

EI-718

ALICE PAPA ZIAN HOVNANIAN

BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 17 OR 18, 1901 (?)

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 10, 1995

RUNNING TIME: 00:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ARMENIAN HOME, JAMAICA PLAIN,
MASSACHUSETTS

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

TURKEY, 1927 OR '28 (?)

AGE 17 (?)

PASSAGE ON THE TRANSATLANTIC (?)

PORT OF EMBARKATION: TURKEY, VIA SYRIA, VIA CUBA

OLD COUNTRY RESIDENCE: (?), TURKEY/HALEB, SYRIA

UNITED STATES RESIDENCE (S): ROSLINDALE, MASSACHUSETTS

ORAL HISTORIANS NOTE: Araksia Makarian joins the interview to translate.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's November 10, 1995,
and I'm here at the Armenian Home in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

HOVNANIAN: Ya.

LEVINE: And I have the pleasure of being with Alice Papazian Hovnanian. And ah,
Mrs. Hovnanian was born in Turkey, but she went to Cuba for two years
before she came through Ellis Island and entered the United States. Well,
I'm looking forward to hearing your story. I'll ask you questions, and then
you tell me what you remember. Whatever you remember is good, okay?

Now, you remember your birth date?

HOVNANIAN: My birthday. September. My birthday is September 18 or 17. Like that.

LEVINE: Well, you thought before that you were born in 1901, which would make you 94 years old now. Is that right? Do you think you're 94 years old now?

HOVNANIAN: Yes. 1901. I born in Turkey, 1901. I comin' here September 17 or 18, something like that. I forgot it.

LEVINE: You came to this country?

HOVNANIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the year?

HOVNANIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember what year it was?

HOVNANIAN: September. That September.

LEVINE: That's the month. And the year? It was September, 19-? What?

HOVNANIAN: September, 1907. 1917.

LEVINE: 1917. Well, you were married when you came. You had a baby when you came.

HOVNANIAN: Yeah. I had a baby. Born in Cuba. I bring it here.

LEVINE: And your baby was three years old when you came to this country?

HOVNANIAN: My boy, very small when I could bring it here. No.

LEVINE: Take your time.

HOVNANIAN: My son is, I don't know. September 31 or 36.

LEVINE: You think you came to this country in 1930 something.

HOVNANIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. I might be able to check on that, so we'll just go ahead, okay? Tell me what you remember about Turkey. What was life like for you when you were a little girl in Turkey.

HOVNANIAN: Oh, Turkey. I hated Turkey.

LEVINE: Why did you hate it so much.

HOVNANIAN: Turkey. All the Armenian killed. All the Armenian sent in []. Turkish very bad. Turkey, I don't like the Turkey. That's why everybody get up. Everybody get up. Coming America. Coming America.

LEVINE: When you lived in Turkey when you were a little girl, did you have a grandmother and grandfather?

HOVNANIAN: Oh, my grandfather, grandmother, all die. Before die. My father, soldiers, they take him. Soldiers. I didn't see my father. I didn't see my father. Because my mother, me and my brother, I have my sister, all the get-up, did not get up. After one Turkey, they come. My mother says, can I have this one boy. And this one girl? I take them my house. I have a big chimney.

LEVINE: A big what?

HOVNANIAN: (thinking) What call that?

LEVINE: Chimney? What does that mean in English. What's the word in English?

HOVNANIAN: Big (thinking) Garden! Garden. Big garden. They have one Armenian woman and that woman she got one children too, with them. They says, no either one. Just my boy and a small girl. She take that. I am stay with my mother. I didn't go to Turkey. And after, when I coming home, I says, one Armenian house. And he got a white donkey, you know? And I cannot speak the Turkish over there. After that I was, that man he get up, he says, I am going downtown. You want something to I bring? Says, I don't want anything. You just (crying) my mother leave my sister. He say, okay. I got give me that []. And after, I don't know. I can't speak Turkey. And the boy, he know Turkish. After I look down that, the man ride donkey. Surin, Surin, the name is Surin. Come on! Come on! Hurry up. One man coming, just that man, taking my sister, my mother, my brother. And she come [afendi, afendi, sanaravizen]...

LEVINE: What is that?

HOVNANIAN: [Afendi, afendi] (laughing a bit) (pausing) What's your name? Where are you? What is your name? [] Turkish says, yeah! Come on down! Come on down! We go down, my god. And he take me and my mother and my sister over there. He take me, I go. I see my brother. He cry. (crying) My sister, just put the, just like Turkish. Says, don't talk to me. Turkish take, cut the thing. My kid.

LEVINE: They cut her tongue?

HOVNANIAN: Yah. Don't talk to me. All Turkey, they cut your tongue. (crying) []
Turkish. Too much done to me. Too much to talk about. Anyway, we find
it. I bring my sister, take home. My brother he stay him. He says, all right.
I take this after. And my sister. I says, [in Armenian].

LEVINE: What does that mean?

HOVNANIAN: [in Armenian] Don't take my sister. You aren't taking. [] My brother
and my sister. I said, No! No! No! Okay. After, she take with me. And
she die after that day that I. My brother, he stay over there. My brother, he
take that, over there. I say, he take that, we take it, over there. They got
that. You know, [donamarka] Lot a, not the church. They keep it, take it,
orphanage.

LEVINE: And orphanage.

HOVNANIAN: Uh, huh. And my brother, all the Armenian people, he take a carpenter.
He's very nice.

LEVINE: Your brother's a carpenter.

HOVNANIAN: Oh, very nice. Everything. Because my father, my father is very nice carpenter. And my brother, we said it again, carpenter. They want pay that. And happy for quarter, [] they give him. Four quarter, good money, that time. Nothing. And that's all.

LEVINE: Well, let me ask you a few questions. What was your mother's name?

HOVNANIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: What was your mother's name? Your mother?

HOVNANIAN: My mother. My mother Takouhi. Takouhi. Queen.

LEVINE: How do you say her last name? What was her name before she was married? Before she married your father?

HOVNANIAN: My mother name? Narzargian.

LEVINE: Narzargian

HOVNANIAN: After, Papazian.

LEVINE: Okay. What was your mother like? When you were a little girl? When you were a little girl, do you remember what your mother was like?

HOVNANIAN: You know, yeah. Don't talk to me. Turkish take out your thing. Don't talk Armenian. Turkish people, they'll cut your tongue.

LEVINE: They'll cut your tongue if you talk?

HOVNANIAN: Yeah. She, small kid.

LEVINE: How old were you when you left Turkey?

HOVNANIAN: Me? I didn't fit too much. We come after, my country, they got just something, a Red Cross people, they sended money. I come from Syria. After Syria, my husband sister over there. My sister, all the time she says, why did you get big. I'm not going to make it. I can't find nobody Armenian here. And after, when I coming, she see me. She arrive there, when I was, too crazy, and very nice blonde hair, everything. And crazy. I asked everything.

LEVINE: You were crazy? How were you crazy? What did you do?

HOVNANIAN: I don't know. And after this, my husband, he says, my mother, Mrs. Queen this is, when I going all, and after coming I'm going get married your daughter. She says, oh! My own. My old (stops, laughs a bit) I don't know. My old chicken, the girl, I'm not going to give one for no. He says, oh, you give me that. I like her. She says, no, I'm not going give you. He says, I like her. I'm []. She says, my old chicken, my girl, I'm not going to give it to him. (laughing)

LEVINE: We're going to pause here for a minute.

(exchange in Armenian) (translator begins)

LEVINE: Okay. Maybe we should start with when you left Turkey? Do you remember when you left Turkey, when you went from Turkey?

HOVNANIAN: It was genocide.

LEVINE: The genocide was when you left.

HOVNANIAN: We went to Haleb, Syria.

LEVINE: Syria. How long did you stay in Haleb?

HOVNANIAN: Five years in Haleb, and got engaged in Haleb.

LEVINE: Maybe you can tell in English about how you got engaged?

HOVNANIAN: Five years engagement. After you come from Cuba, I come from over there.

And after she come from Cuba with me...

LEVINE: Why did you get engaged to that man? How did you get engaged?

(microphone is obscured a bit)

HOVNANIAN: You know, I go in garden, the neighbor's garden for grapes.

TRANSLATOR: She still prefer their neighbor who had boy. She'd go there and steal the grapes. So that boy...

HOVNANIAN: He hit me, I says, I'm going to get my mother. I go home, my mother says, why your cry? And mother, my neighbor hit me. She says, why you hit? Because I steal grapes. Everything, I'm too crazy. I'm stealing everything.

TRANSLATOR: She likes grapes and she's going to steal the grapes.

HOVNANIAN: My mother says, she come and tell them, I do good thing, because she stealing. That small children. I says, I don't care, small children. She's stealing my grapes.

TRANSLATOR: The neighbor says, I don't care if she's a child. They come. Her mother went to the lady and said, he hits her because she steals the grapes.

LEVINE: So how did that, what did that have to do with how you got engaged to your husband?

HOVNANIAN: After, you know I am crazy. No. I see the sister when I was in Syria. Her sister, she see me. She said, where do you live? []

TRANSLATOR: She was in Syria, and she saw his brother, his sister, at that time.

HOVNANIAN: My mother says, my old [] (they laugh).

TRANSLATOR: When that boy meet her, her mother was very mad, and she say, my [asks question in Armenian and H. responds in Armenian] if all my chickens were killed, I never give her to you because he says, someday I'm gonna get married with your daughter, he says to her mother. (they laugh).

LEVINE: Well, what did you think about him?

HOVNANIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: How did you feel about him? (translator)

HOVNANIAN: Oh, I don't know.

LEVINE: You liked him?

HOVNANIAN: Nice man. (they laugh)

LEVINE: What did you like about him? (translator)

HOVNANIAN: He like me too.

LEVINE: He liked you and you liked him. Okay. So that was in Syria.

TRANSLATOR: No. In [Chemukasazk] in Turkey.

LEVINE: Oh, oh, oh. Okay.

TRANSLATOR: And then when they went to Syria, to Haleb, it was after genocide. So he was, after genocide he came to America. And then he write letter to his sister, find for me some girl. [Hovanian adds in Armenian] And her sister meet Alice at that time, and she say, you know my brother looking for some girl. Do you want to go there? She says, I don't know who's your brother.

And she tell him, and she showed the picture, and they send her picture there, and they get, they met with picture after while, and he says, come to Cuba, and I come and get with you.

LEVINE: So he went from America to Cuba?

TRANSLATOR: Yes.

LEVINE: And did you remember him from the picture? When you got the picture in the letter, you got a picture of your husband?

HOVNANIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: When you saw that picture, did you remember who that was?

HOVNANIAN: Yes. (translator) Yeah. Yes. (they laugh)

LEVINE: You remembered him. So you said yes, you would go.

HOVNANIAN: I'm crazy.

TRANSLATOR: About him. She was crazy about him. He was nice looking. Good boy, was, right?

TRANSLATOR: She want to show you the picture.

LEVINE: What was your husband's first name?

HOVNANIAN: My name:

LEVINE: Your husband.

TRANSLATOR: (translates)

HOVNANIAN: George.

LEVINE: Gerdich. How do you spell that? Just write it out and we'll say the spelling on the tape.

TRANSLATOR: N-K-R-D-I-C-H.

LEVINE: And so these are pictures of your husband. Oh, wow. That's beautiful.

TRANSLATOR: And this is her son.

LEVINE: And that's your son. What a handsome son you have. So, do you remember going to Cuba? Do you remember the trip to Cuba? (translator)

HOVNANIAN: I went a boat. Cross Atlantic. Transatlantic.

LEVINE: Transatlantic.

HOVNANIAN: Two day. Just two day.

LEVINE: Oh, two days when you went from Cuba to the United States. Do you remember the voyage on the ship.

TRANSLATOR: She said Transamerican. (translates)

HOVNANIAN: Transatlantic.

LEVINE: Transatlantic. Then you came to Ellis Island.

HOVNANIAN: No. (exchange in Armenian) Boston.

LEVINE: Oh, Boston. You came into Boston. You didn't come into Ellis Island. Ellis Island in New York, when you came from Cuba. (translator)

TRANSLATOR: Not remember now, she says.

LEVINE: Did you see the Statue of Liberty? (translator)

TRANSLATOR: I think she was.

HOVNANIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: You saw the Statue of Liberty. Did you know what it was, when you saw it, did you know?

HOVNANIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: You knew? (translator)

HOVNANIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, were you examined when you came to America? Were you examined by doctors? (translator)

TRANSLATOR: I never had examine, she says.

LEVINE: No. It must have been Ellis Island because of the Statue of Liberty. Well, listen, I know it's time for you to go. Will you say your name for the tape and spell it, so that it's on here. This is the translator in this interview.

TRANSLATOR: My name is Araksia Makarian. M-A-K-A-R-I-A-N My last name. A-R-A-K-S-I-A. .

LEVINE:: Thank you. Thank you very much. We're going to pause here for a sec.

Okay. We're going to continue now. Can you tell me when you first came to America, where did you go?

HOVNANIAN: When I come here, America. In Boston.

LEVINE: And you lived in Boston?

HOVNANIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was everything new and different? Everything was new for you? Do you remember any of the things about it that were so new, that you never saw before?

HOVNANIAN: No. I don't, Cuba. I live in [] hotel. My baby, I have it over there. My baby, anyway, when my husband coming, he says, Alice. I coming here. I want a nice vacation. Stay here. I says okay. He stay over there. After I have my baby, I said, you going home. After I come over. He's going home. After I have my baby, I go home. I going home. I living 231 [] Avenue. I living over there. 230 is living over there. Over in Roslindale I have a lot of cousins. I going over there. My husband buy the house. We buy the house to stay here. My son go there, to school, go there, [], after he says, Father, no. I'm going for engineer. Because I like to be Navy. I don't like the soldiers.

LEVINE: He wants to be in the Navy.

HOVNANIAN: I like to be Navy. He says, all right. He's going [] for engineer. He graduate over there. He coming home. He coming home. We take same picture that. Same picture. All that military men, beside that. Said that guy's my son.

LEVINE: What is your son's name?

M: All that military men. You see them beside you. Said that's my son. He says, maybe he []. I says, no. He says, why don't you get married? He don't want to get married.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE:: What is your son's name?

HOVNANIAN: Edward.

LEVINE: Edward. Now, what do you feel very proud of, that you've done in your life? What makes you feel proud? Makes you feel satisfied, that you did?

HOVNANIAN: Who?

LEVINE: You. When you think about your life, when you look back on your life, what makes you feel happy? Makes you feel proud that you did?

HOVNANIAN: Because I take here. I like it here, everything.

LEVINE: You like it here?

HOVNANIAN: Oh, yes!

LEVINE: What do you like?

HOVNANIAN: Free. Everything free. Turkish, oh! I don't like that Turkey. Day and night. Day and night. [in Armenian] Just like the [], all the time. All the time. Cut. I don't like the Turkey. I don't like it. Any time. Any time, they say Turkey, why did you stay over there. Oh, my god. If I put my hair, my [] look at Turkey. I don't look at Turkey. Because Turkish people, they like hungry. They just cut it []. Turkish people like that. Bad people. Bad people. Very bad people. Cause my sister, she's a small kid. She said, when I talk at man. She said, keep quiet. Turkish people cut you. I says, no! Don't worry about it.

LEVINE: Do you think of yourself as American?

HOVNANIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you think of yourself, as American?

HOVNANIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And Armenian.

HOVNANIAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Armenian and America.

HOVNANIAN: Oh, America. I like America.

LEVINE: America.

HOVNANIAN: Oh, America is wonderful country. You feel free. Everything free. If you go in bed, you feel free. Turkia, if you go to bed, I don't look at any, my sight. I don't look at anything.

LEVINE: You don't look at anything. How do you like it here, in the Armenian home?

HOVNANIAN: Oh, I like it very nice.

LEVINE: What is nice about it? Why do you like it here?

HOVNANIAN: Just like my home. It's like my home. You know, a lot of people here, they bring, they [talkin']. I say, here is just like my home. Just like my home.

LEVINE: So you came from Turkey. You went to Cuba. Then you lived most of your life in America.

HOVNANIAN: America, yes.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much for talking with me. Thank you.

HOVNANIAN: You're welcome honey.

LEVINE: And when I go back to Ellis Island, I'll send you the copy of the tape.

HOVNANIAN: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay?

HOVNANIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. I've been speaking with Alice Hov-...

HOVNANIAN: Hovnanian.

LEVINE: Hovnanian.

HOVNANIAN: Papazian.

LEVINE: Papazian, which is your maiden name. And you came from Turkey to Cuba to America. And probably around 1927 or 1928. And you, so you were a young bride, a young mother, when you came to this country.

HOVNANIAN: Huh?

LEVINE: You had a baby when you came.

HOVNANIAN: I wish, you know, the other day, my son bring that. Whole case of pictures. I says, I wish I keep it. He said, mother I bring another time. I have lot of pictures at my house again. I says, you bring them another time.

LEVINE: Good.

HOVNANIAN: He's going to bring it, I don't know.

LEVINE: I hope so. I hope so. Okay, well thank you very much. This is Janet Levine, and I'm signing off.

END INTERVIEW