

EI-713

ROSE KAYEKJIAN

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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RESIDENCES:

- **TURKEY: CIVAZ**
- **THE US: BRIDGEWATER, MASSACHUSETTS**

LEVINE: Today is November the eighth--

KAYEKJIAN: The ninth, isn't it?

LEVINE: Is it the ninth?

KAYEKJIAN: I think it's the ninth, and I'm quite sure.

LEVINE: Okay, well it's Wednesday, anyway, and it's November. And I'm here in the Armenian Nursing Home, and we're in Roslyn—isn't this in Roslyn? The name of the town?

KAYEKJIAN: Roslindale.

LEVINE: Roslindale. And I'm here with Mrs. Rose Kayekjian who came from Turkey. She is Armenian, and she came from Turkey when she was about nine years of age, in 1915.

KAYEKJIAN: Right.

LEVINE: And I'm looking forward to what ever you can remember. I'll ask the big question, and whatever you remember, you can tell me. Mrs. Kayekjian, tell for the tape, again, your birth date, and where you were born.

KAYEKJIAN: I was born August 18th, 1906.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

KAYEKJIAN: In Turkey.

LEVINE: And the name of the town?

KAYEKJIAN: Civaz.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, did you live in Civaz up until the time you left for America?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Okay, so you were in Civaz for about nine years. Now, when you think of Civaz now, what comes to your mind?

KAYEKJIAN: Nothing really. Nothing much, except the school.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, well the school was very nice, yeah.

LEVINE: What did it look like?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, it was a beautiful school. It was near a river, like. The scenery was beautiful. When we got on recess, we used to feed the ducks, the ducks on the—like the swanboats here.

LEVINE: You remember the name of that river?

KAYEKJIAN: No, I don't, no.

LEVINE: Yeah. And what was school like for you? Did you like going to school?

KAYEKJIAN: I did, but I didn't—I go very much. I didn't learn Armenian very, Armenian read 'til this day, because my sister Margaret and I had to get up and work, because there were six children. Only my father was working, and my sister and I were the next oldest. I think my sister was fourteen, and I think I was a little older than, maybe fifteen or something. I forget now.

LEVINE: Now, was this in Turkey, because you were only nine years old when you left?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, this is not in Turkey, no.

LEVINE: This is here?

KAYEKJIAN: This is in Bridgewater.

LEVINE: Bridgewater. Okay, well let's first talk about life in Turkey. Did you go to school at all?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, no, no, no, we didn't.

LEVINE: Do you remember—well, why don't you start with your father's name? What was his name?

KAYEKJIAN: Kachrdoor.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

KAYEKJIAN: K-A-C-H-R-D-O-O-R, I think. Kachrdoor, yeah. Vartabedian. That's his last name, yeah.

LEVINE: Vartabedian, and that was your maiden name?

KAYEKJIAN: That's right.

LEVINE: And that's V-A-R-T-A-B-E-D-I-A-N.

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, now your mother—what was her name?

KAYEKJIAN: Her name was Marita, like Mary, like, yeah.

LEVINE: Marita. And do you spell Marite: M-A-R-I--?

KAYEKJIAN: M-A-R-I-T-E, T-A-, I think, Marita.

LEVINE: I see. And do you remember your mother's maiden name, before she married?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, wait a minute. Zatumjian.

LEVINE: Oh, good! Can you spell that one?

KAYEKJIAN: [Laughs] Z-A-T-U-N-J-I-A-N, Zatumjian [laughs].

LEVINE: Okay, good. Now, do you remember--?

KAYEKJIAN: [Laughs] I feel like I [unclear]!

LEVINE: Well you remember a lot! That's wonderful! And you spell them, besides! Now, do you remember your grandparents, from either side?

KAYEKJIAN: My father's side, no. My mother's side, I remember just my grandfather.

LEVINE: What do you remember about him?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, he was nice. He was—he used to give us candy, gum [laughs], when we were kids. And when we went to bed he'd used to tell us stories, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh! Can you remember anything about the stories that your grandfather told you?

KAYEKJIAN: No, I don't, no.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. But he liked to—would he tell you the story, or would he read you the story?

KAYEKJIAN: No, he makes them up [laughs].

LEVINE: Oh, he made them up?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, and we fall asleep in about five, ten minutes, and that's it. And he used to cover us, and go to his room, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember, like, what would they be about? What would he make them up about?

KAYEKJIAN: Pardon?

LEVINE: What would he make stories up about?

KAYEKJIAN: About simple things. It wasn't anything frightful or anything—very simple. I think he made them up. I still feel, this day, that he made all those stories up! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Now was that grandfather the one who was a minister or a bishop?

KAYEKJIAN: No.

LEVINE: That was another one?

KAYEKJIAN: The minister was on my father's side. This is on my mother's side, yeah. I don't know what he did for work; I don't know.

LEVINE: And did you have a lot of aunts and uncles around?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, I did have, but don't ask me to name names!

LEVINE: No, you don't need to name them, but can you remember, like, when would you see them? What would be the occasion when you would see them?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, when like, Christmas, Easter—holidays, like that. Because everybody worked so hard, yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember how any of the holidays were celebrated in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, like here, Christmas. But we didn't have the Thanksgiving, but we had Christmas, and Easter, and those things we do have. But we didn't have the thing here, the holidays they have it here, like—

LEVINE: Halloween, and Thanksgiving?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: But when you celebrated Easter, let's say, was it any different from the way we do it here?

KAYEKJIAN: No, we used to—my mother used to color eggs, and we used to crack eggs with each other [laughs].

LEVINE: Oh, you'd crack your egg with someone else's?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, yeah, like you have one. You hold it like that, and I cracked it. If yours broke, I'll take it. If mine broke, you take it [laughs]! Just simple fun, that's all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now what else did you do for fun when you were little?

KAYEKJIAN: We played jump rope.

LEVINE: Oh, really? Did you have like little rhymes that you said when you jumped rope?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember any?

KAYEKJIAN: I think like: One, two, buckle my shoe, something like that, yeah. Three, four, shut the door. Five, six, pick up sticks. Seven, eight, lay them straight. Nine, ten, a good fat hen! [Laughs]

LEVINE: [Laughs] That's the same as in this country.

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, I know.

LEVINE: The same kind of rhyme.

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And can you remember anything else that you did for fun?

KAYEKJIAN: For fun? Oh, yeah, we played—what is it we played? I told we played jump rope.

LEVINE: Yes.

KAYEKJIAN: And we had swings. The swings were nice. It was like a apricot tree, the swings were made, and the apricots used to fall right on our head, and we would take them and eat them. They'd be half-ripe, but we like it!

LEVINE: Oh, wow! And what was growing around there? What kinds of things did you have to eat?

KAYEKJIAN: Mostly apricots and mulberries. Mulberry bush. It was white, and there was blue kind, too. That was very sweet.

LEVINE: And what would you eat? What would be made from the mulberries?

KAYEKJIAN: I don't know. My mother used to make something; I forget now. I think she used to take the syrup from the mulberry bush, and cook the syrup, and keep it in a jar to use in winter time, yeah.

- LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about what you had for food in Turkey, that you remember?
- KAYEKJIAN: I had the same as here. Almost the same, yeah.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were you religious? Was your family religious?
- KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, yes, definitely, yeah. We could never go to—see, at supper we had to take turns, six of us. Today is my turn, tomorrow is yours, the next day it is Margaret's—they all take turns every day to say the prayer before we eat. And at night we pray before we went to bed.
- LEVINE: Can you remember any of those prayers that you said, like grace, before you ate?
- KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, like Our Father, in Armenian, mostly. And there was another one; I like it very much.
- LEVINE: Can you remember?
- KAYEKJIAN: But I don't know how to say it in English!
- LEVINE: Oh, well you can say it in Armenian!
- KAYEKJIAN: [Armenian, approx. 20 seconds], Amen.
- LEVINE: Oh, now do you know what it says? You don't have to say it exactly, but—
- KAYEKJIAN: "Thank you, God, for this meal." And then we thank, like, "Thank you for peaceful sleep tonight, and I hope I'll wake up about the same time. You'll help me to wake up about the same time to your will, Amen."
- LEVINE: Oh, very nice, uh-huh, yeah. So, did you have certain chores you had to do, certain jobs that you had to do as a little girl?
- KAYEKJIAN: Oh, yes. I had to do the dishes, supper dishes, because my mother used to take the leftovers away, and I was one of the oldest girls. So I have to do the dishes. And my sister Margaret comes and dries them, puts them away, yeah. My sister Alice, which is the youngest—she become a school teacher. She was going to college. You know Bridgewater State College? Yeah, she went through there, and she used to teach at the Arlington Heights Junior High.
- LEVINE: I see. And so, your father was a minister?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, Episcopalian.

LEVINE: Episcopalian minister. Can you talk a little bit about your father? What was he like?

KAYEKJIAN: Very kind man, very kind. And he helped a lot of others to come to United States, because we came early, and his folks were left there. And he brought them over here, too. I mean, he helped them, financially. They paid it later on, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about his being a minister when you were in Turkey? Anything that has to do--?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, I remember the church, because we're here, the church is about where that yard is. And in them days, the minister ring the bell, the church bell, one, two, you know. So we used to say, "Another one! Another one!" He goes another one [laughs], yeah.

LEVINE: When would he ring the bell?

KAYEKJIAN: When the church—before the church begin. He's calling the thing, the audience, yeah.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh. And how was he with you? Do you remember any times that you did things with your father?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, he was very, very, very kind! And one thing he forbade was not to talk English at home. He said, "You go to school, you talk English. You go play outside, it's English. But when you enter this house, you're not supposed to. Because when you know two languages, you're two persons. You know one language with one person." So that's why I didn't—we didn't forget our Armenian. I can speak quite—not too well, but quite well.

LEVINE: Good, uh-huh. So when you went to school, you had your lessons in English?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And this was in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, no, here.

LEVINE: No, here. Okay, is there anything else about—[knock on door]. Oops, just a second. [Tape off/on] We're resuming now after a knock on the

door. Now, just to finish up talking about your life in Turkey—do you remember your mother when you were a little girl in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What did she do, like, every day?

KAYEKJIAN: She worked very hard, very hard.

LEVINE: What did she do for work?

KAYEKJIAN: No, she didn't work outside. At home, we were six children, eight of us, father and mother: cook, wash, iron, clean, yeah. But, my sister and I used to help, you know, do our bedrooms and dust if she gives us the dust cloth to dust the furniture, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, you didn't go to school in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no.

LEVINE: Now, would—did other people go to school? And you were nine years old—was that unusual, or not?

KAYEKJIAN: No, it was usual. But you had to pay to go to school over there, and you don't have the money, you just can't go, that's all. My brothers went, yeah. My brothers Jerry and Eddy, they went, yeah. And my sister Alice went here, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, were the boys treated a lot differently than the girls?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, my—yes. My mother favored the boys, mostly. They say that's the way it's supposed to be. I don't know [laughs]. Yeah, especially my brother Jerry; I think she worshipped on him. Yeah, he was very handsome and tall, very intelligent. He could read Turkish, Armenian, and English, yeah.

LEVINE: Now did he go to school in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, he went.

LEVINE: What was the school? When he went to school, what did they teach in school? What language did they teach?

KAYEKJIAN: They teach English, Armenian, and Turkish, I think, yeah. We didn't—the girls didn't go to school. Only the boys went to school, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have any kind of livestock, like, you know, horses, or sheep, or goats? Anything like that?

KAYEKJIAN: We had two sheep, yeah. [Knock on door] [Tape off/on] They used to shear the wool from the sheep, and my mother used to spin it, and make thread, like wool thread, and knit our stockings from it, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh! Was it cold there? Did you have cold winters?

KAYEKJIAN: We had cold winters. Same as here, the weather was same as here. We had four seasons, yeah, like here.

LEVINE: And did you learn to either weave or knit, or any of those things?

KAYEKJIAN: No, I didn't. No, no, I didn't.

LEVINE: Okay.

KAYEKJIAN: But I worked at the—up here, twenty-one years. Do you remember Toby Manufacturing Company?

LEVINE: Oh, where was that?

KAYEKJIAN: That was in here. I worked twenty-one years there.

LEVINE: In Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, no, no, in here. And I got a—I was testing the condensers. You know what condensers are?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KAYEKJIAN: Three machines: ground, charge, and discharge. Here I'm going with the three machines like that. So, I'm can't look—we had eyes on [unclear], with your fingers. And this day somebody came and pat my shoulders. "Oh," I says, "My God, I'm getting tired." Because them days, you couldn't get a job; that was in '35 or '36. And I looked around—huge officers, sailor, with his all stripes. "Oh my God, he's going to fire me!" So the boss says, "Rose, come to the office." So I went there, and he says, "Sit down." I sat down. The man says, "Are you the little lady--," I was a little peanut then! He says, "Are you the little lady did all these condensers?" The [unclear] said, "Yes." He gave me a beautiful, what they call it, service, for United States service. I got that thing here. Yeah, I got it at home.

LEVINE: What were you making the condensers for?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, they said for airplanes, automobiles, things like that. Anything, and home uses, like refrigerators, yeah.

LEVINE: And this was a man from the service, from the Navy?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, Navy.

LEVINE: Well, that was quite a compliment!

KAYEKJIAN: It was! But here I was, shaking like a leaf, because them days, you couldn't even buy a job! It was hard, hard, very hard.

LEVINE: Well I see that you left Turkey in 1915, so that was at the time of the Armenian massacre.

KAYEKJIAN: No, we were here.

LEVINE: You were here? What prompted the family to come here when you did?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, my father did. First, I told you.

LEVINE: Yeah, when did your father come?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, God, 1910, I think, yeah.

LEVINE: So he had been here for five years?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, 1910. Then he came to—and we girls came first with my mother. And Thanksgiving Day we reached here. And my mother bought a chicken. He said, "People eat, everybody eats chicken here, Thanksgiving." We don't know. So we cooked the chicken and we had a big party, and he blessed the table. It was nice.

LEVINE: Had you had chicken in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: No, this is here.

LEVINE: Yeah, but did you ever have chicken before?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, we had chicken. Yeah, we had chicken, yeah.

LEVINE: And was your father a minister in this country?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, in Europe. They ask him to become a minister in this country. They bought this church on Shawmut Ave., you know? Armenian

church, and they didn't have any minister. So they came and asked, said, "Mr. Vartabedian, we don't have a minister. Would you please be our minister?" My father said, "Certainly." Then he said, "How much?" "Thirty dollars a week." Eight of us got to live! He said, "No, I can't accept that." He didn't accept it, no.

LEVINE: What did he do, then?

KAYEKJIAN: He went to work in a factory, like a shoe factory, yeah.

LEVINE: And where did—well first, he sent you the tickets?

KAYEKJIAN: Pardon? Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Did he send the tickets?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Now, who traveled with you when you came to this country?

KAYEKJIAN: My brothers, my mother, yeah.

LEVINE: And your sisters stayed?

KAYEKJIAN: No, we all came here, that same time. But from Ellis Island, we came separate.

LEVINE: I see. Now, tell me about when you left Civaz. Do you remember leaving?

KAYEKJIAN: I remember leaving, because everybody was crying, and just waving goodbye to us. We were like a wagon train we were in, like, yeah. So we traveled about three days in that wagon train.

LEVINE: When you say a wagon train, was it horse-drawn?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, it was horse-drawn, two or three horses, yeah.

LEVINE: And more than one wagon?

KAYEKJIAN: No, we were all in one wagon, no.

LEVINE: And you remember saying goodbye to everyone?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, they cried, I remember. We were kids, you know. We were wondering what they're crying for. But now I remember why [laughs].

LEVINE: Did you take anything with you that was your own thing?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no.

LEVINE: Do you remember what your mother took?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, she took a couple of rugs, they called it Turkish rugs. She got that, but they had to pay a lot of duty on that, yeah. I think—she brought one of them anyway, here, in the United States, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, do you have that rug?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, my mother's, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, very nice. So the wagon train—where did the wagon train take you? Where did you get the ship?

KAYEKJIAN: We came as far as Istanbul, you know, [unclear], Istanbul? We came there, and we stayed there three days for the ship to come in. We stayed there, like a roomer. But we slept on the floor, yeah. There was no beds.

LEVINE: And so you stayed there. Was that the first time you had ever been to Istanbul?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah. And my brother, which was the oldest, and my mother, they used to go the shopping, and they used come and tell us what a beautiful sight the place was, beautiful. But we kids never went out. We had a nice landlady; she used to bring us a meal and stuff, you know.

LEVINE: Did you see any things that you had never seen before, when you were en route to the ship?

KAYEKJIAN: We see a lot of water! [Laughs]

LEVINE: So after three days in Istanbul, then what happened?

KAYEKJIAN: Then we came to Liverpool, England, and we stayed there, too.

LEVINE: A few days?

KAYEKJIAN: A week, more than a week.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Liverpool?

KAYEKJIAN: Beautiful city, nice, very kind people. Very kind people. Very pathetic. We were so young, and we didn't have shoes or anything on, yeah.

LEVINE: You didn't have shoes on?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, we had like slippers, like, yeah.

LEVINE: The people were nice to you?

KAYEKJIAN: They're very nice, very nice. English people were very generous, nice people, yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember how they were helpful to you and your family?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah. She used to cook something and bring it to us, and said, "You eat that before you go to bed."

LEVINE: Again, you stayed in someone's home?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then do you remember getting on the ship?

KAYEKJIAN: On the ship? It was nice, but we couldn't get up. We were all seasick.

LEVINE: Were you down in the bottom of the ship when you came? Were you in what you call steerage, way down in the ship?

KAYEKJIAN: No, we weren't way down, no.

LEVINE: You were in a cabin?

KAYEKJIAN: Like a cabin, like, yeah. But we weren't allowed to go, because we'd get lost, yeah.

LEVINE: So you stayed in the cabin?

KAYEKJIAN: We stayed; we stayed there, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the food aboard ship?

KAYEKJIAN: It was nice, but you know, it was like strange food, lots of times. But you get used to it. We ate it. When you're hungry, you eat anything [laughs]!

LEVINE: Did you go to a dining room, or how did you have your dinners?

KAYEKJIAN: No, they brought it to us. We were too young to go. No, they brought it in the room. We ate it in the room, yeah.

LEVINE: So you had a room, and it was a room just for your family?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did any of your brothers and sisters, or mother—did they go around the ship?

KAYEKJIAN: My brother did, my brother Jerry. Yeah, he did, yeah.

LEVINE: Did he tell you things about it?

KAYEKJIAN: He did; he did. He said very, very nice, nice ship. But I forgot the name. He told us the name, but I forgot.

LEVINE: Is Jerry alive now?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no. Six of them, I'm the only alive! [Laughs] I'm the only sinner!

LEVINE: And you're the next to the oldest?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, I remember that, because then we wait another two, three days. We slept on the benches.

LEVINE: In Ellis Island?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, what do you remember about Ellis Island? Tell me everything you can think of about Ellis Island.

KAYEKJIAN: Well, Ellis Island was nice, very nice, but it was good thing it wasn't winter, like. We have no blankets, nothing, here we are like that. And on our bench we lie down, and sleep there. But they were kind; the people were kind to us. They bring, like, a hot cup of tea or something, or a little piece of a lollipop; we'd suck on it [laughs].

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you go and have dinners at Ellis Island? Did you go to the dining room?

KAYEKJIAN: We did, once. I don't know whether it was a holiday or not, but I know we did once. It was beautiful dining room.

LEVINE: And it was right before Thanksgiving that you were--?

KAYEKJIAN: Right.

LEVINE: So it was about this time of year, November?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes [laughs].

LEVINE: So, do you know why you had to stay there for a few days?

KAYEKJIAN: One of my brother's eyes. They call it nobinall. [PH]

LEVINE: Nobinall?

KAYEKJIAN: Some eye disease, my brother Eddy. So my mother says—they want to leave him behind. My mother said, "Never, never. I would never leave my child behind and go." So that's why we stayed. The three days the doctor cured him; I don't know what the trouble was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you remember anything else about Ellis Island? Did you go outside?

KAYEKJIAN: No, we didn't. No, no, we didn't, no. We didn't know where to go, and we couldn't speak English, either, so we'd get lost. They wouldn't let—they won't let you, no.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people there when you were there?

KAYEKJIAN: Lot of people. A lot of people waiting on the benches, sleeping. It was pathetic sight.

LEVINE: Did you meet other Armenian people?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, yes, there were a lot of Armenians, yes, but we couldn't talk to them very much.

LEVINE: And so then the doctor said your brother's eye was all right?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then who met you? Did your father come?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, he came. He came, yeah.

LEVINE: Did he come before that, and he couldn't take you?

KAYEKJIAN: No, he came after that. Well, he's coming from, like Bridgewater to Ellis Island. It takes a long time, yeah. And then he had to have so much money to show, I think, and what he did, what kind of job he did, and what he made. So all that took time, yeah.

END OF SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Did your father ever become an American citizen?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Was that after you came?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, because we were underage, and through that we came—years ago, when your parent's a citizen, the children, underage, they become a citizen automatically.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember the day when your father became a citizen?

KAYEKJIAN: No, I don't, no, no.

LEVINE: So, your father met you, and then how did you get to Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: How did we get to Bridgewater? Another thing. Another boat ride.

LEVINE: Oh, another boat?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, and we came to harbor, and then my mother—we went home, and my mother, my brothers were waiting for us, and it was Thanksgiving dinner.

LEVINE: Well now, your mother was—your mother came with you, from Turkey, right?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So when you got to Bridgewater, where did you go?

KAYEKJIAN: My father had a house already rented, yeah. That was on Plymouth Street. I remember the thing, two twenty-six Plymouth Street. You walk that street straight up, you go to Plymouth Rock.

LEVINE: Oh!

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, it's near the Plymouth Rock. You know where that is?

LEVINE: Yes.

KAYEKJIAN: Have you been to see the Plymouth Rock?

LEVINE: Yes, I have.

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, we used to go there, oh about, probably we lived about half an hour's walk, yeah.

LEVINE: So what was the first Thanksgiving like for you and your family in America?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, it was nice, because we had plenty to eat! [Laughs] You know, kids love to eat!

LEVINE: Now when you were in Turkey, the family was poor?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, not rich, but we're not hungry. We didn't go hungry, but we're not rich, no.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh. So how was life here in the beginning, compared with life in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, my God! No comparison! No, no, no.

LEVINE: What was different?

KAYEKJIAN: A spacious house, you put new rooms, six, seven rooms apartment, and your heat. We didn't have the heat there. And the air condition. But we did have one thing, that we used to go swimming. That was supposed to be mineral waters, like a pond. I remember going to the swimming there. It was nice.

LEVINE: This was near Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And so you'd go to the mineral water pond? Uh-huh. Now, did you start school in Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Was that soon after you came?

KAYEKJIAN: About two months, maybe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, you started in the next term, probably.

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was it like when you went to school here?

KAYEKJIAN: It was beautiful, yeah!

LEVINE: Now, was it difficult, about the language?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, it was. First we went to the non-English class. Well, like, "This is my hand. This is my fingers. This is my arm. This is my face." We learned that: "My eyes, my body, my foot." We stayed there, in that class, 'til we could speak fluently. Not fluently, but understood. And we stayed there about, maybe, six months or something, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, there were several of your brothers and sisters in the same--?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, we all went to same, because none of us could speak English. My brother Jerry did, but wasn't fluent, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, were there a number of other people who had immigrated in and around Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, there were a lot, but I don't know them.

LEVINE: But you weren't the only children, because there was a special class for children?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, no, no, no, there were a lot of people. A lot of people that came from that—non-English people. They had the special class, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember if there were any other groups from a particular country, besides people coming from Turkey? Were there people coming from any other particular countries that you remember, like from Italy, or from Germany?

KAYEKJIAN: No, I don't.

LEVINE: So, there were a number of people who had come from Turkey that lived near you, that you would see?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, but my mother speaks little Turkish. My father used to speak; my brother Jerry did. But my mother didn't speak very good Turkish, either.

LEVINE: Well now, what did you know about the Armenian genocide that was going on in Turkey when you were here?

KAYEKJIAN: Well you know, we used to be fussy eating. And my father said, used to tell us about the genocide: "People are hungry, dying. Here, you've got food, and you don't eat." I remember he used to say that, yeah.

LEVINE: So did you have—you said your father was helpful in bringing other relatives over?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: When was that?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, maybe two, three years after we landed here, after we came here. I remember that; I don't remember the date.

LEVINE: So he sent them money to come?

KAYEKJIAN: He come, but they all paid back. They only paid so much a month, yeah.

LEVINE: So do you have any other memories about the genocide, anything to do with that?

KAYEKJIAN: No. No, I don't, no. Because we were here then, yeah. We were one of the fortunates.

LEVINE: Yes. And, so you continued being a religious family when you were in this country as well?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes. I never go to bed without saying my prayers. I wake up, I thank God again. I pray for my grandchildren and my daughter. And I thank God that he woke me up in peaceful condition.

LEVINE: And was there anything else about America that, or anything about America, that was new and different, that you liked when you came here?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, the friendly people. They were very friendly and helpful people. You go in a grocery store, and if you can't speak English, somebody will come in with motions and everything: what do you want? [Laughs] Yeah, and help you. And very trustworthy, too. You give them five dollars, they give the correct change to you, yeah.

LEVINE: Was Bridgewater a small town when you came?

KAYEKJIAN: Well at that time it's about, population was about eight, nine thousand, yeah.

LEVINE: So, let's see. Well, then you went to school, and how long did you stay in school?

KAYEKJIAN: Not too long, I told you. We had to get up and work. Yeah, I think I left it when I was in sixth grade, like, [unclear]. I remember the teacher's name. Non-English teacher was Mrs. Barrows, and Miss Jennie Bennett, and Nellie Bennett, five and six, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And when you left school, what did you do when you had to get a job? What kind of job did you get first?

KAYEKJIAN: Working in the shoe factory. I was working in the shoe factory, and I had my hair down with braids. And somebody came and tapped my shoulder, and said, "Put your hair up." I looked up; it was one of the bosses. Because we were too young! And after that, I start—I cut my hair [laughs].

LEVINE: Was that a big decision, to cut your hair?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, because you either had to braid it, or you had to pin it up in a bun. So it was easier when you cut it [laughs].

LEVINE: Yeah, so how old were you, though, when you started working? Well, you were sixth grade. I'm not sure how old that would be.

KAYEKJIAN: I was about fifteen, sixteen. But them days, child labor was allowed. But now you have to be, what, sixteen or eighteen.

LEVINE: So how long did you work in the shoe factory?

KAYEKJIAN: Until I got married [laughs].

LEVINE: Oh! So how did you meet your husband?

KAYEKJIAN: I met my husband in, like, a supper.

LEVINE: A church supper?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, something like that. So I met him there. Yeah, he used to live in Middleboro, about eight miles from Bridgewater.

LEVINE: And was this kind of a social event for people who were Armenian?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, well, you couldn't go out with a fellow, not like the way they do.

LEVINE: No, what was different?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, you ask your father. And you can't say yes or no. You have to have your mother and father's permission. They had to look him over to see if he's [laughs] worth it! And my father said, "He seems to be a good guy." So—

LEVINE: What did you like about him, about your husband?

KAYEKJIAN: It was nice. He was kind and generous. But he died—I was married to him about four years. He died of a heart attack, yeah. I had my daughter here. She was about three, four years old, like that. And he died. Somebody—I was giving a bath Saturday night. I'll never forget. Somebody rang the bell, and here I'm giving—she's in the tub, the baby. And they rang and rang. I opened the door, I said, "Wait a minute!" She says, "Rose, it's very important." So I went downstairs. She says, "Your husband dropped dead at work." That was it, yeah.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

KAYEKJIAN: Name?

LEVINE: His first name.

KAYEKJIAN: Carken.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

KAYEKJIAN: Car, C-A-R-K-E-N, I think.

LEVINE: Carken, uh-huh. And how about your daughter, what's her name?

KAYEKJIAN: Ann, yeah.

LEVINE: And now you have grandchildren?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, I have two grandchildren. One is—that's the ultrasound. She was in New England Baptist. She's a nurse there; she does ultrasound. And the other one sings for Columbia Record Company. Beautiful voice. We got her records here. Beautiful, beautiful voice, and she never took any voice lessons. She went for a voice lesson, and the teacher said, "You don't need any voice lesson. God gave you a good voice. Go ahead and get going." [Laughs]

LEVINE: What is her name?

KAYEKJIAN: Her name is Nancy.

LEVINE: And her last name?

KAYEKJIAN: Tutunjian.

LEVINE: And she sings for Columbia Records? Interesting.

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, they've got a lot of her records. We got her records here, too.

LEVINE: What kinds of songs does she sing?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, church songs, religious songs, and folk songs, yeah, in English and Armenian.

LEVINE: Wonderful, wonderful! How do you spell her last name? Her last name?

KAYEKJIAN: Tutunjian?

LEVINE: Yeah, how do you spell that?

KAYEKJIAN: T-U-T-U-N-J-I-A-N.

LEVINE: Great. Okay, well now, after you met your husband, did you continue to work then?

KAYEKJIAN: Pardon?

LEVINE: Did you work after you got married?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, I did, I did, yeah, 'til I got pregnant, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you stopped. And then when your husband died, what did you do then?

KAYEKJIAN: I went back to work again.

LEVINE: Is that when you were making the conductors?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, I went back to work, the—oh, what hospital was it now? That's when I went, yeah, one of the hospitals. And guess what they paid? I think forty-five cents an hour. And my daughter and I had to live, yeah. The Faulkner Hospital.

LEVINE: What is it?

KAYEKJIAN: Faulkner.

LEVINE: F-O-N--?

KAYEKJIAN: Faulkner Hospital.

LEVINE: Where was that?

KAYEKJIAN: That was near Bridgewater, yeah, surroundings.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. So then you went to work making the conductors, right?

KAYEKJIAN: Condensers.

LEVINE: Condensers, sorry. Uh-huh. And after you were given that compliment about the work you did, did you continue working there?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, I did. After that, the company moved. The company that I was working, they moved, oh, about eight miles from Bridgewater, and they want me to go with them. I said, "No, I can't leave over here. I've got the house, and I've got my kids going to school. My folks are here." I didn't want to go; I didn't want to move.

LEVINE: Now, did you live with your mother and father?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, well I lived for a while; not too long, yeah.

LEVINE: How did your mother adjust to being in this country?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, she never learned the language, but she liked it, because it was a free country. Yeah, yeah, it's nice. She was happy here.

LEVINE: And so then, did you stay working where you were making the condensers?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: You stayed there until you retired?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, no, no, oh no. No, I quit, yeah. When I got pregnant, I had to.

LEVINE: Did you work at all after that, someplace else?

KAYEKJIAN: I did at one of the hospitals. I forgot now. It wasn't—that was when they used to give you about forty-five, forty cents, and your meals free. Imagine, two, three dollars a day!

LEVINE: So when you look back on your life, what do you feel proud of? What makes you feel proud or satisfied?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, proud—I thank God first that he spared my life and kept me healthy all these years; I still do. And I still say my prayers in the morning, and at night before I go to bed, and when I rise from the bed. I thank God a million times. Because the way the world condition is, we're lucky we're here! It's terrible, terrible, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you have any other ways about you that are Armenian, that you have kept up over the years?

KAYEKJIAN: Couple of the rugs that my mother left! [Laughs]

LEVINE: But I mean, things that you do, or your ways of being, the way that you do things? Are there any Armenian ways that you keep up? Did you cook Armenian kinds of dishes?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, I do, I do. Yeah, I do, yeah. But I don't now, but I used to.

LEVINE: But you used to? What kinds of food did you keep?

KAYEKJIAN: We made dolmas [PH], that's like stuffed pepper and stuffed cabbage, and we made pilaf, rice pilaf and wheat pilaf. And we made yogurt, and we made that—we mixed that with barley, and make that like a soup, yeah. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Now how do you think it affected you? I mean, you came here when you were nine years old. You came from Turkey, you were Armenian. Do you think that made a difference later in your life?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, when we went to recess at school, we couldn't speak Armenian, and I kind of shied away. I mean, we couldn't speak English. We were in like a non-English class, and we would kind of shy away, you know. We felt strangers then, but it didn't take long. We got mixed in.

LEVINE: Did you learn to play American games with the other children?

KAYEKJIAN: Oh yes, yeah. We played games.

LEVINE: Were there any games that you remember?

KAYEKJIAN: I remember jump rope.

LEVINE: Oh, you did jump rope.

KAYEKJIAN: [Laughs] And what was the other one? Eeny, meeny, miney, moe? This little piggy went to market! This is what you say? [Laughs] Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you play ball? Or did you play tag?

KAYEKJIAN: Tag, we played tag. Not ball, tag, yeah. And we went to—I told you, we had a lot of mulberry bushes. We used to pick the mulberries.

LEVINE: Was this in Bridgewater, or in Turkey?

KAYEKJIAN: Bridgewater, too. We had bushes.

LEVINE: Both?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah. The red kind of mulberries, and—

LEVINE: Cranberries?

KAYEKJIAN: No, mulberries. Cranberries are different, yeah. But there were a lot of—what do you call that? What is it? I forgot the name in English. Apricots!

LEVINE: Oh, you had those?

KAYEKJIAN: The trees. Apricot tree, we had one.

LEVINE: You had one in Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: We had one in Bridge—

LEVINE: So you had apricots and mulberries in both of those places?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, we did have—we had a big yard. We had a very nice, big garden. And my father used to raise our tomatoes for canning, and the potatoes for winter. We used to put—my father would pick them up, and put

them—we used to dig the potatoes when the time came, and we used to put them in the bags, and my father would take them down in the cellar. And he sorts them, and see if there's some damaged potatoes there, and the healthy ones. We eat it all winter [laughs].

LEVINE: Did you have any chores about the house when you were in Bridgewater?

KAYEKJIAN: Yes, the chores were after dinner. After supper, I had to do the dishes, and my sister Margaret had to dry them and place them in their own places. Because it was too much for my mother, yeah.

LEVINE: And what is your life like now, now in your older years? What is life like for you now?

KAYEKJIAN: Boring! [Laughs] I used to walk about, a least a mile, or more than that, a day, every day.

LEVINE: Really?

KAYEKJIAN: I'd get my work done, the house clean, everything else, and I'd start walking, walking watching the house, the trees. I love the trees. I think the trees are something beautiful; there's something about—they say the trees talk to each other. Have you ever heard that?

LEVINE: No!

KAYEKJIAN: I was reading in a Reader's Digest. I said, "I never heard of a tree talking!"

LEVINE: Well, it's a lovely idea, isn't it?

KAYEKJIAN: [Laughs]

LEVINE: Well now, you're right here by the Arboretum, so you must have walked—that's a beautiful place to walk.

KAYEKJIAN: It is beautiful, beautiful there, yeah.

LEVINE: So you miss walking so much? I mean, I see you have a walker now, so you can't walk so much.

KAYEKJIAN: Still, I can't walk that around, no. No, we can't go out alone, either, no. Because we'd fall or something, yeah. But they take us out once in a while. We're going to get our bus, too.

LEVINE: And where are you going to go?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, where ever they take us, yeah. I mean, the company's buying their own bus.

LEVINE: Oh, the Armenian Home, you mean?

KAYEKJIAN: Yeah, over here, the Armenian Home. They're taking their own—going to have their own bus.

LEVINE: Let's see. Is there anything else that you can think of about, you know, living in this country most of your life? Is there anything you would say about coming to America? I mean, do you consider yourself Armenian and American? How do you think about that?

KAYEKJIAN: I consider myself American now, but I did consider myself as an Armenian, because I told you, my father wouldn't let us talk English at home. So I'm glad I did, because I can speak fairly well now, Armenian, yeah. He said, "Someday you'll appreciate what I'm doing. But," he said, "You're too young to understand. When you know two languages, you're two persons. If you know three languages, you're three persons," yeah. So we stuck to the Armenian language, and we didn't forget it. None of us did, either.

LEVINE: So now you really are thankful that he did that?

KAYEKJIAN: I am, I am, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you ever hear of the idea of the melting pot, that people come to America from lots of different countries, and it's like a melting pot? Did you ever hear of that?

KAYEKJIAN: I heard of that, but—

LEVINE: Yeah, do you think that's true?

KAYEKJIAN: I don't know. I haven't witnessed; I didn't see. Yeah, we were here much before that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you feel like you kept being—you didn't lose being Armenian?

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, no.

LEVINE: You kept it.

KAYEKJIAN: No, no, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well is there anything else you can think of that has to do with coming to this country and being here?

KAYEKJIAN: [Pause] Anything else?

LEVINE: Yeah, about being American?

KAYEKJIAN: Well, I love it! [Laughs] No, I'm one of the fortunate ones to be here, to tell you the truth, because I learned to read, I learned the language, as much as I can now! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Well, I feel fortunate to have been able to talk with you. I want to thank you very much.

KAYEKJIAN: Oh, the pleasure is mine, all of mine! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, well the pleasure is mine as well. And I've been speaking with Rose Kayekjian, who came in 1915 from Turkey, and she was about nine years of age. And let's see, you were born in 1906.

KAYEKJIAN: As far as I remember, it was about that, yeah.

LEVINE: In August.

KAYEKJIAN: August 18th.

LEVINE: So that would make you eighty-nine years old today?

KAYEKJIAN: About that, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW