wood is in the center of it, and you couldn't see that. And then they used to travel with it, and

they'd go all different villages, to borrow it. And of course, people donate money, and they'd bring it to keep the church going.

LEVINE: Did you personally ever know of anybody who was helped?

BOCHES: I went to school there, which is right next to the school, the church that was, and we used to play, and outside the yard they have this cedar trees. They go way up, and they're still there when I left, and they're still there now. And we had a beautiful village, nice homes, and people that they went across Constantinople, enter Romania, came back, make money, and they liked it. We had water, had our own garden, had fruit trees, had grapes, had a lot of things. And it was an easy life. We didn't have no hospital, no doctors.

LEVINE: What did you do if you got sick?

BOCHES: They made their own medicine, most of them. Once in a while, if it's serious, they would have to go by mule or something, quite a ways, to bring a doctor to take care of them. And when the ladies did have babies, they helped each other.

LEVINE: Midwives?

BOCHES: Yeah. My aunt had nine children. My mother had four. And, but, it was no pollution. And when I got inducted in the service, I had there in Torrington, Connecticut. I went to Dr. Hatchet, and he checked me, and I asked the doctor. I says, "I hope I don't go in the Pacific." He says to me, "If you can stand the New England weather, you can stand any weather in the world. But," he says, "If you go to Mediterranean," that's his words, "Your life extends from three to five years." I says, "Dr. Hatchet, why?" "Because oxygen is so pure." That's what he told me.

LEVINE: So you were having that pure oxygen the whole time you were growing up?

BOCHES: I did, but today probably, with the cars and all that, you know, maybe it's not—but still, in the villages, it is no pollution.

LEVINE: What about your school life there? What was it like going to school?

BOCHES: The school over there, you had one big room. They have first class, second class, third class, and they're all in the same thing. But you know, the higher up stay on the side, the small on the other side, the one teacher. Of course, the teacher I went to, he spoke three to four languages: French, fluently, read and write; Greek, fluently, read and write; Albanian, fluently, read and write; and I forgot the other one. And, but we had discipline. You respect him. We never called anybody, "Hi, Joe. Hi, Nick." Mister. Then, in Sundays, he designate one of the boys to tell him who went to church, and who didn't. And

then if you don't, you go—you go in the end over there, with one foot up, your hands up in the air, and face the wall for twenty minutes. Then on the other foot: punishment! They never hit—they used to spank us if we too fresh!

LEVINE: Did you stand on one leg?

BOCHES: One leg!

LEVINE: With one leg up?

BOCHES: Yeah, one leg up, and hands up!

LEVINE: And your hands up?

BOCHES: Yeah, for fifteen minutes, twenty minutes! But they spank us unless you real bad. But you respected it. Now, any older person, you always called them Uncle. And I didn't smoke over there, but when I came here, I was ashamed to smoke in front of my father. So my father happened to say to me—he came in and opened the door, and I see smoke, and he told my mother, he says, "Tell him to smoke in front of me before he sets our house on fire!" [Laughs] You know, we had a lot of respect for older people, and especially the real old ones.

LEVINE: Let me ask you about that. The real old people, the real old people in your town--?

BOCHES: Yeah.

LEVINE: How were they treated? I mean, how did you show respect to old age?

BOCHES: Well, the respect was this: when you get old in places like that, either one of the boys, or one of the daughters, that's married to someone else, they took care of them—took them home, and took care of them! 'Til they passed away. There was no convalescent home, and mostly there was no doctors, but they had their own medicines that they knew from way back, somehow, somewhere.

LEVINE: Did you know about any of those, like--?

BOCHES: Like, taking the dried cloves, some certain kind of small tree: they take the skin of it, and they boil it, and it will never come out. Now, we have bleach in this country. Over there, do you know what they use for bleach? When they have the fire, they have a fireplace, and they take the ashes. They have extra-fine sifter, and they sift the thing, and they use those ashes to throw it in the water, and those clothes come white as bleach, because there's chemicals in it! See what I mean? And lot of, lot of, lot of things like that. They used to do

their own clothes, the ladies, at the age, anywhere from thirteen and up, or [unclear] or twelve, their mother teach them how to take care of the house when she gets married. And then she starts to make her own clothes. Before she gets married, she has somebody [unclear], because they can't afford, like, [unclear], buy, buy, buy! And my mother used to make stockings, used to make this, make sweaters, making all that, things like this here, all that stuff.

LEVINE: Well, say somebody was in their eighties or nineties, an older person. What would they do? What would they--?

BOCHES: They stayed with a son or with a daughter that married somebody else, and they take care of them. And you—that's the way the life was. We all close family. And also a girl that's fourteen, fifteen, seventeen, eighteen, had to be neat, could not go with, like they do here today. Because if you did, it's a big shame, and nobody would marry her.

LEVINE: You mean, you can't date a lot of different boys?

BOCHES: No. Mostly, it was the fathers and the mothers, and they'd look into the boys. And these parents looking into the girls, what background they have. And that's the way they used to match them up. But ninety percent of it, they never went wrong.

LEVINE: What about dowries? Did the girls have dowries?

BOCHES: What do you mean by dowries?

LEVINE: I mean, did the girl have to bring something to the father, to the husband's family?

BOCHES: No. Well, they made their own clothes, and they brought them for herself. But there was nothing to give to them. But, while she was in the house, she had to take care of the husband's—even sometimes, for instance, a family in another village. There were three brothers, and they had money by the bushel—gold! One was in charge of the farming, one was charge of buying and stuff like that, and the other one take care of the animals, the sheeps, and stuff like that. But not so when they got big. They had to break up, and when they break up, all the wealth is gone. Because they was all together, working together, but they got too big, and they didn't have no—they build a home, and then of course the women, sometimes they don't get along together! But, it's hard to explain how nice we used to live. We had faith, believe in—especially the women, had to be very particular, because if she wants, she have a bad name, even they get married. There was no such thing as divorce, never heard of one! But if they did, he had to move somewhere else, go somewhere maybe fifty, hundred miles away, to another place that nobody know of, probably, to get

married again, but not in the village. And you know, they were the old—when I came to this country, it was almost the same.

LEVINE: Well now, when you were there in Libohovë, was your family speaking Albanian at home?

BOCHES: Well, we spoke both languages, Albanian and Greek. We didn't have an Albanian school 'til 1912, I think. Because Albania—there was no such thing as Albania. It used to be about nine and a half to ten million people, they called it Lyria. Lyria. They were part in Greece, part Yugoslavia. And there were almost ten million, and the King then was Piro.

LEVINE: What year was that?

BOCHES: Oh, God, before my father's times! Way back! And of course, they had wars, and the people moved here and moved there, and all that stuff. And it's pretty hard to explain things, because some people then went to Italy, some went to Greece, some went to Romania—wherever they could make a living. Mostly it was farming in my village, farming, corn, wheat, and stuff like that. They had animals; they had sheeps, they had goats, they had horses, donkeys, mules, and stuff like that.

LEVINE: Now do you remember any ceremonies, like either marriages or funerals, or religious occasions, how they were celebrated?

BOCHES: The religious—now I'm going to tell you about the religion. Over there, they have what they call it? They don't eat eggs, they don't eat cheese, they don't eat nothing, for forty days. That's how they believe. Then, come Easter, the good Friday, they don't even drink water. They go and take the communion, and then that's it, until sunset. And then Saturday night, twelve o'clock, they have what they call "Christ has risen." And outside of the church they have a thing made out of marble, and the priest sings in it, and everybody. And they have these eggs, red eggs, you know, dyed red, and they hit each other, make it "Christ ou Staneski." That means Christ has risen.

LEVINE: Do you know the significance of the red, making the eggs red?

BOCHES: They dye them red, yes?

LEVINE: Is it for Christ's blood?

BOCHES: I guess so, has something to do with it, yes.

LEVINE: And then they break the eggs, and that means Christ has risen, when they break them?

BOCHES: That's correct, yeah. And we had very, very qualities, and when I came to this country I found almost the same. Men came in with the horse and buggy, bread, milk. He give us the bill, we put the bill in the bottle and put the money in the bottle, put it outdoors. Nobody would touch it. Today we got to have our eyes in our windows! There was real nice honesty. Only thing is when I got here, my father lost his job; he was a machinist in the machine company. Banks closed up.

LEVINE: Well, before we talk about that part, tell me about how it was decided that you would leave Albania and come here.

BOCHES: My father was in—he came here in 1911, and then he came to visit in Albania, and he got married.

LEVINE: He came back and got married?

BOCHES: Yeah, but he couldn't come back in here, because the law has changed. You had to be a citizen to get in, and he didn't have no citizen. So he worked for a while in the village, then he went to Athens, Greece. And he was lugging bricks when they were building buildings. Then finally he got a job with the milk department, and one day one guy was on a side street, and my father was there, near the Embassy. And the lady, Ambassador's wife, come out and was talking to the Greek fellow in English, and my father heard it. So he went up there, and explained it. So then he asked her, he says, "Please see if you can get job for the poor milkman." So they did hire him, and he was there for many, many years.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

BOCHES: Spiro. And the day he finally asked the Ambassador, he says, "I'd like to go in the United States." So the Ambassador said, he said, "Fine, Spiro, we make the papers ready for you. But I want you to find another man as good as you are." He was very religious man, well-educated man, spoke five languages. He grew up in Constantinople, Turkey, so he spoke Turkish fluently.

LEVINE: Your father did?

BOCHES: Yes, yes, because my grandfather was in Constantinople. He was in the cattle business, milking. So—

LEVINE: So did your father find a replacement for him?

BOCHES: Then he left—before he left, Ambassador called my father in, and he says, "Spiro, come over here! What you see out that window?" My father says, "A lot of buildings and streets." "Oh, no, no, no." He was from Texas. I do have a picture, and I show you after. And he said, "No Spiro," he says, "When you

go to United States, you're not going to see the blue sky that you have in here." And then they gave him suit of clothes as a present, and Mrs. gave him a pair of shoes with twenty dollar bill in it! And he brought another man to take his place. Ambassador look at him. "But Spiro," he says, "He's old!" "But," he says, "He's a good man!" And they took him; he was there until he retired and passed away.

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

BOCHES: Yeah. It's a hard life, but nice, honest life.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

BOCHES: My mother's, Katherine.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

BOCHES: Gogos.

LEVINE: G-O-G-O-I-S?

BOCHES: G-O-G-O-S.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters?

BOCHES: I have one brother, and two of them, one born dead, and one die afterwards.

LEVINE: So in other words—

BOCHES: Should have been four of us, but two that passed away, died.

LEVINE: So did they die right away?

BOCHES: One was born dead, and the other one died about a week or month later.

LEVINE: I see, so did you have sisters?

BOCHES: Baby cribs, that's what they call it, that's what.

LEVINE: So, well, you have two others, though?

BOCHES: I have a brother with me, now. He lives in Concord.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh, okay. So were you the oldest?

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BOCHES: I'm the oldest. I'm eight years older than he is. Because my father, when he got married, and the war was going on, so he left. He left me in my mother's tummy! And when he came back, I was six years old. He had to come to this country to make a living.

LEVINE: Do you remember when he came back, when you were six?

BOCHES: I didn't know him, so I never went near him! Took about a week [laughs]! But I was my grandfather's pet.

LEVINE: Oh, tell me about your grandfather. What was he like?

BOCHES: My grandfather was in Constantinople, Turkey, milking cows and stuff like that, dairy farm. And he spoke also three languages: Greek, Turkish, and Albanian. And then when he was over there, my grandmother and her two sons, Spiro and William, they went to Constantinople, because my grandfather sent a letter to go over. So they went there and stayed quite a while. But my uncle was born in Constantinople. It was only Spiro that was born in Libohovë. And my father left; from there he came to America.

LEVINE: So—

BOCHES: So he was over here for a few years, then he came over, made some money, got married, but he couldn't come back in.

LEVINE: I see. So then he came here, and he came back when you were six, and then he stayed a few years?

BOCHES: He stayed a few years. He was working on the farms and stuff like that, but he didn't like that kind of line. So he had, I don't know, twenty or thirty dollars in his pocket, so he went to Greece, in Athens, started to find jobs, like carrying bricks, and then from bricks become a milkman, and from milkman he got into the Embassy.

LEVINE: Now did he come back to Albania when he was working in Athens, or he stayed in Athens?

BOCHES: No, from Athens he left for America. He never came back there. But he sent for us to come here.

LEVINE: So when you were going—you traveled, though, by yourself, with your friends? You didn't travel—

BOCHES: I came with my mother and my brother.

LEVINE: Oh, your mother and your brother.

BOCHES: And Mr. Pete Goulios, we were in the same boat, left the same time, the village. The day, St. Mary's, they have a big celebration, that church I just told you about it. And the bell rings, and they come all the villages around.

LEVINE: And what is that celebration for?

BOCHES: It's the name of the church, and they get all together, and they cook stuff, and they roast lambs and stuff. They have a good time for about one or two days.

LEVINE: How did you feel about leaving?

BOCHES: Well, when I got—first when we went to Tiranë Albania, which was the capital, and the Embassy, American Embassy was there. And I went by boat from Svaramba to Dourichy, and I could smell the oils and stuff like that, because I breathe pure air in the village. So I was sick! I was sick also coming to United States on that boat for three days! I never came up outside. And it's pretty hard, what people go through in the world, you know. But, that's the only way you can get somewhere. But at least we had family love. We love each other; we love all these relatives. We believe in the church wholeheartedly, and all this stuff. And there was no dishonesty. Anybody who was dishonest, the villagers would disown them. They wouldn't do business with them no more.

LEVINE: Now did your family consider themselves Albanian? Or did they consider themselves Greek?

BOCHES: Well, no, we're not Albanian. Because the part that we are on is very close to the Greek border, and when they made Albania, they switched us to there instead of going back with the Greeks. Because they always, they had Greek schools. They didn't have Albanian—there was no such thing, an Albanian school, until after 1922.

LEVINE: So do you consider yourself Greek or Albanian?

BOCHES: I spoke Albanian with my mother, because we didn't know Greek. But my father, my uncles, and my grandfather, they all went to Greek school. And then there's villages that—right across from us is a mountain. There's villages all the way to the Greek border, always spoke Greek. In the back of us, a few towns, they all spoke Greek. Very little Albanian.

LEVINE: Do you consider yourself Greek?

BOCHES: I learned the Greek language in this country.

LEVINE: No, but when you think of yourself, do you think of yourself as Greek or Albanian?

BOCHES: Well, what they call us—they call them Northern Pyros, Epyros, that's what we belong to, actually. But of course, like now, Yugoslavia is fighting, and Lyria, which was a big country, is gone. Greek's took some, these got some, and it disappeared. And that's why in the Balkans you're having trouble, because it's such a small land, and so many people. And they're always fighting, because you can't live. And that's the way that happened.

LEVINE: So, when you think of yourself now, do you think of yourself as a Greek-American, or an Albanian-American?

BOCHES: Well, I spoke Albanian, so I have to say I'm Albanian. I mean, I didn't speak Greek; my mother didn't speak Greek. But like, my father, and my grandfather—all went to high school, Greek schools.

LEVINE: Okay, so do you remember leaving on that September eighth, when the festival--?

BOCHES: Oh yeah, I'll never forget that day, no!

LEVINE: What was it like when you left?

BOCHES: Well, it was kind of tough, and my uncle took us to the seaport, and we hug each other. He cried; I cried, and all that. And then we took a boat, and we went to Brindisi, Italy. And we took a train from there, and we went through Italy, and then France, and that's when we went to Cherbourg. Waiting for the boat, the Leviathan, to bring us back to the States.

LEVINE: Do you remember being struck by anything in particular? I mean, had you ever been out of Albania or Greece before?

BOCHES: No, no, no, never went nowhere. From the village to here.

LEVINE: Yeah, so I mean, were there things that struck you on your route to Cherbourg, that you had never seen before?

BOCHES: No, [unclear]. First thing I done over there, I used to eat a lot of the French bread, those big sticks [laughs]. You know, you have no idea. In the villages, when they do have a war that change the government, Albania and all that, we didn't have no flour. So we used chick peas to make coffee; we used chick peas to make bread. Many nights I went to bed, I didn't have nothing to eat. And I go without it. Whenever somebody gets something—real tough life, believe me, those days! But now, has changed. It's not the same as those days, a little bit. The only thing that the [unclear], he never give the freedom to people to go in and out of the country. But he done some things good. At least the doctor goes, once, twice a week, visits the villages. The government

give him a card to go. And they have little roads now, not exactly paved, some of them, dirt roads. But at least you got a doctor. They used to have a telephone in the villages; they got lights in the villages. And then they had a lot of spring waters, and then they took it one place, and they built a thing, cement, with a cover on it. And the water gets in there, let it go to the houses. And over there, you don't have to dig in the ground, because the ground never freezes over there. They have little coal, and if it snow, one, two days later it's all gone! It's a warm climate.

LEVINE: So, you were sick the whole trip over, on the Atlantic?

BOCHES: On the boat, all the way [laughs]! I didn't eat nothing!

LEVINE: Do you remember when the boat came into the New York harbor?

BOCHES: I don't remember anything when it comes to that. The only thing I remember, when they got to Ellis Island, and they used to holler "Mangeria!" in Italian. And I used to go there, and I see the Italian bread which we didn't have home, and I ate like a pig! [Laughs] I was there for three days on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: How come you were there?

BOCHES: I don't know. They found some little thing. I don't remember what it was.

LEVINE: You mean, in the physical exam?

BOCHES: Well, something, I don't know. I never knew it; my father didn't even know it, either. And of course, he had to wait for us, and he brought us to Torrington, Connecticut.

LEVINE: So your mother and you and your brother had to wait for a couple of days? The three of you had to stay?

BOCHES: No, the three of us inside, because they wouldn't let them, too, me in there, so they had to stay, too, until they released me, then we all come out.

[End of Side A/Start of Side B]

LEVINE: What was your brother's name? What is your brother's name?

BOCHES: Constantine.

LEVINE: Constantine. And so was anybody put in the hospital?

BOCHES: No, no, no. Was no serious thing. I don't know what they found. I don't know, it's something. But they had to be careful, because you know, they bring diseases that they didn't have here, and things like that. They had to watch it.

LEVINE: Then did your father come to Ellis Island to pick you up?

BOCHES: Yes, he left the factory, and he told them, "I have to go pick up my family." So they give him a week. And I don't think he got paid! In those days, there was no such a thing!

LEVINE: Where was he working?

BOCHES: Handy Machine Company. He was a machinist.

LEVINE: Where?

BOCHES: In Torrington, Connecticut.

LEVINE: Oh, Torrington, Connecticut.

BOCHES: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, do you remember the reunion with your father at Ellis Island?

BOCHES: Oh, yes, yeah! Then he brought us to Torrington. Of course, we lived—the houses over there, they didn't have no ceilings like that. They didn't have no [unclear], just plain old homes. And right next to, had the little animals, you know, the horses and the donkeys and the sheeps and everything—they had a place on the side over there. And it was not sanitary like it is here. So, when he brought us, and I look in the house, I see nice beds, white sheets, nice wood floors! I was amazed! I said, "Papa, this is our home?" He says, "Yeah!" So my father and my mother used to make bean soup, you know. That's our favorite. That's a big—

LEVINE: How did she make it? Do you remember how she made it?

BOCHES: Well, you get those white beans, they call it northern beans, but they're bigger. They come from Italy. And we were careful how much oil we put into our foods, you know, because, you know, when you poor, you got to watch. That's it. You've got certain things, and that's it! There's no more! So, and then, they would put a little extra oil in. And we had the bread, the Italian bread, and all that, bake it broil it, [unclear]. Then I started to go to school, but it was hard, you know. And I got pushed here, and pushed there.

LEVINE: How was the school here different from the school in Albania?

BOCHES: The school was the same, but they wanted us—of course, those days they were more strict than they are today, even. But I went to school, and I got in a fight with a guy, and I pushed him, and he banged his head on a—they had a little drinking water fountain. And I quit! So then I had to go to night school, the high school, night time. It was a lot of Italians, and different ones, they had to learn the language.

LEVINE: Did you have a tough time learning the language?

BOCHES: Well, it's hard at the beginning, it's hard. You can say the words, but you no say it plainly. Probably, I have an accent now. Yeah, this is the cross that I was telling you about, right there. They stole it, and they can't find it, who took it.

LEVINE: Now, it's stolen?

BOCHES: It was taken by somebody during the day where those Moslems over there, and all that stuff. Yeah. Oh, it's a beautiful thing. The people really believed on that thing. The whole, really believed on it. And everybody went to church every Sunday. Everything, the women dressed on Easter nice.

LEVINE: How about in Torrington, Connecticut? Was it the same? Was there a large community of people?

BOCHES: Torrington was, well, I don't think it was more than fourteen, fifteen thousand. Maybe it was a little more, but they had a lot of factories.

LEVINE: But were there a lot of people who had come from Albania or Greece, in Torrington?

BOCHES: There were quite a few. You see, what happened is, when one, four or five gets in to a certain village, and there's factory there, the rest of them come to live together, so they spoke the language, and they have the food together, and all the stuff. And then of course, when the factories close up, they had to disperse. Go anywhere. Some was in Chicago, some New York, some everywhere, Massachusetts. And over here there were quite a few, but then the rest of them come in here. We were a majority, even at the church, from my part of the world.

LEVINE: Did your mother cook any of the same kind of dishes that she cooked over in Albania?

BOCHES: Oh, yes!

LEVINE: What did she make here that she also made there?

BOCHES: Everything that she learned. You see, the mothers taught them from the beginning. Like I said, they teach them how to cook, teach them how to sew and crochet, teach them a lot of things, so that when the woman gets married, that's part of her job at home. When they have family, they got to take care of it, because the husband brings so much money. She's got to make it. You can't go splurge. If you make a hundred dollars and you spend a hundred fifty, it's impossible to live! But that's the way they lived. And they lived a good life. They didn't live fancy life. But there were three classes of people: rich people, middle people, and poor people. Always will be. Because God didn't make us. You see, the fingers are different; one is short, one is long. And so like that, and so some got brains, some willing to work, some is lazy. Everybody can't live rich!

LEVINE: Tell me how you were affected by the Depression?

BOCHES: Oh, Depression was very, very bad. We left Torrington, Connecticut, and we moved to New York, Manhattan, on Delancey and Rivington Street. It was all Jewish section.

LEVINE: Why did you go to Manhattan? Why did you leave Torrington?

BOCHES: We had to go somewhere there's work. There was no work in Torrington. The factory was closed; everything was dead! Banks closed, people, I remember on Forty-Second Street, people's bank, people lost their money, the little money that they had. They were crying. They lost it! And then we started, so my father went to work early in the morning, it was two o'clock the next morning, and we'd cry—thought we lost our dad. He quit that job, got another job, working in restaurants and things like that. So one day I went to a Jewish pretzel place. And I got a basket with a handle on it, and I bought Jewish pretzels, two for a nickel. I put them around the basket like that, and I carry it with the streetcar to Thirty-Fourth Street. And I would sell them, two for a nickel. And of course, the policemen chased you, because you don't have no license, and the firemen and policemen had the same blue uniforms. I made two dollars and some-odd cents. In those days, it was big money! So next day, I got a bigger basket. But the Board of Health, it wasn't fussy like today. They didn't bother, like milk and everything, you could get it, and there was no pasteurized or anything like that. So then I got promoted, so I started to sell these hot chestnuts in the winter time—Times Square, Seventh Avenue, Broadway.

LEVINE: Did you have a little push cart?

BOCHES: Well, used to have what they called a baby carriage, but we'd take it apart, the cover part, and then we made a platform on it with some kind of wood, and then we carried Hershey kisses, and Brazil nuts, and India nuts, and stuff like that [unclear] for it.

LEVINE: And you had a thing that made a fire?

BOCHES: For the hot chestnuts, yes, charcoal fire. And then you cook them, and you cut them like that, and then you stick them up then on the top of the pan, and they buy them, so many for a nickel. And it was hard, living, but we didn't—we lived in that section for about not very long, and then we moved on the West Side, what they called Hell's Kitchen. It was rough! That's where all the boats used to come in those days. And my father and two other gentlemen, they opened up a little place, rented a little store on Thirty-Ninth between Ninth and Tenth Avenue. And they put cement on the floor, and they got a machine with ice and salt, all fresh, and were making ice cream. They used to make thirty gallons a day, and then they'd go down. Each one had their own pushcart, but the pushcart had this kind of wood that holds the cold. And they'd go down to the garment factory, or they'd go down to the fur factories down on Seventh Avenue and Eight Avenue. They used to sell it, and it made a pretty good living.

LEVINE: So were you selling things--?

BOCHES: My mother used to work at Madison Square Garden, the old one. Oh, yeah!

LEVINE: What did she do?

BOCHES: Well after they had the games, and stuff like that, clean up the chairs, and stuff like that. There were quite a few women with her.

LEVINE: And so you were selling things on the street during the whole Depression?

BOCHES: We were there until 1933 or so. I saw Roosevelt, going across the ferry, going to Washington as the President of the United States. [Unclear], God bless his soul; he's a good man. We all loved him. And then we moved to Torrington, Connecticut.

LEVINE: Tell me about Roosevelt. What do you remember about him? What made you think he was such a good man?

BOCHES: Well, he tried to help the people. As he said, if I remember—I was a youngster—he told the big money people, he said, "Either you give, or you lose everything you got." Because he was afraid they might go socialist, might go something. When you're down—you had soup lines from here to across the street, the gas station. People didn't have no food to eat! Big lines, soup lines! Terrible! It was bad!

LEVINE: Was it as hard here as it was in Albania?

BOCHES: It was worse!

LEVINE: Worse!

BOCHES: At least over there we had our milk, we had our eggs, we had all that on the farm, it was all right. But here, you had to buy everything, and where are you going to get the money? So, I saw Roosevelt going over there, and then 1933 we come here, Concord, because we had some countrymen over here. And we got a little store. In 1936 we lost it—big flood. Broke again!

LEVINE: You and your father?

BOCHES: Yeah, broke again.

LEVINE: What was the name of your store?

BOCHES: It was a little grocery store, a neighborhood store. In those days there were no supermarkets. A lot of little neighborhood stores. We didn't have no meats, but we had beverages, and when the beer came out we had a little beer, a little hamburg and stuff like that. And then of course, right across from the store used to be the Boston and Maine Railroad. They were fixing the cars and the engines, and some of the guys used to come over and have a hot dog and things like that. Five cents for a hot dog! [Laughs] You see?

LEVINE: So what happened after the flood?

BOCHES: Then after the flood we lost the store. My father didn't have no money to open another store, so we moved back to New York when a fellow named Maxie Cohen—oh, at the flood, Maxie Cohen, his family used to live in the back of our store; he had his own house. And of course, the Red Cross anything never looked after him. So my father says, "Maxie, you take your children," he had three boys, and two of them—five. And four of us—nine. And we live Kelly's Drug Store, the end of South Main Street. It was upstairs; we had apartment upstairs. Some slept on the floor, [unclear] Maxie and the whole family. Because they were nice people; they were hard-working people. They can say anything they want about the Jew people, but they work hard. They work hard, and they know what they're doing. And he was a very nice man. So he took us in an open truck—we didn't have much furniture—and he took us back to New York.

LEVINE: Where did you go in New York?

BOCHES: And then when we went to New York, my father was in Manhattan. I went to work in Valley Stream, Long Island, Sunrise Highway, Pete's Diner. I used to take the Pennsylvania Railroad. Until my father got called back in Torrington, Connecticut machine shop. They were going to open up. And the things got

[unclear] but there was no pay. I worked with the Manhattan Handy Machine Company, I was only getting twenty dollars a week, and working Saturday, every day.

LEVINE: So did the whole family then go back to Torrington?

BOCHES: Oh yes, yeah.

LEVINE: And so then what did you do? After you really weren't getting paid much in the machine shop?

BOCHES: Then my father went to Torrington; my mother moved with him. I was still in Long Island. I finally came over; I worked in the Handy Machine Company with my father. First I worked in the paint shop, and then I got through--my father, because my father was a well-liked man, not only the Ambassador in Greece, but at the factory. I forgot the guy's name that was the superintendent; he always liked my father. He used to bring a lot of guys, he got them a job. He'd say, "Spiro, but he's don't know anything!" "But he's a good man. You've got to help him. He got a family!" So he used to take them in. Patrick his name was. So I worked there, and in 1941 they called me in the service, March 13, 1941. I left home, it was in September, no, March 13, 1941. I went to Fort Devens. From Fort Devens—

LEVINE: You must have been a citizen by then?

BOCHES: No. I was still youngster yet, in the twenties. So we went. They took us at Fort Benning, give us a shot, and we took a train; we didn't know where we were going to go. We look, and you know how those days it used to be down South? Terrible! Some shacks, full of colored people, used to live. The roosters are there, the pig come out of the same place! I say, "Oh my gosh! Where the hell are we?" And we went to Camp Wheeler, Georgia—Macon, Georgia. And I was over there for quite a while. I took seventeen weeks of basic training—I mean hard training! And the Captain of the company was Philip Wortheimer. And my Lieutenant was Howard K. Schmidt. Two Germans! He was strict, and we took seventeen weeks of hard training. Finally, I got in the kitchen, and the rest of them, of course, after seventeen weeks they leave, and new ones coming in all the time. So I stayed in the kitchen; it was then I became mess Sergeant. Get that thing over there, Sophie.

SOPHIE: What thing? What.

BOCHES: And I become a mess Sergeant. The picture.

LEVINE: Your picture in the service?

BOCHES: Right here Sophie. Hanging, hanging.

LEVINE: Maybe we'll wait 'til we finish.

BOCHES: That thing right there.

SOPHIE: Oh, this, oh, yeah.

BOCHES: Yeah, and I can become mess Sergeant, and that's the one that I had, by the Commanding General, Two-Star General, Brown—he gave me “superior mess hall.”

LEVINE: Wow. You got a commendation!

BOCHES: He come in, and he says to me, “Sergeant, you're not cooking according to the menu.” They used to make the menu once a month. And I says, “You are right, sir, but the way that menus says, we'd throw half of it away, and this way, we don't have enough.” He says, “Atta boy,” he says, “You're looking after the men.” And he looked—was clean, I mean clean. They go over the mess like that, and I'm here with a white towel, look to see if there's dirt in it, the floors, the outsides. But I'm fussy; I love nice clean things—always did, and I'll always until I die. And I don't want to go somewhere that says, “Well, I don't have nothing today; I go without.” But I'm too proud of myself. And her and I, we work hard all our lives. And we got the home, we got a little money, we don't have to bother anybody. But it was done by hard work, and think to buy umbrella for rainy day. And that's how we done it. And there's a lot of people from my part of the world here, they work hard, they economize, but they never bother the city of Concord, the welfare, the food stamps, and all that stuff—nobody! Like [unclear] told me, “I never seen one. I never saw a Greek going in to get food stamps or anything. And you ought to be proud of yourselves.” And that's the only way you can live! You've got to work, and you live with your means! You don't see me—I got a car, it's a 1977 Lincoln! I fix it, I keep it, because I figure, I'm eighty-one years old! What I go and spend fifteen, twenty thousand dollars.

SOPHIE: You read it?

LEVINE: Yeah, it's lovely.

BOCHES: Yeah.

LEVINE: It's quite a tribute. It's a commendation on your kitchen in the service. Now, so when did you meet your wife?

BOCHES: Oh, I meet her after Second World War. And then I went to France.

LEVINE: Wait a minute, you were in the kitchen—you were doing the mess duty?

BOCHES: Yeah, and I was there, and they wouldn't let me go. Well, finally orders come: everybody had to leave. Commissioned officers, and everything. I became a Mason, also, Masonic Temple, in Macon, Georgia. What's that?

SOPHIE: Your army picture.

BOCHES: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: That's a beauty. That's lovely. So what, so then you were sent to France during the Second World War?

BOCHES: Oh yeah, I went to France.

LEVINE: You went to Normandy?

BOCHES: I was on the Le Havre, when our boat landed in Le Havre. And it took them quite a while, about four or five hours, before you could get in there, because it was bombed so bad, you know. And then we were about thirty kilometers out, and we pitched tents there to recuperate a little bit. Because it was out in the ocean for quite a few days, you know, because they never take a straight thing, they go zigzag. It was four hundred boats when we left. I mean, the whole division, Seventy-Fifth Division, and then you had your tankers, and then you had your food ships, and then you had the Navy going in between and in front, they had one in the front, sub-chaser. And they go this way and they go that way, and they go this way, and they go—and they never take it straight, to avoid the submarines. And then I went to France, from there went through France, went to Germany. First city we went: Manheim. And from Manheim we went all the way to Austria, Wells, Austria, at 7:30 p.m. And then, concentration camp broke loose.

LEVINE: Which one?

BOCHES: Concentration camp.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of it?

BOCHES: The name of the concentration camp? No, I don't, but I remember it was in Wells, Austria, and it was at 7:00 p.m. And it all broke loose, and they had all those wooden shoes. And when you look at them, not a chunk of meat! Just skin and bones—you're scared to look at them! You think they come out of the grave! And they give orders to shoot up in the air, so [unclear]. They were hollering water: "Wasser, wasser!" In German, that's water. And finally—

LEVINE: What was it like for you to see all those people?

BOCHES: Oh, I saw more dead people and blown-up people! They were dead over there, they're blown-up, and everything else, and oh! I saw a lot of it. I saw enough of it! Sometimes I dream at night; I jump in my sleep! You never forget those things. Bad things, bad things!

LEVINE: How did the people react when the liberators came?

BOCHES: Well, then the government took over, and they got hold of this factory, soup factory, dehydrated soups. And they took them all. I don't know, they hired trucks or something like that. I don't know what they done with it, but they feeding them two ounces, three ounces every day, the soup, because there was nothing in it. Some of them probably died, but most of them, I hope they survived. But I saw bad things! In fact, I don't want to say this, because it's a very terrible thing, but I saw a shade lamp made out of Jewish skin. This is no joke. You could see the pores of the hair, you know, [unclear]. They done bad things, those Nazis! Bad, bad, bad! Anyway, so when I got to Wells, Austria, that was the first time that I ever slept inside the building. Alsace Lorraine, we sleep there in snow, January, in cold, keep my feet working, so—you know, a lot of guys lost their feet, because if the blood don't circulate, they lose their feet. So I rubbed mine, or he rubbed me, and they keep going like that. And the roof of my mouth was peeling, because we had cold beans and cold cheese. And in the war, [laughs] you can't build no fires, because if they see you, then they hit you with a thing! So, when we got to Wells, Austria, we slept in, and in the morning I got up, I look out the window, I see a Greek flag! You know, stripes of blue, with a cross on it! And I says to a fellow named Van from Iowa, I says, "Van, look! We got some Greeks over here!" And I spoke a little Greek, because I picked that up in this country, you know, hanging around with them, and I picked it up pretty good. Unless they start fancy Greek, and then I get lost. So we went up there. I could hear them playing the phonograph. And I said to them, "[speaking in Greek]." That means, "Hi, boys!" "Ooh!" they hollered to me. They hugged me! I feel like crying! The poor guys.

LEVINE: These were Greeks who--?

BOCHES: They were Greeks from Greece. I says, "How you guys got here?" He says, "The Germans got hold of that end of the street, and this end of the street, whatever," and then they put them on the truck and they didn't know where they was going to go. So they took them to Germany as slave labor! So, and then he says to me, "I work in the soup factory." And their wives were over there also, but they couldn't see their wife for many years. They weren't allowed. And he said to me, the old man says, he says, "Help, me." He says, "Yes, of course, for our wives," because they find, after we got there, they got free and they got together, get some clothes. So there was tanks going through, planes going through, noisy, and everything else. So I went to the

store and I hit the window with the butt of the rifle, broke it. And he went in there and grabbed all the clothes! He didn't care about what size they were, for they were give it to their wives. And that's when they told me how they go there. And then, one guy says to me, "You've got to do me a favor," the Greek fellow. I says, "What is it?" He says, "There's a guy lives in here, in certain street here. He was a foreman in the soup factory. Excuse my expression," he says, "He made me go and kiss the dog's fanny. And I done it so quick," he says, "Because it was a German shepherd, it was liable to bite me." So I went, and I says, "Where?" So we went up there, and I got hold of him. I took him, I took him to the headquarters, and I told them what he done. And what the headquarters done with him after, I do not know. But they went through hell, the poor people. And those four women, with their belongings on them, the children—everything is bombed, they didn't have no home. But they go, winter time. It was bad. It was bad. I hope they never have another one like that. The one that they had in Iraq, it was nothing, compared to ours. You have to fight a man with the best equipment in the world, and was ours, in those days. But we had the superiority, and they didn't have no more gasoline for the planes; otherwise it would have lasted longer. And then of course they went to Russia, and they froze to death.

LEVINE: So when you came back—we're getting close to the end of the tape. I want to find out when you met your wife.

BOCHES: Well, I met my wife here. I opened up a little grocery store, with my father and I. We had to save from the—because in my pay, I tell them to send it home, I had two thousand seven hundred dollars when I come back. So I got—went to Fort Devens on the twenty-eighth of December, 1945. I had four years and seven months in the service. So I opened up a little grocery store with my father, and we working hard—no pay—for about three or four months. Just eat, and that's it, while we build it up. She used to come buy all my milk! [Laughs] So finally, which is my brother-in-law, he told me, he says, "I got a good girl for you." I say, "What is it?" I heard of the family, who had a big name. Her father had it, but he's a nice man, God strike me dead, he was a good man. And I mean, loved him. He stayed with me here, with his wife, for seven years, in my house—no rent, no lights, no nothing. I took care of him. Because they were down and out. They were old. The older son was in the Air Force, and he used fly the B-51's and 54's, and protect the bombers when they went over to Germany. And finally he retired as a full fledged colonel, flying the B-52 bombers. Now he's in Laconia here. So I had enough of that. I wish a dog that kind of life, believe me. Those poor people. [Unclear] with Germany, there was nothing standing. Everything was bombed! Nothing! Buildings, roads, everything was bombed! One night, twelve hours, our artillery. There was from here, we say two miles long: boom, boom, boom, boom, finished! For twelve hours! And you used to go to sleep, on the Maginot lines there were [unclear], going like that. You get in like that, and you go in like that. And you couldn't sleep, because the ground was shaking

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from the bombs. In the morning, the shells were that high. And they had two kinds of shells: one goes down in the ground and blows up. The other one goes about this high, and all the trees [unclear].

LEVINE: How did you feel about serving in the Army, having immigrated to this country? How did you feel about fighting for this country?

BOCHES: I, well, we had different than the guys have today. We knew that Hitler, he was up to something. And the day that President Roosevelt made a speech, I'll never forget it. I thought I was going to be a year in the Army and then get out. But then he made the speech; I knew that I was stuck for good. And he made the speech and we knew that—the people were different then than the young people today, believe me. Love the flag, love the country, willing to fight for the country. Today, I don't know. I don't know, maybe certain amount, yes, but we went through hell. You don't know.

LEVINE: Tell me what you're most proud of. What makes you feel very satisfied?

BOCHES: Well, I'm proud that I went and fought for the country, and I came back, because I left poor, and I got a little more than what I had in the village. And now, now, it felt good to myself that I went and done the job that they wanted me to do.

LEVINE: And how do you feel having immigrated to this country? Do you think that made a difference in the kind of person you are, the fact that you started out--?

BOCHES: Of course, of course!

LEVINE: In what way?

BOCHES: Well, those days, the people were more honestly, they were more decent people, the word is the word. There was no crimes. Here, you could walk in the street, or anywhere. You never heard anything bad and stuff you would hear today, not at all. It was a beautiful country. Now it's still a beautiful country, but I don't know how they're going to get rid of them, the criminals and the stuff like that, and the guns, and everybody has the guns, and stuff like that. How they are going to do it, I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay, well this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I've been speaking with Chris Boches here in Concord, New Hampshire, on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1995, and I'm signing off.

[End of Interview]