

EI-777

ANDREW HANISIAN (originally ANTRANIG HOVHANISIAN, OHANISSIAN)

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SHIP: PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay, today is August 9th, 1996. I'm here in the Ellis Island studio with Mr., called in this country Andrew, Hanisian, who came from Turkey. He is Armenian and came from Turkey in 19—in the '20s when he was ten years of age. He was born in 1910, so it was obviously 1920, possibly 1921.

HANISIAN: Yeah, 1920.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I want to say that I'm delighted that you happened to be visiting this museum and I was able to interview you, because I did interview your uncle, Mr. Hanisian, in 1992 and he was such a wonderful human being that I remember that interview very vividly. So let us start at the beginning, Mr. Hanisian. If you would just say for the tape your birth date and where in Turkey you were born.

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HANISIAN: I was born on July the 3rd, in Antioch, Turkey now, and 1914 by dad was in the Turkish army. He skipped away and landed in South America, and he stayed there for a while. From there he came to United State in Connecticut with his other two brothers. There were three of them.

LEVINE: And was one of those two brothers the Mr. Hanisian who I interviewed?

HANISIAN: No, he is the fourth one. There were four brothers and one daughter and when we heard the massacres, our young fellows, they were organized about that time. They didn't want to obey the Turkish command, so somebody tipped them off. Evidently the organization did, that they were going to do the same thing to us they did to the people that they were massacring in Turkey. So they said that it is better for us to go and fight, the young fellows, and they went out there up in the mountains and they fought for forty days and forty nights. However, at that time they knew France, England, they knew what was happening throughout the world. They knew the coming war was going to happen, so they used to send battleships and cruisers in the Mediterranean Sea, and we had, while the war was going on communities, you know, prepared for the opposing—the Turkish army because up to that point, they weren't around yet. But they did have some gendarmes, you know, that rode horseback and they had guards in the ocean there to see if they could go out there and get a—somebody to give them a hand. To give us a hand to fight the Turks because we didn't have any cannon, but they had—even uncle was in there, who was a young fellow.

LEVINE: Yeah. So you went to the battleships—people went to the battleships that were in the Mediterranean to see if you could get cannon fodder or whatever you needed to battle the Turks.

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So while they were doing that, they radioed in. They got another battleship in and they put us in there. They took the children and the old people, you know, women, children and the old people, old men. They took us to a place they called a Port Sahid [PH], near the Suez Canal, but not in Alexandria side, but that would be on the east side.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, now you—what year was this, about?

HANISIAN: This year is 19—wait a minute. 1914. That's when we landed over there, okay. So I was only four years old. I had a sister, too, but she died over there because change of climate. It was hot as hell in that

place and a lot of people got blind. It was so, you know, you're not used to the area and the sand, the heat on the tent.

LEVINE: So you remember that? Do you remember, how long did you stay there in Port Sahid [PH]?

HANISIAN: Four years.

LEVINE: I see. So that's really probably your first memories. Do you have memories prior to that?

HANISIAN: Yeah, well, I remember I used to go out and sit on the Suez Canal there with my grandfather. You know, the only grandson he's got, so he used to go fish and I was only about four or five years old, you know. Finally—that's the way he used to pass his time. They had—they had set up tents for all the people that they brought in. They brought quite a few in. Matter of fact, they emptied seven villages.

LEVINE: Now, were the mothers of the children with their children?

HANISIAN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So it was the mothers, their children, old people?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah. My grandmother, my grandfather, my aunt and my uncle, I and my mother and my other sister that passed away over there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, can you—your grandfather, was this your mother's father?

HANISIAN: No, it was my—they were both there, but my father—I lived mostly with my father's father.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything that your grandfather, your father's father—do you remember anything that he told you about life, about the Turks, about how you should behave? Any kinds of—

HANISIAN: About that time, hon, I was only, I would say five, six years old, you know. We were already settled in there a couple of years. The people that couldn't stand it, they passed away and they were always moving dead bodies. It was pretty well established. They had a hospital and they had everything else in there, but there were too many people, old people, and they couldn't take the heat and so they'd just perish and some of them even got blind. See. At any rate, he used to tell me that, "Your daddy's over in South America," and he used to be in the Turkish army. He ran away from Turkish army and he went over there,

and when he got there, he got hold of his other brother, and he was also there. Then two of them got together and brought the other brother over. Now there were three in there, and when the war was—it hadn't started yet in 1916 or 1917—1916 it must have been. They all came to Connecticut and started working at a factory. By that time, we had already gone back after the war. After the war, I mean that 1917 war, see.

LEVINE: After the First World War.

HANISIAN: Yeah, that's the one I'm talking about. No, I think we stayed there for another year or so because it was about six months I stayed in there after we went back because we were already on our way to America. But it takes us about six months to get to that point. We had to get a—what did I say? A sailboat from there.

LEVINE: From Port Sahid [PH] back to—

HANISIAN: No, from Port Sahid [PH] we went back all right. We got there all right, but I only—I only stayed there—uncle, too. I think we only stayed there six, seven months.

LEVINE: Back in Turkey?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you got back to Turkey what you saw, what it was like after you came back from Port Sahid [PH]?

HANISIAN: Well, yes. I saw the thing that I had—when I was a child I didn't know, and I knew the properties that my grandfather had and my other grandfather passed away, over on my mother's side. He passed away in—oh, God, while we were in—

LEVINE: Port Sahid [PH].

HANISIAN: Port Sahid [PH]. He passed away there, so he didn't go. It was only my mother and I and my grandfather on my father's side and my aunt and my uncle.

LEVINE: Excuse me, just to go back a minute. What were the living conditions like in Port Sahid [PH] with the tents and with the set up that they—

HANISIAN: Well, it was hell to begin with because you're not accustomed to it. When you're accustomed to it, whether it's natural, you know, it has seasons, real seasons and when the country isn't like winter. I didn't

know what ice was, I mean snow was until I came to this country, but they did have snow, but the morning you got up it was gone. That's what, the six months that I knew, that I was over there, that's the way it was, see.

LEVINE: Okay, well, so then when you got back to Turkey, what did you find had happened or what did you see or experience as a result of the massacre? You came back after it was over.

AH; Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And what were the ramifications or what did you experience?

HANISIAN: Well, I didn't experience anything at all in there because about that time Turkey resented it, the Armenians having their own, you know—they didn't like the idea of being Armenian. If you change your name like a Turkish name, then you're all right. In other words, give up Christianity, and hell, they've been fighting, the Armenians have been fighting since five, six hundred years ago just to keep that as a religion. But I saw the things that we owned, see, and I saw the things, the land that we owned and the fruits that we had and gardens that we had, the flowers that we had. I saw all those things that I hadn't seen before because when I left, I didn't know any better, but when I came, in that six months did a lot of things.

LEVINE: Well, what happened to the land and the gardens and the fruit and everything?

HANISIAN: Well, later on they had to leave again because Turkey started in. I think Turkey became—what do they call them now? A republic. You remember, [unclear]. No, that was—I forgot the fellow's name. They had a new president. When he came in power, then he started massacring Armenians. You know, the Turks did. Not the soldiers, you know, they had a free hand. They came to you, but the place where we lived, we were all the same kind. There were no mixture in us, but we had a deal with the Turks in order to get our food. Uncle almost got killed one time on the way back again. You know, when we went back, he had to escape. He went—he went there for food. That's over in—oh, God, it's Christian. There was a lot of Christians in there that landed in there years, years ago. Ah, I forget the name of it. At any rate, he had to go over there and get food for the family. He was only a kid.

LEVINE: He had to go to some other town, is that it?

HANISIAN: Yeah, to a—maybe it will come to me.

LEVINE: Okay. That's okay.

HANISIAN: See, I haven't used it. So they had that happen.

LEVINE: So he would go to this other town to get the food and then what happened to him?

HANISIAN: That there town, hon, they used to have these mules carrying. In the morning there would be a caravan of mules going. Well, he was a young fellow in those days, so he would travel with the caravan and they would go in town and they would buy all the things that they would need. They would pack it on the mules and bring it back home. Well, one time while he was over there, towards the end, he almost got killed because they were running all over. Wherever there was an Armenian, they killed him. The place where he was buying food from. So he was safe. He had stayed there a couple of days and run away. Somebody hid him. So he took off one night and traveled. You had to walk. That there place is about—it takes about seven hours to walk. You got to get up early in the morning. You know, that's a long ways off, and you're going hills and valleys and crossing water and everything else.

LEVINE: So he had to go—he had to walk back. He had to leave the mules because he was—

HANISIAN: Yeah, he left the caravan. He was out there to save his soul, you know.

LEVINE: Right.

HANISIAN: To save himself.

LEVINE: So did you encounter any Turks who were—

HANISIAN: No, I hadn't. No, no, I was too young. They always—you know, I was the pet.

LEVINE: Oh, you were the pet?

HANISIAN: Well, the other one passed away, so I was the one.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

HANISIAN: My mother's name was Marita. We call her Mary. Over here they call her Mary.

LEVINE: Do you remember her maiden name?

HANISIAN: Yaralian. [PH]

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

HANISIAN: Yeah, you had to—[writing].

LEVINE: That's good. [pause] Could you say it on the tape?

HANISIAN: Yaralian.

LEVINE: Y-A—

HANISIAN: It's Y-A-R-A-L-I-A-N. That's her maiden name.

LEVINE: Okay, and your father's name?

HANISIAN: My father's name is Zakara. [writes]

LEVINE: Can you spell that one for the tape? Z-A—

HANISIAN: Z-A-K-A-R-A.

LEVINE: Okay, and let's see. So—well, tell me a little bit about your father. Now, your father went while—when you were quite young, he went, he skipped the Turkish army and went to South Africa.

HANISIAN: South America.

LEVINE: South America, I'm sorry.

HANISIAN: Brazil.

LEVINE: Brazil, and so he was in Brazil and then he went to Connecticut?

HANISIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you did not see him until you came to America, is that correct?

HANISIAN: That's right.

LEVINE: Okay.

HANISIAN: That's right.

LEVINE: So you were with your mother then?

HANISIAN: All the time.

LEVINE: Tell me what your mother was like, what you remember about your mother when you were a little boy, before you came to America. Any stories that you think of when you think about your mother and what kind of a person she was and what kind of experiences she had over in Europe?

HANISIAN: All I could tell you is, when I was with her, when we went up in the mountains, she used to grab me and she would slide down. You know, instead of jumping, she would slide down to sort of a chute like.

LEVINE: Where, in the—on the mountain?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah, and it rained like heck at the same time, you know. So she would grab me and she would go like this, you know, and then I would go down with her. Then she'll pick me up again.

LEVINE: What was she sliding on?

HANISIAN: On whatever she had. The dress, she had a dress, that's what she'd slide on.

LEVINE: No, but I mean what were the chutes?

HANISIAN: There was no chutes. It was sort of a chute, I said. It was built like a chute, but it was dirt.

LEVINE: And did people normally do that, they sat down?

HANISIAN: They had to do that, they had no choice.

LEVINE: Oh, it was hard to get up and down the mountain.

HANISIAN: That's right, that's right. That's the only way you could get—it was like steps but only thing is, you're traveling from a height and then you're going down all of a sudden. You can't jump, so people evidently—she wasn't the only one, everybody was. So they made sort of a chute. All you did was sit down and slide down because it was raining and wet and everything, you see.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh, and what kind of a person was your mother? How would you describe her?

- HANISIAN: She was a beautiful—beautiful. She was tall. Beautiful. She was about, oh, I would say five eight, nine. She had a pleasant voice, never scold me. Matter fact, my other sister, too, never scold us.
- LEVINE: Can you say anything about how she—what attitude she had? How she lived through the displacement and I'm sure people she knew who were massacred.
- HANISIAN: You see, hon, when we went into that—when we got into Suez Canal, you know, Port Sahid [PH] they called it, I think. Yeah, and we were all in one room, one tent. My grandfather, my grandmother, my aunt, I and my sister and my mother, see. The tents are big, you know. They had it already pitched down, and so there was nothing I—you know, nothing I could tell you about it. All I could tell is I was a pet most of the time because I was the first boy, you know.
- LEVINE: Were there any special things that you were given as a little boy in those circumstances that was like a special treat?
- HANISIAN: A special treat was the time when my uncle—when my father ran from the Turkish army, as a rule, one of the sons had to go in the army, the Turkish army. The eldest son. When he ran away, his other brother—he said—
- LEVINE: Was enscripted into the army.
- HANISIAN: Yeah, and so he didn't stay either. He did the same thing. So by that time, there was a third brother, but this time they didn't know. By the time he got it, the war was already going on, see. So they dragged the young one out of there, too. When I say the young one, his name was John. They took him to South America. So there were three brothers. Now, when we were in Port Sahid [PH], the three brothers are the one that helped my grandfather and grandmother financially because they had left everything over there, see.
- LEVINE: So they sent money to Port Sahid [PH]?
- HANISIAN: That's right. That's right. They kept us going that way, see. And when the 1917 war began, my uncle, the youngest uncle came over to Port Sahid [PH] where I was at and he brought my—he brought me and my uncle each a sailor's suit. Yeah, sailor's suit in Port Sahid [PH], and that was the only time I remember seeing him. Otherwise I never saw him before. I don't remember seeing him.
- LEVINE: Now this is the uncle who I interviewed.

HANISIAN: That's the one before him.

LEVINE: And he—uh-huh. Oh, the one before him.

HANISIAN: This uncle is going with me. See, my uncle is about ten, twelve years old when I am. See. He was about ninety-six when he died. I'm eighty-six already.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so he was in Port Sahid [PH] with you.

HANISIAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. He was a pet, too, but he used to go to school.

LEVINE: You mean in the camp?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah, they had schools. Hospital schools and they trained nurses from our group, you know, young ladies. They became nurses and some of them are so well advanced that they send them to college to become whatever they chose. The people that chose them to become—you know, some became doctors. Some became priests, you know.

LEVINE: Was this sponsored by the Armenian—some Armenia society?

HANISIAN: Yeah, Armenian outfit. I think they called them Dashnag Dagon. [PH] That's what they used to call it. Those are the one that opposed them a lot. They always wanted their independent. They're the one that fought. Matter of fact, the uncle that I had that came over and give us this sailor suit, he was already volunteer to an Armenian army to fight the Turks, and that's where he died. From—he went—they were in South America just before the war started, three brothers came to Connecticut, and that's where he volunteered to go to that place, and that's where I saw my uncle.

LEVINE: I see. Now, do you recall if your uncles were in San Paolo? Do you remember if that's where in Brazil they were?

HANISIAN: I don't know the name of it, hon, because I didn't hardly know much.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, so you came back and you were six months back in Turkey.

HANISIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Before you left for America.

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Why was it that your mother left with you and your sister at that time?

HANISIAN: Because my father says we live in Connecticut and “I’m working.” That’s what he says and “I like to have the family together.” So, he send us the fare.

LEVINE: And do you remember letters that your father wrote from Connecticut? Did you ever read any of those before you left?

HANISIAN: No, no, no. I was too small.

LEVINE: Well, you were ten. Do you remember anything your mother told you about coming to America before you actually came?

HANISIAN: All I know is she says, “We won’t have to worry any more about death.” She said, “Nature will take care of that.” That’s the only thing she told me.

LEVINE: So did your grandmother come with you?

HANISIAN: No. She lived to be a hundred—I think it was a hundred and ten or a hundred and twelve and my grandfather lived—one of them lived a hundred thirteen. I don’t know which one it was.

LEVINE: Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandparents?

HANISIAN: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What was—

HANISIAN: I cried.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HANISIAN: I cried my—it’s hard for me to shed tears, but this time I did. I did.

LEVINE: Did your grandmother or grandfather tell you anything because they probably expected they weren’t going to see you again.

HANISIAN: Not that I remember, hon. I was probably excited getting out of there, you know.

LEVINE: So you and your mother and your sister were the three traveling together.

HANISIAN: My sister passed away in—while we were in Port Sahid [PH].

LEVINE: Oh, she passed away in Port Sahid [PH].

HANISIAN: Yeah, she passed away, and I—

LEVINE: So who—

HANISIAN: My mother and I.

LEVINE: Your mother and you. When you left, is there anything about the departure, about leaving the village—

HANISIAN: Oh, you hug, you cry, everything else, especially my grandmother, she didn't want me to go, you know. I was about that high.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So how did you leave the town? What kind of transportation did you take out of the village where you lived?

HANISIAN: They took us down to a seashore, Mediterranean and they boarded us in one of those sailboats, and they took us to a place, but we ended up in—where the heck did we end? Yeah, we had to get a boat to go to Greece because that's where we were supposed to board the ship for US. And we happened to get there a little earlier, and we had no way of knowing where to go or what to do. There was two couple. There was another couple. You might have—did you interview my uncle alone? There was another young fellow with him?

LEVINE: No, I just interviewed him.

HANISIAN: All right, but his mother was with us. She was coming to United States to get married. She was only a kid. So she was with us, too. So that means that my mother, I and her. Now, I don't remember anybody else. Now, when we ended up in—

LEVINE: Greece.

HANISIAN: In Greece, I think they call it Piat. [PH] Piat [PH], that was the town's name or village I don't know what it was. It was a seaport. That's where we got into a ship to come to United States.

LEVINE: And do you recall the name of that ship?

HANISIAN: No, I have no idea. No. I don't remember it. I did probably years ago, but I've forgotten it.

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- LEVINE: Okay. Okay, so was anyone able to speak Greek or to get along there?
- HANISIAN: No, they directed us to an Armenia church, while we were waiting. Would you believe, we had sleep outside on the church ground. Yeah, even the other young girl that was with us, you know. What did I say, young girl? She was good enough to get married, you know. But my mother and I, we were to sleep right near the church.
- LEVINE: Was this something that happened very often, that a young girl would go to America in order to get married?
- HANISIAN: Not necessarily because as a rule, it's already fixed up over there.
- LEVINE: It was determined by the parents, who would marry whom.
- HANISIAN: It was the parents, yeah. He sent the fare and they get married.
- LEVINE: I see. Okay, I think we'll stop here for a second while Peter turns the tape over and then we'll continue.
- HANISIAN: Yeah, go ahead.

END OF SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

- LEVINE: Okay, now we're resuming. So you boarded the ship.
- HANISIAN: Yeah.
- LEVINE: And what do you recall about that ship and about the passage to this country?
- HANISIAN: Well, to begin with, it wasn't first class, that's for sure. It was the third class and I think they kept us apart, but I was young enough to be able to float around from one end to the other. You know, run around, and I used to—I got to know somebody over there. I used to tickle his feet when he's lying down. He's sick as the devil, you know, seasick. I used to [unclear] [Laughing] That was a good one.
- LEVINE: Was there anything about the voyage that you particularly noticed?
- HANISIAN: No, no. It was a long voyage, though. It was up and down, up and down. Just like a riding a horse. You know, if you don't know how to

ride a horse, you better believe it, you feel it. But one thing it was, I never got sick, see. I never got sick, but it took a long time to get there and when we got there, we ended up over here.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor? Do you remember?

HANISIAN: No, I don't, but I do remember when they processed us. My mother didn't know how to write, read or write, see, so they got an interpreter, an Armenia. Like I say, we speak different dialects, but her father was a teacher, so she knew something about it. At any rate, so they got a—they brought over or they sent us to a place and they had a row of desks like this and they were saying "Armenian," and they'd point over there. So you went over there. So he was the one. He talked to us in Armenian, see. Even I knew how to speak it a little bit because I went to school for four years over there. We were in Port Sahid [PH] for four years. Uncle was a Boy Scout. He was in high school. Uncle was a sharpee. He was a bright boy. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. So when your mother was tested, as far as reading and writing, what happened?

HANISIAN: They didn't bother her.

LEVINE: No?

HANISIAN: They didn't say anything. All they did was after, they gave her a physical, you know. You went through like a conveyor system, you know. You go from one thing to another. Guy does something else. That's the way everybody does. They looked at eye, oh, eye and they feel around there you know, and then they want to see your tongue and we went through that. So I followed. I was in front of her, so we just came. Finally, we ended up with an Armenian fellow, see.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and then were you—do you remember you were told you were all right or you could go?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And was somebody meeting you?

HANISIAN: No, they slapped a tag on me and then I don't remember how I got there, my mother and I. They put tags on us, and first thing I knew, I was in New Britain. I don't know how I got there.

LEVINE: You must have taken a train, I expect. Your father was in New Britain?

HANISIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the reunion? Well, you didn't really remember your father.

HANISIAN: I didn't even know him. I didn't even know him. I never had any pictures of him. I didn't have any pictures or anything.

LEVINE: What was it like for you, a little ten year old boy seeing your father for the first time?

HANISIAN: Well, now I got a father. Before I didn't have a father. I used to have a grandfather and I was their pet. Now I've got to behave, he's my father. I couldn't figure out what to do, when you're ten years old.

LEVINE: Well, what was your mother—can you remember how your mother responded when she was reunited?

HANISIAN: Oh, yeah, they hugged each other, you know. Oh, yeah. We got down, just like this, you know, and they hugged each other. Yeah, that was a good time. Good days.

LEVINE: Do you remember some things that you saw for the first time in the early days?

HANISIAN: Well, I saw—for the first time I saw the railroad station, which I had never seen, and I had never seen sidewalk. I saw a lot of sand, dirt, sand. Especially sand, phew, but the sidewalks. Top covered, nice breeze, you know. Climate good. Those were the things that hit me right away.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, did you start school soon after you arrived?

HANISIAN: I think it was about five or six months.

LEVINE: So you probably waited until the next—

HANISIAN: When they had a new batch going in.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HANISIAN: Yeah. Excuse me. They sent us to a school where all the foreigners that came that couldn't speak English. That's where I had to go first.

LEVINE: Oh, so was it a school of children?

HANISIAN: Yeah, children school.

LEVINE: Who had just arrived.

HANISIAN: Yeah, just arrived.

LEVINE: Wow. Could you describe that school in detail, what it was like?

HANISIAN: Well, it was in the center of the town. That is in New Britain. Of course, New Britain was known as the hardware city of the world years ago. Not now.

LEVINE: It was known as? I'm sorry?

HANISIAN: Hardware city of the world.

LEVINE: Hardware?

HANISIAN: Yeah, and the school was in the center of the town. Across the street, oh, about a block up, there was a Catholic church over there, but they had teachers in there were patient with the children. They had to teach them how to speak and pronounce the words correctly. So I had to attend that school for a while. After I got to know how to get around, knew how to speak a little bit, I was on my own. So I had to go to the regular school, see. I got as far as the tenth grade. Depression came. I had to help my parents, see.

LEVINE: Did your mother learn—and mother and father, did they learn English?

HANISIAN: Oh, yeah, she knew. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. She knew how to write her name. She could speak.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Was there a time when you were teaching her? I mean after you learned English, probably more quickly as a child in school.

HANISIAN: You see, first thing I think I did was to teach her how to write her first name. That was the first thing, and then she started going to night school, see. It couldn't come out, you know. Penmanship wasn't—but nevertheless, she—and they didn't call her Marita. They called her Mary then, see. So she changed. Like when I entered that school I was telling you about, teaching [unclear] I wrote down Andrew. Presumably, that's supposed to be the first born. That's why they give you that name, see. But my uncle gave me my name, what you see in

there because of a hero he had. He was a young boy. He died anyways. My other uncle. My mother's side.

LEVINE: That's Ans-tronig.

HANISIAN: Ahtronak. [PH]

LEVINE: Ahtronak.

HANISIAN: Yeah, he was a young fellow. Eighteen years old and he had gone through three different colleges, different languages. Died of tuberculosis. Yeah, that was my mother's brother.

LEVINE: What kinds of things did your mother and father hold onto? What kinds of traditions or customs? Armenian ways did they hold to, once they were in this country?

HANISIAN: Mostly they ate Armenian stuff. Meals, you know. Whatever they ate in the old country, they had it here.

LEVINE: Like what?

HANISIAN: Like pilaf. Rice pilaf. Bulouse [PH] pilaf. Bulouse [PH] is Turkish, that wheat germ, see. And salads. They liked a lot of salads. Turkeys, chicken, once in a while beef. They used to get these big round steaks. In those days, you go to the butcher shop, you know, they cut you a chunk. The whole thing [unclear] no sanitation or anything like that, you know. Out in the open, but never last very long, anyways, you know.

LEVINE: Was there a large Armenian community in New Britain at that time?

HANISIAN: No, the only—the only one that I remember of was our kind. Right the villages where we come from, there was one, and I happened to marry their daughter. [Laughs] Yeah, their oldest daughter I married.

LEVINE: So did the Armenians mix with the other immigrant families that were living in New Britain?

HANISIAN: Yeah, it all depend who your neighbor were. If it was an Italian fellow, you dealt with him, you know. You had to go along with him, what he says. Once in a while, if you tell him to do something in your own way, you know, he probably go along, but nine out of ten they wouldn't. They had their own, you know, they want to sit down and eat, they have wine. Our people didn't have wine. Our people, we sat down, we either had a cup of coffee or a glass of milk, you know.

LEVINE: And what about the other groups? Like maybe were there—what other ethnic groups were there that you were living amongst in New Britain?

HANISIAN: Well, to begin with, my father lived in a six-family house because it was closer to the factory where he was working at.

LEVINE: What was he doing in the factory?

HANISIAN: He was a tool—dye maker, see. Originally, when he was young over there, he was a weaver. They used to raise silk, silkworm cocoon and they would make things. Matter of fact, he had gave my mother a scarf that he had raised the silkworm, got the cocoons, got the silk and weaved it. I still have that over here, see.

LEVINE: Wow. So he then had to give up his weaving trade and he became a dye maker.

HANISIAN: Tool maker. Tool maker, more. I became a dye maker, not him.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

HANISIAN: See, I had to get out of school fast. See, I got as far as the tenth grade, and by that time we had—we had my brother Johnny. We had my brother Zoe, my sister Arp [PH], okay.

LEVINE: I see. So when you left school in tenth grade, it was the Depression time.

HANISIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Tell me how the Depression affected you and your family.

HANISIAN: Well, it was easy for me to get a job because I had—I used to go to Sunday School. I was a—not Episcopalian. I'm a [unclear], but in those days I was a Protestant, see, because that was the only church. I wasn't Catholic, but I was a Protestant and I used to go to Sunday School and my parents used to go to church, Sunday church. They had one room, Armenians did, and that's where I went. We didn't have any Armenian churches in New Britain. Now we have two, see, but in our time there was none around. So that's the place where I went to church. Oh, yeah, I got a job, see. He was a honey. I used to love to listen to him. You know, right after Sunday School, he was a minister from New Hampshire or Vermont, around there. His name was Dr. Green, and after Sunday School classes, I would wait for my mother and father in the church, but I would be way out in the back, so I'd be

the first one. We had no way of—we didn't have a car or anything. We had to walk, you know. So I used to love to listen to that. Oh, I loved him. Loved that guy.

LEVINE: What was it about him that you were so taken with?

HANISIAN: He had a way of—he can make you understand even how stupid you are, how dumb you are, he can make you understand what he's talking about. He doesn't use big words. He uses plain words. He uses action. He uses his hands, see. You know, something that really I was—he always got me. From Sunday school I would go over there.

LEVINE: Would you say he was like a hero to you?

HANISIAN: Oh, he was more than a hero. I had two—when my—may God rest her soul. When my mom passed away, she was only fifty-two, see, and I got hold of Dr. Green and the Armenian one. We had two bury her.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Did you have other heroes in your lifetime besides Dr. Green? Is there anyone else that you either knew and looked up to—

HANISIAN: There was one, but I—honey, there was one there I wish I could remember her name. That's the one that started teaching me how to speak English.

LEVINE: Oh, in the first school that you went to.

HANISIAN: Yeah, that was the one that I—she was a beautiful woman. When I say beautiful, she was tall, beautiful, dressed nice, neatly and I don't know to this day. I could, as a rule, tell you just by looking at you or darn close to it, as to what nationality you are, see, but this one here, to me it was more like an Englishman, the woman was. She was tall and shapely, you know.

LEVINE: And how did she treat you—how did she teach you English, can you remember how she went about it?

HANISIAN: Well, I had to start first of all with ABC's. Secondly, I had to go out there and she used to throw in a little arithmetic, too. See, get out the board and she used to read. She let us read, and then she used to get old newspaper. I don't know where she got it from. She used to say, "Now read this." Now I've got to go out there and read it, you know. I didn't stay there too long, anyways. I went to school from there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, getting back to Depression time when you left school in tenth grade and went to work, you got a job because—

HANISIAN: I didn't get a job. First of all, I sold newspapers, morning paper and evening paper and then go to school at the same time, see. And then—

LEVINE: Did you have a job when you quit school?

HANISIAN: Yeah, I had a summer job. A fellow from the church fixed me up and got me—I used to bring boxes to the girls while they were packing.

LEVINE: In the factory.

HANISIAN: That was only—yeah, in the factory. That was Landersfair [PH] and Clark in New Britain, see.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and then what happened after that? You had the summer job and then what did you do when the fall came around?

HANISIAN: Well, falls come around, then I decided to become a beautician. Had to do something. So that didn't bring any dough down. Couldn't get much. In those days they used to finger wave, you know. No permanent.

LEVINE: So you went to school or you apprenticed? How did you learn to become a beautician?

HANISIAN: I went to school for two weeks. [Laughs] Two whole weeks. I said, "Heck, I could do this," you know. So the rest came in easy for a while, but what gets me is I had a job assembling I think it was washing machines. Oh, no, no, no. It was stoves. Electric stoves. That's what the heck it was. Electric stoves. Landersfair [PH] and Clark used to make it. Now, I quit school. I have to have a steady job, so this Dr. Green, he gave me a slip ticket to the employment office, so they sent me down there. First week there were—you remember the automatic toasters popping up? Well, the first week I was testing that automatic toaster. They would send me to the store and buy a loaf of bread. You know, in those days it was Bond Bread, slices. So I would come over there and I would test it, see, and see how long it took to pop up. I had one of those stop watches, you know, to see if it's uniform. I did that for a while, and then the engineer says to me, "How about coming down so and so place?" you know. I said, "I don't know." I says, "I'm doing all right here, you know." He says, "No," he says, "I'll have you work down there," you know. I said, "Ah, I'll come down." So I went over there and he says—he introduced me to the—the engineer did.

He introduced to me the supervisor, superintendent. That's the place where they made the stoves and the washing machines. They assembled them. So I was putting doors on the—yeah, the stoves. I got to a point where that's all I was doing and in those days I got a straight, straight—I think it was thirty-five cents. Yeah, thirty-five cents an hour and there was some fellows working in there and they were on piece work, you know. They had to do so much and I would look over there. They had given me a number to put on. I would look over there and see my tag are missing.

LEVINE: Oh, my—

HANISIAN: The other guy's taking it, you know. [Laughs] I said, "All right." Finally, I says—I got hold of the foreman and I asked him, I says, "What am I supposed to do, just this here?" "Well," he says, "we'll have to see." So the engineer come down and he says, "Andy, how you doing?" I said, "I don't know yet," I says, "because I don't know what I'm doing yet," you know. So he says, "Stay here, you'll climb up gradually," you know. So I says, "This ain't for me," so I went to trade school.

LEVINE: That was the tool maker? Dye maker.

HANISIAN: Dye and tool maker. First I wanted to know how to run it. I went there for a while. They put me on a lathe. I said, "I don't want that," because I knew a neighbor of mine, he worked and he used to bring in a lot of dough. When I say a lot of dough, fifty-five cents an hour. That's a lot of dough. From thirty-five to fifty-five is a lot of dough. So he says, "What you ought to do," he says, "go on automatic machine operate." I said, "All right, I'll go to trade school, operate." So I had to buy a smock. The oil, you stink the dickens. You go home, you got to change, and I said, "This ain't for me." Finally, I made up my mind I was going to be a dye and tool maker. I stuck that out. I attended something. Then I got a job in the job shop. By that time I had already gotten married.

LEVINE: How did you meet your wife?

HANISIAN: My wife was—I started telling you about this. They used to live in New Britain when we lived in New Britain and parents were parents. You know, they came from the same village and when you haven't got anybody around to visit night time, you know, to kill some time, you go and visit the neighbor and they come over to you. Well, I had gone one time with them and I had seen two of them. They had two daughters there. They didn't have anybody else. The father had decided he wanted to go old country and buy a field to raise wheat,

back the old country. So what happened was, my mother-in-law was a beautiful lady. She had her leg amputated because set into her—I don't know what the hell you call it now. They had to amputate her leg, so she passed away. And they send the daughter to her uncle's house in New Britain and her uncle was related—yeah, her uncle's wife was related to my mother, see. So the girl was over there. By that time I was going with somebody else, see, and they don't want me there. That's the one, you know.

LEVINE: Who was saying "that's the one"?

HANISIAN: My mother.

LEVINE: Your mother.

HANISIAN: Yeah, my mother. So finally they—she didn't like me because she didn't know a damn thing. She used to say this. If this is white, she would say "That's black," and you had to go along with her. See, that's why, and I always opposed her, see. And I used to tell my mom, "Don't let her," you know, "be at me." She resented it. Uncle was all right, you know. Give her a hand, you know. Finally, I had to write a letter to her father. I wrote her father, and he says, "Go to it."

LEVINE: Were you happy about it?

HANISIAN: Well, about that time I was a beautician. [Laughs] I was a beautician, cutting hair, waving hair. I was just beginning to curl iron then, too.

LEVINE: So really it was your mother who decided that would be the wife for you?

HANISIAN: Yeah. Well, I was already going with one girl, you know, but different nationality.

LEVINE: I see.

HANISIAN: She was a beautiful girl, too.

LEVINE: So you—

HANISIAN: So what happened was the aunt sent her over to New York to her other sister's house to keep her away from me. She's afraid I'm supposed to elope with her. So she related to me through the other one, right. So I was in New Jersey that time, so I'd go across the—ride the train. Go to New York and I would stay overnight. In the meantime, she was going to school because they had taken her away from school

when they had moved over there, back to old country. Oh, God, that was—

LEVINE: Well, did you have children?

HANISIAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

HANISIAN: I had—I have one is Flo and the other one is Maryanne.

LEVINE: Okay. We just have a few minutes left on the tape, so I'd like to ask you, what do you feel very satisfied about that you've done in your life?

HANISIAN: My lifetime, I did all right without anybody's help.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and how do you feel about coming to this country as a ten year old and immigrating here and living your life out in this country?

HANISIAN: Ah, honey, in the old country they say, "A woman can't ride a horse. The only time a woman rides a horse is when he gets married," and when the old ladies, after a woman got married, one of the old ladies said to her, he says, "How did you ride? How did you like the ride?" and she says, "If I ride that thing once more," she says, "I know how to ride it good." Know what I mean now? I did good, hon.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HANISIAN: Thanks Lord, I never went on WPA or any of those things. I raised two kid, educated, college, Master's, one is a Doctorate. They married. One's married to a pharmaceutical fellow. He's a millionaire. The other one's a dentist. He's well off. I've got six grandchildren, three boys and three girls between them, okay, and the oldest grandson, the father used to be the president, vice president of Wilkum [PH] Pharmaceutical outfit. He draws in more now than his father did, grandson, plus bonuses.

LEVINE: And how about you at this time of your life, now that you have retired and your children are grown? How is this phase of your life?

HANISIAN: Well, for a while I lived two homes. I had a home over in Florida and another one in Connecticut, and I'm all alone. So—

LEVINE: Are you enjoying your old age?

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HANISIAN: Oh, yeah. I do all right. I do all right. I'm a Shriner, Mason, 32nd Degree Mason. I could go picnics. I could Shrining. I could do anything I want.

LEVINE: How did it feel to you to come back here to Ellis Island at this late time?

HANISIAN: Well, I was just trying to describe it to my brother, you know, and I couldn't describe it to him because I said, "This isn't like it." When he seen the pictures, I says, "See these here? That's the way it was," you know. Yeah. Yeah.

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

HANISIAN: Well, I'm proud to be a United States citizen and I'm proud that my kids were all born in here and their children are all doing good. This is a country you can't—you can't do without. This is out. This is all the wealth in the world, your freedom. This is it.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you so much for a most interesting interview, Mr. Hanisian. We've been here at Ellis Island on August 9th, 1996, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off. Thank you very, very much.

HANISIAN: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW