

EI-081

ANNA SPANOS SOFRANOS

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 3/1994

GREECE, 1920

PORT: ATHENS

AGE 20

RESIDENCES: GREECE: AGOVOS US: LOWELL,

MA

Oral Historian's Note: There is a constant mechanical noise throughout the recording of this interview. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 3/4/1994.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Boca Raton, Florida at the home of Anna Sofranos, who came through Ellis Island from Greece in 1920, and she was twenty years old at the time. Today is August 28, 1991, and I'm very happy to be here. Thank you very much.

SOFRANOS: I'm very happy to feel. I feel like a high stand.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, you'll get used to it.

SOFRANOS: I don't want to talk too much.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

SOFRANOS: We said the person is feeling low, the Lord makes them to go high. And the people that feel high, the Lord makes them to feel low. (she laughs) But in Greek sounds so beautiful.

LEVINE: Can you say it in Greek?

SOFRANOS: Yep. (Greek) Do you want me to repeat it?

LEVINE: No, that's fine. Go ahead.

SOFRANOS: (Greek) Who likes to go high can't reach the way they want to go so high because the Lord bring them down. And the people that medium, you know, not look for high stuff, the Lord puts them high. But it sounds good in Greek.

LEVINE: Yes, yes it does. (Mrs. Sofranos laughs) Well, that's a nice beginning. Let's start with your beginning. Tell me when you were born, your birth date.

SOFRANOS: I born in Greece. How do you say before? I'm ninety-one.

LEVINE: You're ninety-one. So you were born in . . .

SOFRANOS: 1899.

LEVINE: In 1899, and what day?

SOFRANOS: Oh, I can't remember the day.

LEVINE: I mean, what date? Do you remember the date?

SOFRANOS: I don't remember the date.

LEVINE: It was November?

SOFRANOS: November 14th.

LEVINE: November 14th.

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, fine. And what was the name of the town that you were born in?

SOFRANOS: Acovos.

LEVINE: Could you spell that, Anna?

SOFRANOS: Let me have the pen. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So Acovos.

SOFRANOS: Acovos.

LEVINE: Acovos. Could you describe Acovos to me?

SOFRANOS: To describe Aquabus is a mountain, and the village is right in the mountain. It's about five feet higher from the (?).

LEVINE: Five feet higher from the . . .

SOFRANOS: Five hundred feet higher from the (?).

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

SOFRANOS: So then we see another mountain at the other end, the snow never melts. And we have all mountains all over. And we sit on the porch, the patio, like, and we see all the mountains. In the night we see a light, somebody drives on the narrow roads to go to the cities. I said, "Oh, somebody goes to the city," especially in the night, with the lights, the little, you know, they hang like that.

LEVINE: Kerosene?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, how many people lived in your village?

SOFRANOS: The village, at that time, I bet it was about four hundred families, that's all.

LEVINE: And what did people do for work mostly?

SOFRANOS: They have fields, produce lentils, wheat, corn, grapes, pears, all kind of fruits.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

SOFRANOS: My father's name George.

LEVINE: And what did he do for work?

SOFRANOS: He was making a saddles for the mules and the donkeys.

LEVINE: Sandals?

SOFRANOS: Yeah. He make it, you know, the whole thing, with the woods. And put it on the center of the mules. That's his business.

LEVINE: I see. And what was your mother's name?

SOFRANOS: My mother's name was Georgia. Georgie, Georgia.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. And do you remember your mother's maiden

name, her name before she was married to your father?

SOFRANOS: Jamoures. Jamoures. (break in tape)

LEVINE: Will you say it again then, the name of, your mother's maiden name?

SOFRANOS: Georgia.

LEVINE: And her name before she was married?

SOFRANOS: Jamoures.

LEVINE: Jamoures. Okay. And then were you an only child, or did you have brothers and sisters?

SOFRANOS: We was six children. Three brothers and three sisters.

LEVINE: Could you name them from the oldest down?

SOFRANOS: The oldest, John. No, Helen, John, Lapros, Anna, Peter and Katherine. My gosh!

LEVINE: So, now, when you were in, in Acovos?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Acovos, what do you remember about the house you lived

in? Do you remember that?

SOFRANOS: I remember everything.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Well, tell me what the house was like?

SOFRANOS: The house was a little house, and they have a fireplace and two rooms on the side. And then one large room like this, we all sleeping here in a row, six children here in a row. And at night we used to fight, and my father he used to come up. (she makes slapping noise) In 1972 I plead my husband to take me to see a place in that village, and I went there and I said to my sister's grandson, "Did you know, honey, I was sleeping here for twenty years?" "Did you hear, Grandma? Aunt Anna was sleeping here for twenty years!" (they laugh)

LEVINE: So the family still has the house.

SOFRANOS: Still the same house. You know, they repair a little bit around, but the same. Beautiful. I was so happy, too. Went back to see my house. My sister, she still live in there. She got married and she moved in with my father and mother, and she had six children. The

same children my mother have, she have. So that's all.

LEVINE: And now she still lives there.

SOFRANOS: She still lives there. And I went down there and I couldn't find anything to talk with her. Nothing in common. You know, she was talking different things and I, I wasn't interested because I don't know she was talking about it. And then if I wanted to talk about here, she didn't understand anything also. I said, "What is this?" Of course, everything here is away from your sister. I left a little baby and I find an old lady. Nothing in common. The only thing, we used to correspond each other. "How are you?" This, that's all. So that's all.

LEVINE: Well, what do you remember about your childhood? Do you have any particular events that when you think about your childhood in Greece these are the things you remember?

SOFRANOS: I remember the time we went to school, and I saw my teacher, she was knitting something with needles. And I was interested in arts and crafts, but I didn't have

the materials. So the time I saw my teacher do that and I went home and I pleaded my mother to give me a few pennies to go and buy the materials. So I wanted to learn how to do it. So my mother said, "My dear child, I don't have no money." "Oh, I want it, I want it." Finally my father went to the city and he bought me the needles and the materials and my teacher taught me how to start it. But after I left, and forget it. But I always like to do things with my hands because I like to do things and I have no materials around. So the time my father wants to go to the city I said, "Daddy, take me along. I want to come with you." "No, no, no. You're going to go. I'm going to sleep, you know, outside in the garage."

Put their mills there and they sleep there overnight and come back home. So I said, "Please, I'm going to sleep with you. Any place you're going to sleep I'm going to sleep with you. I want to go to the city to see if they have materials." The time I saw the store was a little bit better from the village I went home, I said, "I'm not going to stay here. Mother, I'm not going to stay here." "What do you want?" "I'm want to go somewhere. I'm going to go to the city." "We

don't have no money, my dear child. If you go there to stay with somebody you have to pay money. We don't have no money." Ahh. And then my brother came here, and then I started to plead my mother I wanted to go to America. "No, no, no. You don't go to America. The girls go there and get sick and they die." I said, "Not me!" (they laugh) "I'm different!"

LEVINE: How old were you when you first got the idea that you wanted to go to a city and that you wanted to . . .

SOFRANOS: Fourteen years old, yeah. So that's it.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember your friends and the games that you played?

SOFRANOS: I remember by the time I come back I didn't find anybody my age. You know, they were all gone. So on that same place they used to ask me, "Do you remember me?" I said, "I'm sorry, I don't remember you." But I said, "Who was your father?" So he said, "That kind of father I have." "Oh," I said, "I remember your father." But he was dead. So I know his father because the time I left, I left the kids two years old and I go back after seventy years. (she laughs)

Anyhow, honey . . .

LEVINE: Now, you were twenty when you left, right?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: So can you remember, in your childhood can you remember what games you played with your friends? Did you play games?

SOFRANOS: We used to play games. We used to go to school and the teacher used to take us in the fields and play different things.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything, like can you remember little rhymes you said, or any kind of . . .

SOFRANOS: Oh, (she sings in Greek) Yes. (she laughs) That means "the rabbit was sleeping."

LEVINE: The rabbit is sleeping.

SOFRANOS: Yes. And then the time we were going with the hands like that, the butterflies. (Greek) You know, the butterflies are flying. We used to go by hands like that. (she gestures) And then my mother was coming around and see us about twenty, thirty little ones

around with their little hands up and she thought it was the pleasant thing in her life to see that. "My dear child, I'm not going to forget those little hands." (she laughs)

LEVINE: Ahh. Tell me about your mother. What was your mother like?

SOFRANOS: My mother was very intelligent. She never went to school, but she was very intelligent and in philosophy. She used to help people, and advise them. So they all come, now they call come to me because I took after my mother. Everybody who has a little pain comes to Anna. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, was your mother considered like the wise woman of the village?

SOFRANOS: She was a kind woman.

LEVINE: A kind woman.

SOFRANOS: A kind woman, very kind.

LEVINE: Let's see, and were you closest to some particular member of your family? Would you say that you were

very close with either a brother or sister or your mother or father?

SOFRANOS: I'm only close with one of my brothers here. I'm very close with him. I have another brother here, but that is oldest, but I can't, you know, I respect like a father, so I can't. But with my youngest brother we were like twins, you know. We joking around, we laugh, we enjoy life.

LEVINE: And what is his name?

SOFRANOS: Peter.

LEVINE: And that's who you named your son after?

SOFRANOS: Yeah. No, no. I named my son after my husband's father. That's the traditional. So that's it. But one, I think, the time I went to the city after the war come around. 1914 was some kind of war. And then they didn't have nothing to eat. So my father came in the city and picked me up, and he took me to the village. And from then on I started to sew, because I was learning dressmaker. I started to sew for the women in the village. And the women in the village, I

used to finish their, what I was making for them, but they have no money to pay me. So then I was worried so much my lip was cracked here.

LEVINE: Why were your lips cut?

SOFRANOS: Cracked. Oh, cracked. I'm never come here. And I said to my mother, "Oh, she's just from worrying. She's worrying a lot. She wants to go to America." So then after my brother left nobody could keep me there. And then my second brother left, my little one brother.

LEVINE: Peter?

SOFRANOS: Peter. So I said, "Mother, one and one is two." "No, I'm not going to send her there. See if she's going to, no mother, no sister. Where's she going to go to America to find out? She's going to die." I used to listen. My mother was talking to my father. So I said, "Oh, no. You don't understand. I'm not going to die if I go to America. I go to America to buy materials." (they laugh) And I want to wear to sleep with a muslin. Because we used to wear the weave materials, you know, the village (?). So I

wanted muslin, you know, with a little lace.

(she laughs)

LEVINE: So that's what you wanted, and that's what you had in mind.

SOFRANOS: And I came in Lowell, Massachusetts, that's where I started to, ohh!

LEVINE: So let's go . . .

SOFRANOS: And I still make, look at what I make now for the festival.

LEVINE: Oh, very nice! They're little dolls made out of wool.

SOFRANOS: They're little evzons. Those evzons, they watch the embassy in Athens. They stay outside with a gun and with a uniform. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Like a guard, uh-huh.

SOFRANOS: So that's the traditional. I saw one in Ellis Island in one room. The society of, some kind of society donated the room, and he put the big evzons. I saw them there. I said to my son, "Oh, my goodness, the evzons. You see?" (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, these evzons will be for a Greek festival?

SOFRANOS: I'm going to sell them. So the people buy them. You know, it's traditional.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Did you have an extended family in Greece? In other words, was your Grandma, your grandparents in the same village?

SOFRANOS: Yeah. It was in the same village. There was behind. They were there.

LEVINE: But they, when you were growing up they were there, and you had a lot of contact with your grandparents.

LEVINE: My grandmother. My mother's mother, she has seven daughters and two sons. (she coughs) And the two sons died. So she started to live with one daughter-in-law. And after she has a grandson. (she coughs) And at the time the war declare they took all the boys. The first day he went in the front he got killed. So they bring the answer back, and my grandmother was on the ground in the garden. She was doing garden work. And somebody went there and they told her the news. And she raised her hands and she

said, "Oh, Lord, I bury my sons. I didn't want to live and bury my grandchildren." And she dropped dead. And she was a good grandma. Oh, I used to love her.

LEVINE: What was she like?

SOFRANOS: Gray hair, jolly like me, a little bit.

LEVINE: Jolly, uh-huh.

SOFRANOS: And good for the town. Everybody used to love to see her coming.

LEVINE: So you became like your mother's mother and like your mother in a way. You're like both of them.

LEVINE: And then my mom, my house was here and my grandmother's was a little further up. And close to my grandmother's house was the cemetery, and my mother used to cook something and she said, "Come on, Anna. You have to take that to your grandma." I said, "Mother, I don't want to go there. It's too dark." "No, before it gets too dark you must go." And I used to, afraid to walk, and I know the cemetery was . . ."
(she laughs)

LEVINE: You were afraid of the cemetery.

SOFRANOS: So I arrived at my grandmother, I said, "I have to leave. I'm afraid." She said, "My dear child, don't be afraid. You know what you're going to do." I said, "What, Grandma? I'm shaking." "Say the," how do you call it, the pray we say? "Our Father."

LEVINE: Our Father? Uh-huh.

SOFRANOS: And I said, "I say it, but I'm finished before I'm here. She said, "Start again." (they laugh) That I remember, which is nice.

LEVINE: Very nice, very nice. Now, describe your father. What kind of a man was your father?

SOFRANOS: My father was very, uh, distinguished old man with a little moustache. And he used to sing beautiful songs, and any time they had a wedding party he was invited special. So he was sitting in the special in the head table to sing the songs. That's all.

LEVINE: Was he a strict father?

SOFRANOS: You know, he was strict with his eyes. The minute we

have some habit, you know, to do something, he would say, "Anna." I was looking at him. So he didn't move his eyes. Then I got hypnotized. I stopped.

(she laughs)

LEVINE: He didn't have to say anything.

SOFRANOS: No. Stop it. And one time he said, you know, the time you have a dinner the father is supposed to cut the bread, slice the bread. My mother used to give him that loaf of bread, and he's supposed to slice it, put it on the table. So some time we did something wrong, and he said to us, "Oh, I'm worrying if I die you're going to die starving." I said, "Not me. I'm going to eat. I'm not going to die." (they laugh)
I didn't die. We never answered the father. We're not allowed. Oh no, start. Anyhow, nice family.

LEVINE: Very nice.

SOFRANOS: Nice family, nice. We have a nice life.

LEVINE: Is there anything else, before we talk about coming to America, is there anything else about your childhood in Greece that you recall, that you remember when you

think about that time?

SOFRANOS: I don't know what.

LEVINE: What about school?

SOFRANOS: The only thing I remember, the time I was seven years old, I went to school. And what else I remember? And after school I used to go home, take my little apron off and put the house clothes, you know, the working clothes, to not dirty it, so I have to wear them the next day. So then I went home and I do all the housework, I take care of everything, I have everything ready for my mother, my older sister, to come from the fields. They were so tired, and I have everything done, even cooking. So one morning my mother's sisters came to visit, and they knock the door, they find me. My mother, she went already out to bring some wood from the field. And I have all the house clean up and everything, straighten up. And my mother came and she said, "I can't understand when you get up? You clean up your house and you went to work." She said, "I didn't clean the house. That little girl." "Don't say that! She cleaned the

house?"

LEVINE: How old were you?

SOFRANOS: Nine years old. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So that was your job, to clean the house.

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother work?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, she was working in the fields.

LEVINE: In the fields.

SOFRANOS: And at the time I left my mother came along and she said, "Oh, my dear, we're going to starve. We're going to starve. Who's going to cook?" Because I was cooking. I didn't like the field work. So any time I used to go with them, my mother said, "Anna, it's time to go now, you know, to prepare things." So my older sister, she goes, "Yeah, she wants to go because she didn't want to work any more." I said, "No, my mother said this so I can work." (she laughs)

LEVINE: You had the good job, preparing the meal.

SOFRANOS: And I used to like to go on the mules. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, to ride them, just to ride them, not to go
someplace.

SOFRANOS: And then all the girls, they used to say, "Anna, the
girls are not supposed to go on the mules, you know,
like a man." I said, "Who am I!?" (she laughs)
And I used to go on the mules. I enjoyed life. Even
now I enjoy life.

LEVINE: And you did then, too.

SOFRANOS: I enjoyed life. Because I tried to teach Anna. Anna,
I said, "You talk all the time suffering, suffering.
You linger, you linger. Anything you say, oh!"

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That's your neighbor, Anna.

SOFRANOS: So that's it, honey. I had a good life with my
husband.

LEVINE: Let's just say, before we finish with the childhood in
Greece, did you have a religious childhood? Was your
family religious?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, very religious.

LEVINE: Now, what would you do? Observe the holidays?

SOFRANOS: The holidays, yeah. Celebrate, every name day. We used to have a festival, up to the mountains, a little church on the mountains. And the day was coming to celebrate the day. All the mules was coming up with a beautiful, (she gestures) a beautiful something like that on the mule. And the ladies was all dressed up, different colors. Just like Gone With The Wind. We used to go up to the church, and we have roast beef, and we used to sell different things. And my mother was very good to sell things, sweets, you know.

LEVINE: I see. Things that she made, or, were they things that she had made?

SOFRANOS: No, no. Those things we sold at that time, we used to make breads and stuff like that. But most things we bought it in the city. Because the young kids, they were so thrilled to see something different, not every day cooking from Mother and Grandmother. So they were coming for the sweets.

LEVINE: I see. So you would go to the city with your mother to buy these things? How would she get them?

SOFRANOS: No. One of the men, they used to go with the mules and bring it up, yeah. It was nice. Life in village beautiful. Fresh air, fresh water, clean everything. But poor. No progress. You don't find materials to do things. Only thing produced wheat, tomatoes, wheat, stuff like that. Wine, grapes. You know, from the grapes we used to make the wine.

LEVINE: Well, now, how was it decided, apparently your father came to the United States first.

SOFRANOS: My father came here 19, 1905. And he came back 1909.

LEVINE: Now, what was his experience when he came to the United States?

SOFRANOS: He came here and he was working in Utah. Utah?

LEVINE: Utah.

SOFRANOS: By the railroad.

LEVINE: The railroad in Utah, uh-huh.

SOFRANOS: And then my mother was writing to him, "Try to bring one of the boys with you." And he answered back, "Once I leave, none of my children are going to stay in the United States." Because there was nothing. They were working on the railroad, cold. It was fifty cents a week. So one time he sent us, I think, twenty-five dollars. And my mother was so thrilled to see the twenty-five dollars, you know, the check. And he said to us, "Oh, my goodness, I'm going to the city now, I'm going to bring some stuff." She came back with a little stuff. I said, "Mother, why did you get that? Why don't you bring us that?" She said, "Honey, the money wasn't enough." I said, "You said, 'Your father sent a check.'" "All right. The check was enough for this stuff." I said, "That father of ours. Why he didn't put more papers in the thing?" (they laugh) Because I didn't know he paid the twenty-five dollars to make a check. I said, "Just a brown piece of paper." (she laughs heartily) And then the time he came back, also see the father come back, we're going to, he's going to go in the city, he's going to bring some meat, he's going to bring some sweets. You know. And the day he came and my

mother had everything prepared she asked him what he wants to eat for dinner the next day, and he said, "Greens."

LEVINE: Greens?

SOFRANOS: He says, "Greens!!" And we said, "Why?"
(she laughs) Greens? (they laugh) Oh, it's a thrill.

LEVINE: Well, now, how did you get along when your father was away those years? How did the family get along? How did your mother . . .

SOFRANOS: Well, my oldest brother was older. He went to the city and he got a job. He still got work. We didn't pay no rent. We had plenty to eat inside, you know, how do you call it, preserve.

LEVINE: I see. And your mother worked in the fields, too?

SOFRANOS: Oh, yeah. All the time. She worked like a man. She used to go get the spray to go and spray the fields, the grape vines for. (she makes a spraying noise)
(she laughs)

LEVINE: So then your father came back in 1909?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then when did your first brother go, your brother first go?

SOFRANOS: I think he came in '16, my first brother.

LEVINE: And then . . .

SOFRANOS: And then '18 the other, and in '20 I came.

LEVINE: And how did you get to go? What, how was it decided that you would be able to go?

SOFRANOS: I wanted to come. I wanted to go away from the village.

LEVINE: And did your brother send money for you . . .

SOFRANOS: No, my father, my father. My father gives me the money. Twenty-five dollars.

LEVINE: Twenty-five, wow.

SOFRANOS: You have to show on the Ellis Island, I have to show twenty-five dollars. And then (she laughs), they

was handing little packages outside to give them to the people. I said, "No, I'm not going to spend my dollar." (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, how about the passage? How did you afford to pay for the ship?

SOFRANOS: The passage?

LEVINE: How did you afford to pay for the ship, for the passage for . . .

SOFRANOS: My father gave that. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: I see.

SOFRANOS: And I have to have in my hand twenty-five dollar cash.

LEVINE: Yes, yes.

SOFRANOS: He paid the ticket for the boat, my father. And the time I come here I work and I send it back.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. Now, did your father put up an argument? I mean, he didn't want his children to come to the United States. How did he feel about you coming?

SOFRANOS: Well, the time he was, but after the time we started, wanted to come here, things was better. More people used to come out from village. They all went away. They come to America or Australia.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember what you thought about America before you left?

SOFRANOS: At the time I thought America, I thought it was a paradise. I thought it was, just like the Cypress Gardens. (she laughs)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SOFRANOS: And on the street they had piles of coal, not gravel, the powder. And the kids was playing outside, there were. And I said, "This is America?" (she laughs)
I said my brother. At night I was crying. I was going like this, "Send me back to my mother. I miss my pear tree." I was climbing in the pear tree and shaking and all the pears was coming down. And I said, "This is America?" I said, "What a stupid thing, a waste of money, coming to America." And

another cousin came along and he saw me crying and he said, "Anna, don't cry. Wait. After one year you're not going to remember." "Don't tell me that I'm not going to remember my village and my mother!" I was (?). (she laughs) So that's it.

LEVINE: Well, now . . .

SOFRANOS: Gradually, gradually I got used to it. Now I'm here. I love America anyhow. I'm happy here.

LEVINE: Well, where did you get the ship from? Where did you . . .

SOFRANOS: From Athens.

LEVINE: From Athens. And how did you get to Athens from your village?

SOFRANOS: My father took me and next city is the train. And he put me on the train. And the time I get off on the train, the train started to go, and my father was on the ground, and he used to wave to me like this. (she gestures) And the time I came in Ellis Island I saw that train I got so sentimental, because I had forgotten it. But sometime I remember my father like

this. (she gestures) At that time I was happy, I didn't know anything feeling for Father, but now I know how he felt. See? That's the truth.

LEVINE: Did your mother or father tell you anything about, you know, what you should do when you got to America, or give you advice?

SOFRANOS: The mother and father, my mother used to teach us do not let anybody touch us. (she laughs) But the time she started to talk that to us, and I said, "Why? Why she tell us not all the time touch?" I thought they're going to touch. In time I grow up a little bit, you know, I come to the point. I said, "Oh, that's why Mother said no touch. That touch!" (they laugh) So that's, it's a beautiful old time life. And my mother used to say, "Now, my dear child, you're going to America. You have to know these things. Any place you go, any place you stay and time comes to move from here over there, don't forget you have to live a good name." That's my mother's philosophy. So I keep, it's in me. And then next time she said, "If somebody do something for you, don't expect them back. The time you do something for somebody you have to

throw them in the ocean, because some day something's going to come you need help, and somebody's going to come and help you." And that comes to my life, true.

So that's the way, those people, they never went to school, but they educated by experiences of life or to learn from, they're born like that, I don't know. So everything's okay.

LEVINE: She taught you beautiful lessons.

SOFRANOS: Yeah, what a nice mother.

LEVINE: So then did you spend much time in Athens before you actually boarded the ship?

SOFRANOS: We spent about a week in Athens. We had a hard time to go through to the, how do you call, the embassy to get . . .

LEVINE: A visa?

SOFRANOS: A visa.

LEVINE: And who were you with in Athens?

SOFRANOS: What?

LEVINE: Who were you with in Athens?

SOFRANOS: I come here with three more girls from the same village. But one girl has an uncle to the next village, and he was a priest. And he promised my father, to my father he's going to accompany us to Athens because he has relatives in Athens, something like that. And he was the watch guy for us. And we laughing so much, "You girls! You think you own the village." (she laughs) I said, "But shh! The priest come, the priest come!" I'm going to show you the picture of the way I come here. (sound of papers rustling)

LEVINE: Okay. So you were three girlfriends traveling together from Athens.

SOFRANOS: Three, three of them. And the time they put us in the island, on the row, you know, one row here, one row here. So each one supposed to go to one row. So they put one girl over there and the other one over there and one over here. I said, "No, no, no. We are together! We come over. (she laughs)

LEVINE: That was at Ellis Island?

SOFRANOS: Huh?

LEVINE: Was that at Ellis Island?

SOFRANOS: Somebody came and said to me, "No, no, no. Keep them back here." But, of course, I did not understand, but with our hands. So I said, "Oh, my goodness," I said to the girls, "they're going to put us in separate now. We're going to be lost." "No, don't worry about it. After we go inside we're going to be together."
(she laughs)

LEVINE: So did you have a good time on the ship coming over?

SOFRANOS: I had a very good time. I didn't get sick, and I used to go in the front to see all the fishes, boom.

LEVINE: The dolphins?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, the dolphins. All the other girls was in the cabin, "Ahh, ahh." One girl didn't eat a thing for weeks.

LEVINE: How long did it take, the boat ride?

SOFRANOS: Eighteen days.

LEVINE: Eighteen days. And it was, the name of the ship?

SOFRANOS: Greek name, Nea Hellas.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Nea Hellas, uh-huh.

SOFRANOS: (writing) Ah, (?). I should bring my pen. Inside
I have a pen.

LEVINE: And when you were on the ship what was the food like?

SOFRANOS: Oh, I didn't like it at all. (she writes)

LEVINE: You didn't like the food.

SOFRANOS: No, I didn't like the, it was roast beef and stuff
like that, the smell. You know, you come from the
village, different seasoning, different, I was eating.
They call them the dry bread. It sounded like
a . . .

LEVINE: Like biscuits?

SOFRANOS: Like a pita.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Pita bread.

SOFRANOS: But it was crispy, and cheese. That's all I was

eating all the way through.

LEVINE: And did you bring that with you? You took that with you?

SOFRANOS: No, they had them. They had that.

LEVINE: On the boat, uh-huh. Were you in the steerage or were you in a cabin?

SOFRANOS: In the cabin.

LEVINE: And how many, your three friends?

SOFRANOS: Two together, two. One, one in the back, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So there were the four of you in the one cabin?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, in different, in different sections. It was nice.

LEVINE: And was there anything else that you remember from the boat trip, that happened in the boat trip?

SOFRANOS: The only thing I know the time I get out from the boat I lost my heel. And I, I tried to go down the stairs. I was hopping. That's what happened. That's better

with me, I lost my heel. (she laughs)

LEVINE: That happened on the ship.

SOFRANOS: That I got so interested in the time they put us in the train from New York to Massachusetts, all the new people, working people, in the morning, you know. Rosy cheeks, red. So I said, "What kind of people is this? Different." By the time we went in the boat and the colored people come to serve us I said to my girls, "Look at that. It's a colored people." You know, marvelous color.

LEVINE: You never saw them.

SOFRANOS: I never saw them. No, I never knew there's colored people. No. (she laughs) I said, "Look at them, how dark they are!" (she laughs)

LEVINE: They were serving you in the dining room. Is that when you saw them?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when you, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you were on the ship?

SOFRANOS: Oh, yeah. I remember the Statue of Liberty, but I didn't remember, I remember one room.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island.

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you remember . . .

SOFRANOS: It was dark, it was night.

LEVINE: Oh, you got to Ellis Island at night, so you couldn't really see. And then you went into one room, and what do you remember about when you were at Ellis Island?

SOFRANOS: The only thing I remember, we were so hungry, and the man was coming and he was bringing some water, some drink, I don't know. And we used to tell him, (she laughs) I didn't know what it was. Maybe he said, "It's coming, it's coming." We had fun, though. I'm glad I came with the girls. We had fun, and we talked. And then we went to school, in the night school in the night. So the teacher explained to us this and that. And the sound, the English, the sound makes the funny words, and we started there.

LEVINE: Your friends went to Lowell with you?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: You all went to Lowell.

SOFRANOS: We all went to the same place. So they stayed living.

One called a couple of months ago, and I said, "Thank you very much. You bring me back in 1920." I said, "My goodness, I feel so young today."

LEVINE: Now, what were the names of your friends who you traveled with?

SOFRANOS: Uh, Terpsichore. Calliope, you know Calliope? Calliope, Terpsichore. And this Terpsichore. Terpsichore, she's mentally now.

LEVINE: I'm sorry, say that again?

SOFRANOS: She has the Alzheimer's disease, do not remember. And I feel sorry for her. So we had on and off, on and off, the troubles and sacrifice. But, you know, as, so we build up, we build up with a hard way, and we can't take more, you know. Because I see now young girls they can't take much. You know, they all

collapse. They're always tired, they're tired. I never say I'm tired. If I'm tired I sit down, that's all.

LEVINE: So did you keep in contact with your two friends?

SOFRANOS: Not much, no. But I send them an invitation for my birthday. This one friend called me up, and she sent me a present. I said, "I don't need no presents." Because I put down "no presents." So they donated money for the church. So the collection went to the church, for the building fund. We started to build a new church now, and I'm very happy about it. Because it was here, and the time we moved here nothing was here in this town, nothing. Not even a supermarket. So then I used to say to my husband, "What I give to you, my dear? You bring me the deserts. You bring me the end of the war." We got used to the city, you know, with the community, with all the stuff, the relatives, friends. And he said to me one time, "Anna, don't worry about it. Some day we're going to have a Greek Orthodox church." I said, "You lost your mind!" (she laughs) And I was talking in the party, and they took video of it. So my son explained

to them how I felt all those years. So.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember anything else about Ellis Island? Do you remember the medical examination? Do you remember eating there? Or did you stay overnight there?

SOFRANOS: No, we didn't stay overnight. I mean, this time I came up there.

LEVINE: I mean, when you first came, when you came from Greece?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, we stayed overnight.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was it like?

SOFRANOS: I don't remember. We just sleep, that's all, and the next day, we sleep with the same clothes we come in, that's all. And the next day. (she makes a whoosing noise)

LEVINE: And who met you? Did someone meet you there?

SOFRANOS: My brother.

LEVINE: He met you at Ellis Island?

SOFRANOS: No, no. He couldn't make it. He couldn't make it that time.

LEVINE: So then when you, when you went from Ellis Island where did you go?

SOFRANOS: I went to Lowell, Mass.

LEVINE: And you got on the train?

SOFRANOS: On the train. So I met my brother, and he took me to the apartment. It was about five, five boys that have the apartment. And that time they didn't want to rent the apartments to the single boys because they used to ruin it. So I went in the apartment, I saw all calendars that's around the wall. (she laughs) All the calendars. New Years' calendars, Christmas calendar, religion calendar. That's decorating. And I said, "What is this?" In the village you have a home, but you have the things around, looks like a home. So then I started to cry, and I went inside. Each one has a bed, no dresser, no nothing. One box underneath the bed to put the underwear. So there I stay about three years, and I started to, I find a job

in the factory, and I went home in the night. I used to bring something to cook. We cook and eat and wash the dishes, and then I wash my clothes and each one brings me the underwear to wash. And I said to my brother, "I didn't come here to wash them clothes." I said, "You'd better take me the ticket and I went back home." "Oh," he said to me, "you know why you do that? Because you don't pay board." And I'm still mad with my brother. I'm still mad.

LEVINE: Now?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, now. Yeah. (she laughs) Now I'm more mad than then, because then I didn't know much.

LEVINE: So there were five boys there?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, five boys, they have apartment.

LEVINE: And what about your friends? Where do they . . .

SOFRANOS: All the friends, they had the families. One has aunt, and the other has the mother and father here.

LEVINE: I see. Now, were there a lot of Greek people in Lowell?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, oh, yeah.

LEVINE: In the community where . . .

SOFRANOS: It's a big community, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you took a job in one of the mills in Lowell?

SOFRANOS: I had a job in the factory.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

SOFRANOS: Weave the materials. At that time I couldn't see much. I couldn't see. I didn't wear glasses. I was nearsighted. So then I saw the boss was coming every day, put the roll over there. He said to me, he said, "The loom stopped. That means the thread's not going through. You're supposed to stop the loom and thread, put the thread in to weave naturally." So one day, second day, I used to feel so embarrassed and I couldn't say anything. I went home and I was crying. I said to my brother, "I can't see very well and the boss punish me almost every other day." He said to me, "Don't worry. We're going to the doctor to examine your eyes." So I said, "I don't want to wear

glasses. How I'm going to get married?" Don't I say silly things? (she laughs)

LEVINE: No, they're fine. They're funny.

SOFRANOS: So there was another girl there, she was wearing glasses, and the boys criticized her. "Oh, she's not going to get married. Never, never, never. She can't see. She wears glasses." (she laughs) So then finally we went and I got a pair of glasses. I went in the room, I'm wearing them, so I could see the things better, but I didn't dare wear them. (she laughs) So then I got married and I have a trouble with my husband.

LEVINE: Tell me how you met your husband?

SOFRANOS: My husband was from the same village.

LEVINE: Oh. And he was in Lowell?

SOFRANOS: Yeah. So then we got married and we went to New York, and he teach me how to go to New York to see, you know, the place. He said, "This is Second Avenue, this is Eighth Avenue." And I couldn't see the numbers. (she laughs) So I used to say, "Yeah,

yeah, yeah." So one day he got so mad with me. He said, "We're coming so many times here and you can't read where's the Second Avenue?" I said, "I'm going to fix you. Wait." We went home and we went to bed and I started to cry. I cried so hard he couldn't understand what happened. Finally he said, "Please tell me what happened to you." I said, "You want to know? I don't want to go to New York with you any more. That's it." "Why?" "Because I can't see the numbers." "My dear girl, come on, let's go to the doctor." So we went to the doctor and so I got the glasses.

LEVINE: Well, you got, so you wore you glasses after you got married.

SOFRANOS: But I got him first. (she laughs) Oh, honey, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, did you just meet your, did you have a social club? Was that how you met your husband in Lowell? How did you come to meet him?

SOFRANOS: My husband, at that time he was in Greece, his father. He used to come to my father's store to make the saddle for the mule.

LEVINE: The saddle?

SOFRANOS: Yeah. And one time he brought the son along. And my father saw him and he said, "You have a good-looking son." And it happened my mother was coming down and they talked together. And he said to him, "Listen, I have three daughters. Some day I want to make him a son-in-law." So I came, I remember that my mother used to tell him that I came here, and happened to me. So then right away we got married. He was a good man, a good-looking man. I had a good life.

LEVINE: Now, what was his name? What was your husband's name?
What was your husband's name?

SOFRANOS: Anthony.

LEVINE: Anthony, okay. And so his name was Sofranos?

SOFRANOS: Sofranos.

LEVINE: And your maiden name was Spanos?

SOFRANOS: My first name, my father's name, Spanos, yes.

LEVINE: And then you and Anthony had . . .

SOFRANOS: That goes all in there? What we talk goes here? No!

No, I thought you, I talk to you!

LEVINE: No, it's on here. You can hear it, you can hear it back.

SOFRANOS: No, that's okay. Anyhow, what else?

LEVINE: You and your husband had one child?

SOFRANOS: One child.

LEVINE: And his name is Peter.

SOFRANOS: Peter, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, how about learning English. What was that like?

SOFRANOS: The time I got married, my husband has the restaurant, and I, he took me to the night school. So I started to learn, you know, from the ABC, how to spell "cat," how you spell "dog," how you say, "I want to go out." You know, stuff like that. And then we moved and I have a child and I dropped the school. But gradually I learned how to read, but I can't write. So that's

it.

LEVINE: And so your husband had a restaurant? That's what he did?

SOFRANOS: Yeah, with my brothers. (?)

LEVINE: (traffic sound is heard in background) So did you stop working once you got married, or did you continue to work?

SOFRANOS: Who?

LEVINE: You.

SOFRANOS: No, I did work. Then I have the child. I used to help in the store, yeah. Any time the chef, I mean, the dishwasher didn't come or the waitresses didn't come, so they used to call us to go and help the store, that's all.

LEVINE: And so your brothers were partners with your husband?

SOFRANOS: Yeah.

LEVINE: And where was that, in New York?

SOFRANOS: In New York, in College Point.

LEVINE: College Point. Where is that?

SOFRANOS: Long Island.

LEVINE: Long Island. Okay. Now, as far as Ellis Island was concerned how, you mentioned the counting of money. Do you remember something that happened at Ellis Island that had to do with counting your money?

SOFRANOS: What do you mean to count the money?

LEVINE: When you filled out this questionnaire you had mentioned counting money. Is there anything else that you remember about coming to this country and experiences that you had getting used to being here?

SOFRANOS: I didn't have no experience at all what I'm going to find here. The only thing I was dreaming it was going to be paradise. But the minute I move in Lowell and I move to the apartment, and after that a couple of days, a couple of weeks, I finally shop in the factory, and in the wintertime it was slippery outside and, you know, I have to prepare my lunch in the morning. All that suffering.

LEVINE: Suffering.

SOFRANOS: But at that time I didn't know it was suffering because I said I want to come here, I have to do it.

LEVINE: I see.

SOFRANOS: Till the good days coming, gradually. Till now. Now I'm the happiest woman in the world, and I always said to my friends, "Kneel down and kiss the ground and say, 'God bless America.' And God bless who discover America. So be happy here. You have all the freedom. You do anything you want." So what else? Of course, you miss your family, you miss this, but so many years now, it's all faded out, faded out. You get used to it here, what's going on here now. I'm interested in here now, I know the people here now, especially in Boca Raton. Even back home. I don't like to go back home. I don't find anybody. At my age they're all gone. The young people, they're married, they have kids. I don't know them. So I'm a stranger there. I'm happy here. So I want to die here. I said to the priest, I said, "Father, if you're going to build up the church, one thing you have to know. I'm going to

die happy." That's all.

LEVINE: So the church is very important to you.

SOFRANOS: Very important to me, yeah. Because you come from society. You know, community. And all of a sudden you come here, you don't see nothing, only little birds and ants and strange people. The first time we came here we rent, and at the time we started to build the house here I didn't know anybody. I said to myself, "Not even one person is here to invite me to go in the house to see how the houses are?" Finally the time the builders was working here the old lady was living over there. And she came by the fence and she said to me, "Welcome here, my neighbor." And she was an old Hungarian lady, you know, with a heavy voice. I said, "Somebody asked me to go in the house, oh my Lord." And then I went inside, and she said to me, "You want a glass of wine?" And I started to cry. I started to cry. I couldn't control myself. I felt ashamed. So I said, "I'm not happy here. I don't know anybody. I don't know anybody." "Don't worry, I'm here," she said to me. So then we started, and gradually, gradually more Greek people moved here.

Then I started to feel like myself again. So it's a different if you own. I'm a good mixer with American people, too. I'm a good, you know. I don't find no difficult with any. But I liked my own. So that's it.

LEVINE: Okay.

SOFRANOS: Anything else?

LEVINE: Unless there's something else that you want to mention.

SOFRANOS: Well, nothing else. I have wishes. I wish I can die fast and not suffer, that's all. But that is a wish, never mind. The Lord's going to take care. I said to the lady I went back home and everybody said to me, "How's everybody down there?" I said, "You want to know the news? Everybody is like the ripe figs. They're all ripe." (she laughs) "You know, if they're ripe, ripe figs, it has to fall." (she laughs) "Whop!" (she laughs) (?) My brother is ninety-five, and he went to the doctor, he said, "I can't walk. I don't know why I have this thing." And the doctor said, "How old are you,

Mr. Spanos?" "Ninety-five." "You made it. What else do you want?"

LEVINE: What else do you want? Well, thank you very much. It's been a wonderful interview. Thank you. I appreciate it.

SOFRANOS: Can I call Anna to bring us something to eat, some cold cuts to make a sandwich?

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine signing off with Anna Sofranos in Boca Raton, Florida. Thank you very much.