

EI-829

HELEN STATHIS SIMOS

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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NEW YORK, NEW YORK

SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, November 29th, 1996, the day after Thanksgiving.

SIMOS: Right.

SIGRIST: And I'm in Springfield, Massachusetts and I'm at the Ring Nursing Home, and that's R-I-N-G.

SIMOS: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Ring Nursing Home, and I'm here with Mrs. Helen Simos, S-I-M-O-S.

SIMOS: [whispers] Right.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Simos came to America in 1913. She came from Smyrna, which was Greece, but governed by Turkey.

SIMOS: By Turkey.

SIGRIST: At that time and we think she was about four years old when she came. Anyway, Mrs. Simos, thank you very much for letting me come.

SIMOS: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: Can you give me your birth date again please?

SIMOS: September 13th, 1908.

SIGRIST: 1908 and were you born right in the city of Smyrna?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Smyrna?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, do you know anything about the day you were born?

SIMOS: No, I don't. But my mother was telling me that there was—the hospitals were right around there when I was born, but I don't remember which hospital or what.

SIGRIST: But you were born in a hospital?

SIMOS: Yeah, I think so.

SIGRIST: Yeah. [Laughs] Do you have any memories yourself of Smyrna before you left?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: No.

SIMOS: Well, yes, I have something. See, I was going to take the nail polish off. I was out watching next to my grandmother's house. We were looking at some chickens she had in the yard and she—there was a dog in her yard and she come out chasing the dog and threw a stone at him and the dog and as he ran out, he snapped my finger and you can even see over here it's a little cut like.

SIGRIST: Yes.

SIMOS: Where they sew—it was hanging. So my grandmother grabbed me and took me, I don't know whether the doctors' or hospital where—and put it together again. That's all I can remember on that.

SIGRIST: And that's your middle finger.

SIMOS: The middle finger.

SIGRIST: On your right hand.

SIMOS: And it's even been disfigured, the nail. It's hard. See.

SIGRIST: And you remember that happening?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: That I remember.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me, why don't we talk a little bit about your parents. What was your father's name?

SIMOS: My father's name was Costas.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SIMOS: Yeah, C-O-S-T-A-S, Costas.

SIGRIST: Cos—Costas.

SIMOS: Yeah, Costas.

SIGRIST: And what did he do in Smyrna?

SIMOS: He was a shoe repair man, but he had a trade of making new shoes from scratch. But he never got around to it here because he had—he didn't have the equipment.

SIGRIST: Did he ever talk to you later on about what his life was like in Smyrna?

SIMOS: No, they—

SIGRIST: What did he tell you about his past?

SIMOS: He—just that they had a happy life and they got along, and that—that's all I can—

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about his family background?

SIMOS: No. All I know that he had a sister out in—Sass-Sass—Salmon, Seymour. I forgot the name of it.

SIGRIST: Is it a city?

SIMOS: A city, yeah.

SIGRIST: In America?

SIMOS: No, no, in Greece.

SIGRIST: Oh, in Greece. Samos is an island on—

SIMOS: It's an island. It's an island.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, did—did you ever—what do you know about that sister?

SIMOS: Nothing much.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Just that she—

SIMOS: I was too little that I couldn't even remember too much.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your father's personality was like?

SIMOS: Very good.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: He was a lovable man. Everybody liked him and he was a good father.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up in the United States, what were some of the things that you enjoyed doing with your father?

SIMOS: Well, tell you the truth, not too much because he had a family of six when he came here. So he didn't have too much time trying to get something to do for himself for work and all, and I don't remember too much of that. But he was a wonderful father.

SIGRIST: You said his first name was Costas.

SIMOS: Costas.

SIGRIST: What was his last name, which would be your maiden name?

SIMOS: Yeah, Efstathopoulos.

SIGRIST: Oh, my goodness, can you spell that please?

SIMOS: Yeah, E-F-S-T-A-T-H, Efstath, T-H-O-P-O-U-L-O-S. But when we came here, they shortened it. They took the Stathis, when he had his citizenship papers.

SIGRIST: How—and how was that spelled?

SIMOS: S-T-A-T-H-I-S.

SIGRIST: S-T-A-T-H-I-S.

SIMOS: I-S, so that's how we were going by that name when we entered school and—

SIGRIST: Stathis.

SIMOS: Stathis, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. So that let me just get the—the name when it was in Greece was in Efstathopoulos?

SIMOS: Es—he came—he came with—he came with Efstathopolous.

SIGRIST: Yes.

SIMOS: Here, Efstathopolous.

SIGRIST: And then it was changed to Stathis.

SIMOS: Stathis.

SIGRIST: Here. Wow. Let me just make sure that I have the spelling of the first one correct. Efstathopolous is E-F-S-T-A-T-H-O-P—

SIMOS: S-T-A-T-H-O-P, P-O-U-L-O-S.

SIGRIST: L-O-S, okay. I did have--I had an extra U in there. [Laughs] Great, and then it was changed to Stathis.

SIMOS: To Stathis.

SIGRIST: S-T-A-T-H-I-S.

SIMOS: After my father got his citizenship papers.

SIGRIST: What—when you were born, were you named Helen or were you named something else?

SIMOS: Helen. No, Helen.

SIGRIST: Helen, and spelled as it is in English?

SIMOS: The same, yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, great. So your father had a—you remember him as having a good personality.

SIMOS: Right, very good personality.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me in words what he looked like? No, don't—don't point to a picture.

SIMOS: Oh, you don't want a picture?

SIGRIST: No, tell me in words.

SIMOS: He was a handsome man.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: And a good dancer. The Greek dance with my mother. Every time they'd get up to dance, they'd say, "Look at Mr. Efstathopoulos with his wife. How graceful they're dancing." That I remember. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What business did he go into in the United States?

SIMOS: Well, when we entered—I think it was Pennsylvania, it was when we first got there. I don't know how long we stayed there, and then we went to New York for a little while. That's what I heard from my parents.

SIGRIST: Yes.

SIMOS: He couldn't get a job right away. Then he was recommended just by somebody that he was a shoemaker. So he started making the shoe repairing. Somebody he had taken him to his shop and work and that's all I can remember. But he was a—a shoemaker that could make shoes from scratch. I'll tell you one story. There was a woman that had problems with her one foot. She had a shorter leg. That's my parents, were telling me that and I saw it after when I got older. I saw that woman with that same shoe. And somebody came to him and says, "This lady," says, "needs a pair of shoes and we don't know anybody that could make a pair for her." So he says, "Well," he says, "if I have the equipment," says, "I can fix her." So I don't know how they got the equipment for him to—things he needed, and he made her a pair of shoes with a cork in the bottom there making the foot a little even with the other, and she was so pleased with it that she was telling everybody about it. And ever since then, she's been having her shoes made by him.

SIGRIST: What did your father enjoy doing for his free time? What did he enjoy doing for himself to have—for his own pleasure? You mentioned dancing. You said he liked to dance with your mom.

SIMOS: Yeah, yeah and then staying home with his family. He enjoyed staying home with the family and talking to the children. Yeah. He was a home father.

SIGRIST: What language did he speak?

SIMOS: Greek.

SIGRIST: He spoke Greek.

SIMOS: Uh-hmm, and he—they made the business that they spoke Greek to us, too, so we learned the language, which we did.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever speak at all about his life in Greece when the Turks came in—

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: And—didn't ever talk about that.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Okay. What was your mom's name?

SIMOS: Demetria. Demetria.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SIMOS: D-E, D-E-M-E-T-R-I-A, I think it is.

SIGRIST: Thank you, and what was her maiden name?

SIMOS: Oh, I don't—oh, yeah, Kalakios.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

SIMOS: K-A-L-A-K-I-O-S.

SIGRIST: Kalakios.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

SIMOS: A wonderful person. A home wife.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, what are some of the things that stick out in your mind when you were a child about your mother and what she did and—

SIMOS: I can't remember, but my mother always made it a point that we should help with the housework. She always gave us a chore to do. Each of her child has something to do. That was their job.

SIGRIST: What was your job?

SIMOS: [Laughs] My—well, not there. There I don't know, but when we came here and I grew a little older, she had a brass bed and she gave me the job to polish that brass bed.

SIGRIST: That's a lot of work. [Laughs]

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about your mother's family background?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about her parents, for instance?

SIMOS: No, the only thing I told you is I told you my grandmother when I got hurt with my finger. She lived right next door to us and that—but she was a little woman like me, too. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: That's your mother's mother?

SIMOS: My mother's mother, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you—do you know what—how large your mother's family was? You know, did she have brothers and sisters?

SIMOS: She had—yes, she had three brothers and two sisters.

SIGRIST: Did she ever talk about growing up with her brothers and sisters or—

SIMOS: No, but we got in touch with them. I don't remember them very much until after we came to the States we got more acquainted.

SIGRIST: Were they all over here?

SIMOS: Some of them, yeah.

SIGRIST: Some of them were here.

SIMOS: Most of them.

SIGRIST: I see. Why did your parents want to come to the United States?

SIMOS: Because there was nothing for him doing there and we had an uncle that was in the States.

SIGRIST: Where was he living?

SIMOS: Ah—

SIGRIST: The uncle.

SIMOS: When we first stop—came to Pennsylvania and then to New York and from New York, when we my father was in New York, he was selling peanuts just to get a little extra money and my mother was doing nothing there at that time. Taking care of the family, and that's all I can remember. And then we came to Springfield.

SIGRIST: But I was wondering where—you said you had an uncle in the United States before you got here.

SIMOS: Yeah, we—yes.

SIGRIST: Where was he living in the United States, the uncle?

SIMOS: Well, he was living in New York.

SIGRIST: In New York City.

SIMOS: Yeah, in New York.

SIGRIST: And what was he doing for a living?

SIMOS: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Is this—whose—whose brother is he, your mother's brother?

SIMOS: My mother's brother.

SIGRIST: Your mother's brother was in New York.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did—you may be too young, but did you know anything about the United States before you came here?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: No, no. I'm wondering did your parents ever—

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Tell you about the things they expected to find here?

SIMOS: No. No.

SIGRIST: No. So it's 1913, they decide to go.

SIMOS: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father ever tell you about how they felt when they left their home?

SIMOS: Well, they felt sad. They didn't want to leave. This is all her other family was there. She only had the two brothers here. There were three brothers, but the two of them were here. So she didn't like the

idea, but then they talked it over and says, "Well, we have to do something. We can't stay here," because there was nothing going on there. He couldn't get a job.

SIGRIST: And that's what your father was hoping—

SIMOS: That's—

SIGRIST: To do was get a job when—

SIMOS: Right.

SIGRIST: He came to the United States.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember either personally or from what you were told, about the house that you lived in there?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Any—or do you have a recollection of a—

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Do you know if your parents brought anything to the United States?

SIMOS: Any what?

SIGRIST: Anything?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Any objects? Did they bring—when they left there, what—

SIMOS: No, they had nothing.

SIGRIST: Had nothing, yeah.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Do you personally have any memories of the actual trip, either on the ship—

SIMOS: No, I don't even—I used to remember the ship's name. Now I forgot that. I can't remember the ship we came in.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being on the ship?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Or seeing something that was—that stuck out in your mind?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father ever tell you any stories about what happened on the ship?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: You said there were six children?

SIMOS: Six children.

SIGRIST: Can you name everybody for me?

SIMOS: Yes, there was—

SIGRIST: From the oldest to the youngest.

SIMOS: There was—well, I'll tell you them in Greek or the way they were here?

SIGRIST: As long as you can spell them.

SIMOS: I don't know if I could. Efstrat—just as I pronounce it. Efstratios was my older brother. No, Efsterpie was my older sister.

SIGRIST: All right, can you—

SIMOS: Efsterpie.

SIGRIST: Do you think you can spell it? If I give you pencil and paper, can you do it?

SIMOS: No, no, I'll—E-F-S, E-F-T-E-R-P-I-E.

SIGRIST: Efterpie?

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's your—she was the oldest child?

SIMOS: Yes, the oldest, and then I had one, Efstratios, E-F-S-T-R-A-T-I-O-S. Efstratios.

SIGRIST: Efstratios.

SIMOS: Tios, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: And the other one was Yorga, that's George. Yorga. I don't know how that would—how that would go. It's a Y—Yorga. [stuttering] I can't tell you.

SIGRIST: That's a tough one. [Laughs]

SIMOS: Yeah, it's a Yorga. I can just write it, but I can't pronounce it.

SIGRIST: It may even be a different letter than we have in English.

SIMOS: No, it's—see, like this. Yor-ga.

SIGRIST: Yorgo.

SIMOS: Ga.

SIGRIST: Yorgo.

SIMOS: Yeah, Yorga.

SIGRIST: Yorgo, huh.

SIMOS: Maybe you can write it better than me.

SIGRIST: Yeah, maybe. Well, we'll do that when we get back to Ellis Island. All right, that's three.

SIMOS: Uh-hmm, and then we have Efpraxia. They're all—

SIGRIST: [Laughs] These are tough names.

SIMOS: Efpraxia, E-F-P-R-A-X-I-A, Efpraxia.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, that's four.

SIMOS: And then me, Eleni.

SIGRIST: And you. Can you spell your name in Greek?

SIMOS: Epsilon, E-L lambda, Eleni. [stuttering and sound out] E-L-N-I-E.

SIGRIST: E-L—

SIMOS: You know the—the story about the Leni? The book? They had a story about her.

SIGRIST: Hmm.

SIMOS: It's—it's a wonderful book. Eleni.

SIGRIST: Did you say it was E-L-E-N-I, Eleni?

SIMOS: Eleni, yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay, E-L-E-N-I.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay, so you're the next to the youngest.

SIMOS: Right.

SIGRIST: And who's the youngest?

SIMOS: The youngest is Kriton. He's—yeah, he's two years older than me. Younger than me.

SIGRIST: Younger. Kriton? Kriton?

SIMOS: Kriton.

SIGRIST: K-R—

SIMOS: K-R-I-T-O-N.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, can you tell me what all—were those names changed to English names—

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: When you got to America?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what they were changed to?

SIMOS: The first one is Edward, Efstratios.

SIGRIST: Efstratios was Edward.

SIMOS: And the other one was Esther.

SIGRIST: So that was Ef—

SIMOS: Efterpie.

SIGRIST: Efterpie was Esther.

SIMOS: And then the other one was George, Yorga.

SIGRIST: Yorga is George.

SIMOS: And the other one is Praxia. Efpraxia—the—her name is almost the same. Efpraxia.

SIGRIST: Efpraxia.

SIMOS: And me, Helen.

SIGRIST: Helen.

SIMOS: And the other one, they called him James, Jimmy.

SIGRIST: James. Kriton was James.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Who changed those names, do you remember?

SIMOS: When we went to school because they didn't—they thought they were too hard to write. So—

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Yes, they are difficult.

SIMOS: They changed the names.

SIGRIST: And when you think of those long names with what your last name was in Greece.

SIMOS: You're right, it's hard.

SIGRIST: That's a lot of letters. Do you know how long the voyage took to the United States?

SIMOS: A what?

SIGRIST: How long? Do you know how long it took for the ship to get to the United States?

SIMOS: Oh, I don't know that.

SIGRIST: I just wondered if maybe your mother told you.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about what happened to your family when they got to New York? Like when—when they got to Ellis Island or—

SIMOS: [unclear] No, they were very sad. They didn't want to leave their country, but then they said, "Well, we got to do something, we can't stay there and suffer," because see, it was governed by the Turks and it was real bad at that time.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm.

SIMOS: There was nothing to live with.

SIGRIST: Right, it was a bad situation there.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did—did anything happen to your family when they got to Ellis Island when the ship—

SIMOS: Not that I can remember.

SIGRIST: Not that—not that you—you think that you went to Pennsylvania first.

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Okay.

SIMOS: And then we went to New York.

SIGRIST: What's your first memory in America? What's the first thing you remember when you're in America?

SIMOS: Well, when—the first thing I remember was when we passed on the boat the Statue of Liberty there.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you do remember that?

SIMOS: That, yes, because they were so glad. They were all pointing out, see. That I remember.

SIGRIST: Is that—is that the one memory you have of being on the ship?

SIMOS: That's—on the ship.

SIGRIST: Then what—then where does your memory kick in next? What's the next thing that you remember?

SIMOS: Just looking around at the people, the crowd, you know. Couldn't remember much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about the train ride? Or I'm assuming it was a train ride, from New York to Pennsylvania?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you lived in Pennsylvania?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Did you just live there for—

SIMOS: No, a little while.

SIGRIST: Oh, just a little while. Why did they go to Pennsylvania?

SIMOS: I think that's where one of my uncles lived first, and we thought we'd go there first and see. But when we went there, they didn't—didn't think it was the proper place for us.

SIGRIST: Do you know why they thought that?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: No, so they—they went back to New York City.

SIMOS: Yes, and we stayed in New York for, oh, a few months. In the meantime my father got a job selling peanuts.

SIGRIST: And that was in New York City.

SIMOS: In New York City.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: And my mother was doing nothing.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about living in New York that time?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: No, do you know where they were living?

SIMOS: No, no.

SIGRIST: I see. Where did you—where did the family go from New York?

SIMOS: Springfield.

SIGRIST: Went to Springfield.

SIMOS: Right to Springfield.

SIGRIST: Okay, and then did they stay in Springfield?

SIMOS: Oh, yes, we've been in Springfield ever since.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, great. Well, let's talk about being in Springfield. What do you remember about the very early days of when the family got to Springfield?

SIMOS: Oh, not really much. I know my older sisters went to school and I was still too young and then when I did start school, they had to come to the school—excuse me for saying it. I had—they had to come to the school to take me home because I always used to dirty myself.

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

SIMOS: So they got mad. My sister got so mad, says, "Why do you have to do that all the time?" and I start crying. [Laughs] That's all I can remember.

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

SIMOS: You can't forget that.

SIGRIST: No, certainly not. Do you remember where your family lived in Springfield? Like the actual building that they lived in?

SIMOS: Well, the first place we lived in was I think Ferry Street. I don't know if you remember the street at all.

SIGRIST: Ferry Street.

SIMOS: Ferry Street and we kept moving a lot of places there, but—

SIGRIST: Can you—can you see what the inside looked like in your mind, of that first place on Ferry Street? What—what you remember about being inside?

SIMOS: Well, there were—this street they had a lot of stores and there were a lot of Greeks in there, see. The grocery stores and—eh. It's—

SIGRIST: What about—but what about did you live in a house or an apartment?

SIMOS: No, a house.

SIGRIST: It was a house.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the house itself?

SIMOS: Not too much.

SIGRIST: The inside at all? Do you remember the inside of the house?

SIMOS: No, it was just—well, it had a long hallway, I remember that, but the other rooms were here and there. I can't remember too much.

SIGRIST: I see, and you said you moved around a lot.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about school because you don't speak English.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: When you come to America.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what it was like to—to be put into an American school in Springfield. What—

SIMOS: It was tough.

SIGRIST: Yeah. I mean, obviously you're having—you know, you had one reaction to being there.

SIMOS: Right. Right.

SIGRIST: But—but what else do you remember about—about some of the challenges that—that you faced when you went to school? For instance, like the language. Talk about—

SIMOS: Well, yes, the language was—I used to talk Greek, you know, and the other children would say, "We don't understand you. What are you talking about?" and I'd—I'd answer them back again in Greek because I didn't know what they were talking about. So that's the only thing I can remember.

SIGRIST: And—and your—you said your family spoke Greek at home.

SIMOS: Oh, at home, yes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father—did they want to learn English, your parents?

SIMOS: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: They did.

SIMOS: My mother tried very hard.

SIGRIST: How did she try? What was the process that she went through?

SIMOS: Well, she used to go to do grocery shopping and she couldn't under—explain to her what she wanted. For instance, if she wanted to get some eggs, so she says, “[makes chicken sounds].” That did it.

SIGRIST: Was she making like a chicken sound?

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

SIMOS: And then—then she'd make a motion and they'd take, bring an egg to her and show it. She goes like that.

SIGRIST: Shakes her head.

SIMOS: Shake her head. Now, she's telling me all this, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Right.

SIMOS: But she was telling us all those. So we'd sit around in the kitchen sometimes or some place and talk about different things and she used to tell us this would happen.

SIGRIST: What about your father, did he make an attempt to learn English?

SIMOS: Well, he was, yes. Yes, I can't tell you about him because he was more out looking for a job and that, but he was a very good father. Both of them, good father and mother. They were home people.

SIGRIST: I—I guess what I'm curious about was whether they were anxious to—to—to become part of life in America by learning English—

SIMOS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Or whether they wanted to just sort of retain their Greek—

SIMOS: No, no, no. No.

SIGRIST: No.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: They wanted to Americanize.

SIMOS: Yes. She learned how—she wasn't an expert talker, but she learned a lot of words. She could do her shopping, broken English.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, you mentioned—you talk—you talked about your experience in school with speaking Greek. Were there any other difficulties in school that you had?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: That you can remember?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of your teachers at that time?

SIMOS: No. No.

SIGRIST: Because I'm wondering if you remembered one who was very helpful to you or maybe one that was not very nice to you.

SIMOS: No. No.

SIGRIST: How much older—how—how many years are there between you and the oldest child?

SIMOS: Well—well, there's another one younger than me.

SIGRIST: Right—

SIMOS: But you wanted me—

SIGRIST: Right, but I'm curious how much they're—like how much older was the oldest?

SIMOS: They were—they were all about a year and a half apart except myself and Efraxia were two years apart. All the others were a year.

SIGRIST: Did the oldest children—when you got to America, were the oldest children expected to get a job or did they go into school?

SIMOS: Oh, the oldest one, yes.

SIGRIST: And the oldest one is a woman, right?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SIMOS: Yeah. So it's—they finally put her to work in some corset place like that and she didn't know how to speak English, but she managed by them showing her.

SIGRIST: This like a corset factory of some sort?

SIMOS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Huh. Do you remember—did—your mother, did she work when you first came to Springfield?

SIMOS: My mother, no.

SIGRIST: No, she didn't work.

SIMOS: Never worked.

SIGRIST: Your oldest sister, who was working in this factory, do you know what she did with her money? The money she got paid—

SIMOS: Gave it to her parents. Yeah, to bring some food. [Chuckles]

SIGRIST: What kind of food—when you first came to America, those—those early years that you were here—

SIMOS: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What kind of food was your mother cooking?

SIMOS: Cook Greek.

SIGRIST: Greek food.

SIMOS: Greek food.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where she could buy the ingredients for the Greek food?

SIMOS: Well, there was some markets there that had people—Greek people that were there much before us, and they had opened little stores with Greek—

SIGRIST: Greek foods.

SIMOS: Food and stuff.

SIGRIST: So this is a whole Greek neighborhood.

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: That you're living in.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other businesses that were run by Greek people in this neighborhood that you remember?

SIMOS: I can't remember, no. Most of them were grocery.

SIGRIST: Grocery stores.

SIMOS: Yeah, most of them.

SIGRIST: Was there a Greek church?

SIMOS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: And what religion were you at that time?

SIMOS: Pardon?

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

SIMOS: Greek Orthodox.

SIGRIST: Greek Orthodox.

SIMOS: And I'm still a Greek Orthodox.

SIGRIST: And there was a Greek Orthodox church there?

SIMOS: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Was—was religion an important part of your life in America?

SIMOS: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about how—how—you know, how you practiced your religion in America when you were growing up?

SIMOS: Well, we'd make it our business to go to church every Sunday and before we go to church on Saturday night we'd have to wash up and bathe and get ready for church. Be clean. We didn't have the best of clothes, but they were clean, and go to church every Sunday. And then they had like a parochial school to learn not to forget your Greek language and we'd practice on that more. And then as I told you, my mother was always talking Greek to us at home.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. So the church actually encouraged you to speak Greek.

SIMOS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Ah, can you—

SIMOS: Not encouraged us, but that's how we knew and that's how they were taught, and their—their services were in Greek. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you—do you still remember a prayer in Greek?

SIMOS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you say for me—

SIMOS: Well, that—Our Father.

SIGRIST: The Lord's Prayer. Can you do that in Greek slowly for me, please?

SIMOS: [Recites The Lord's Prayer in Greek], Amen, and then we bless ourselves.

SIGRIST: Thank you. You were speeding up as you went through the prayer. I always—when I—when I ask people to say a prayer in a foreign language, I always say to do it slowly, because when you do it by yourself you probably do it kind of fast. [Laughs]

SIMOS: [Chuckles]

SIGRIST: What about a—is there a song or a little poem or a hymn or something that you know in Greek that you learned as a child that you could sing for me or something like that?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing like—like a song your mother taught you how to sing?

SIMOS: No. No. My mother didn't have time to teach us songs.

SIGRIST: That's right. Who was the most religious person in your family?

SIMOS: We were all religious, all of us.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

SIMOS: The same way we do now.

SIGRIST: But—but I mean how. What—what—what ways did you practice your religion when you were in your home, as opposed to being at church?

SIMOS: Well, we made sure we said our prayers before we had lunch.

SIGRIST: Before you ate.

SIMOS: Yeah, before we ate and bless ourselves, and then before we go to bed.

SIGRIST: What—in your house, or you know, you said you moved a lot, but in all the places that you lived, did your parents keep some sort of little—

SIMOS: Icon.

SIGRIST: Altar or icon?

SIMOS: Icon we had.

SIGRIST: Can you describe those for me please?

SIMOS: Ah, well, we had Virgin Mary and we had Christ and we had now like the Saints, Saint Constantine and Helen. In fact, each child had an icon with their name that the Saint—Saint Yorgo, Saint whatever it is. She had an icon for each child and then when we got married, she gave us that icon to take home with us.

SIGRIST: When you say an icon, can you just describe exactly what that is?
What—

SIMOS: It's a wood—

SIGRIST: Piece of wood.

SIMOS: With a hand painted figure of the saints. Saint Helen had—I'll say
Saint Helen. Saint Helen had the—

SIGRIST: That was yours—

SIMOS: Yeah, Saint Helen had the Helen and then a cross in the middle
because she's the one that found the cross. I don't know what it is. I
forgot it and then Saint Constant next to her.

SIGRIST: Saint Constantine was next to her.

SIMOS: Yeah, next to her and each child had. Now, Saint George has the
one with the dragon and Efstatios, I can't remember them, their icons
how they are.

SIGRIST: And these were in one place in the house?

SIMOS: Yes, in a—especially in one bedroom there where the child—
youngest child is, see.

SIGRIST: That's very interesting. Can you tell me, what was the big religious
holiday that your family celebrated back then?

SIMOS: Ah, Easter.

PS What was the most—

SIMOS: Easter.

SIGRIST: Easter was the most important. Can you explain to me how you
celebrated Easter at that time?

SIMOS: Well, we had our religion is to—we believe in fasting. In fact, the old
timers fasted for forty days, is it, or fifty? They didn't eat meat. No
meat, just seafood or—no blood, see. Then we'd fast for a whole
week before Easter and then go to church Holy Saturday and receive
communion. Fast the whole day. No—no coffee, no nothing to eat
and drink, and we'd fast that day. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then—

SIMOS: Then we'd go home and have our breakfast and eat all we could.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

SIGRIST: Were there special foods that—that were prepared for Easter?

SIMOS: Yeah, lamb.

SIGRIST: Lamb, and how was the lamb prepared?

SIMOS: Roast in the oven, yeah. Now—now they put it in a rotisserie here, which is better.

SIGRIST: Right, but back then it was different.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about were there special sweets of some sort that were made?

SIMOS: Well, we didn't have too much sweets, just had what they say koulouria [PH], Greek cookies.

SIGRIST: Koulouria.

SIMOS: Koulouria, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know how to spell that?

SIMOS: K-O-U-L, koulou—K-O-U-L-O-U-R-I-A or something like. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Yeah, koulouria.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what's special about the koulouria.

SIMOS: Well, it's with—at that time we didn't have butter. They used whatever they had, lard or whatever. Flour and the seasoning—the flavoring. Then they twist them, you know. Braid them like a braid.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: Or make it in a round and sometimes in Easter time they made the round ones and put an Easter egg in the middle. A red egg. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what is the egg symbolic of?

SIMOS: I think—I was told that and I forgot it. About Christ.

SIGRIST: But it has a meaning?

SIMOS: Yeah, it has a meaning. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your parents belong to any Greek social organizations?

SIMOS: No, no.

SIGRIST: Or were there such things at that time that you remember?

SIMOS: No, no. No, they were too busy with their family.

SIGRIST: What about the church, did the church also sponsor social events for people in the neighborhood?

SIMOS: At that time, no.

SIGRIST: No.

SIMOS: At that time it was just church and home, that's it.

SIGRIST: I see.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you do when you were growing up for fun? What did you do for entertainment when you were growing up?

SIMOS: I used to go out and play with the kids, jump rope. After I learned how to speak a little English, I mixed in and I was playing with them.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the first—what the first word that you learned in English or some of the first words?

SIMOS: No, but it's funny, I think I told you. I used to go out and talk to the children and talk to them in Greek and they'd say, "We don't

understand you, Helen. What are you talking about?" and I'd keep repeating the same thing.

SIGRIST: How did that make you feel inside when that happened?

SIMOS: Well, I felt bad because they couldn't understand me. I thought they must be dumb or something, they can't understand my language.

SIGRIST: Were there any other children that you can remember who had been born on the other side and brought to America, also?

SIMOS: Well, I had cousins, that's all. I had a lot of cousins there that came with my uncles.

SIGRIST: When you got a little older, were you expected to go out and get a job?

SIMOS: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What was the first job you got that you got paid for?

SIMOS: Oh, I was quite old, though, then. Yeah, I think the first job I got was chocolate dipping.

SIGRIST: Chocolate dipping?

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how old—

SIMOS: There was this—this Greek man that knew us and he gave me the job. That's the only thing I can remember.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you got the job?

SIMOS: Oh, my God, I must be about thirteen, fourteen years old.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, and what do you remember about what you had to do for this job? What did you—what did you do to be a chocolate dipper?

SIMOS: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were dipping into chocolate?

SIMOS: Into chocolate, yeah.

SIGRIST: But what was it?

SIMOS: We wore—we were wearing gloves, and take the chocolate and just with a spoon or something put it in a syrup, chocolate syrup and twist it a little and pick it up with the thing. That's all.

SIGRIST: Was that in Springfield?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the company or—

SIMOS: No. No.

SIGRIST: How long did you work as a chocolate dipper?

SIMOS: Oh, about a year, that's all.

SIGRIST: Were you still going to school at that time?

SIMOS: Yes. Yeah, it was after school that I went.

SIGRIST: Did you want to get a job or was—

SIMOS: Oh, yes, I wanted to go and help my parents.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. So that—what did you do with your money that you—

SIMOS: Gave it to my parents.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: And they'd give me some spending money. If I needed clothes, they'd buy them for me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a—a—a dress, an outfit that you had when you were growing up that sticks out in your mind?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: One that you really liked?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Did your parents—what did your parents do for entertainment?

SIMOS: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Like if they—

SIMOS: Nothing.

SIGRIST: If they had a Sunday afternoon free—

SIMOS: No, nothing. They were too busy taking—raising a family.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: What—when you got a little bit older, like around the time you were dipping the chocolate, thirteen, fourteen, did you ever—you had been in America for quite a while at that point.

SIMOS: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And you—you were so young when you came that I'm assuming that you sort of Americanized a little easier than maybe your older brothers and sisters. Did—did your parents look—were you ever—how do I put this? The fact that your parents had been immigrants and were immigrants, okay, did that ever bother you when you were a teenager?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: In some way?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Were you still living in the—in the Greek neighborhood?

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so that was never a source of conflict of any sort.

SIMOS: No, no.

SIGRIST: Were your parents—what were some of the rules that you had to live by when you lived in your parents' house? Some of the rules that they set down for the kids.

SIMOS: Well, we weren't allowed to go out unless somebody older was with us and they had to know. My parents had to know where we were going and what time to be back, see. That's all.

SIGRIST: And that was—that was the—

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Their biggest concern.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was knowing where you guys were. Were the girls treated any differently than the boys?

SIMOS: No. No. No.

SIGRIST: You know, I'm just trying to get some of a sense of what family life was like.

SIMOS: Yeah, right. Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Well, what—you—your first job was the chocolate dipping, right?

SIMOS: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: What was the next job that you got?

SIMOS: Hmm. Boy, I was much older than that. I went to where they make coats.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: Finishing coats, and then I went to another shop. That was before I got married, pocketbooks—making pocketbooks.

SIGRIST: And were you still living with your parents?

SIMOS: Yes. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, and—and still giving them your paycheck?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: For these. Were these factories? Like a pocketbook factory or a coat factory?

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

SIMOS: Oh, no. Very little, I'll tell you that much.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Very little. How old were you when you got married?

SIMOS: I was eighteen.

SIGRIST: What—and obviously you married Mr. Simos.

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was his first name?

SIMOS: Evangulos in Greek.

SIGRIST: Evangulos.

SIMOS: Evangulos, Angelo in English.

SIGRIST: Angelo. Angelo Simos and do you remember the date that you got married?

SIMOS: Pardon?

SIGRIST: The date that you got married?

SIMOS: In Springfield.

SIGRIST: But what—what date?

SIMOS: Oh, the date.

SIGRIST: What year in the—

SIMOS: January 27th, 19—oh, what was it? Well, I was eighteen.

SIGRIST: Well, you were eighteen in 1936. '36, that sound right? Let's see, '08 to—I'm sorry. '26.

SIMOS: '27.

SIGRIST: '27.

SIMOS: '27, now I remember. It was 1927.

SIGRIST: My math isn't very good. How did you meet him?

SIMOS: Well, we lived in an apartment house and this family lived there and it was a friend of theirs and he used to go and visit them, and he—he spoke to that lady next door and says, "I'd like to meet that family there." So he came. In fact, at that time I had one sister that was already married and she was divorced and the other one's single. That's the one before me, and he wanted to get into the family. So he was going to go for my sister, but then my sister was already promised to somebody else. He says, "Well, I'd like to get into the family because it's a nice family and I want to get into the family." So he says, "I'll wait for the next one." So it was me.

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

SIMOS: So that's how.

SIGRIST: Did you like him?

SIMOS: Well, in the beginning I didn't know, but after I got used to him and I did.

SIGRIST: Was—

SIMOS: In fact—in fact, we eloped. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: That was very daring for those days.

SIMOS: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] How did your parents feel about that?

SIMOS: Oh, they didn't want me to because I was young. I was only eighteen and I had a sister who was divorced and then the other one was already promised. So they thought I was too young and at that time, my husband was in New York. He had moved from Springfield to New York and they didn't want me to go away far from there, see. so we corresponded. We said nothing. We just kept corresponding, until one day he decided, "Well, we either go your way or my way." So that's how it happened.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Where was he from?

SIMOS: He's from Cyprus Island.

SIGRIST: Was he born in Cyprus?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: When—when did he come to the United States?

SIMOS: Oh, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: A long time before you knew him.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SIMOS: He came after me.

SIGRIST: Oh, he came after you.

SIMOS: Yeah. I mean he was here after me.

SIGRIST: Was he older than you? Younger than you?

SIMOS: He was about eleven years older than me.

SIGRIST: Eleven years older. Okay, so when he got to America, he was a young man.

SIMOS: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did you have—well, you had children, obviously.

SIMOS: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you name the children?

SIMOS: Yes. In Greek?

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. Only if you can spell.

SIMOS: I'll tell you in English.

SIGRIST: All right.

SIMOS: Well, I'll you in Greek, Anastasia's the oldest.

SIGRIST: Anastasie?

SIMOS: Anastasia.

SIGRIST: Anastasia.

SIMOS: Anastasia.

SIGRIST: Anastasia.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what is her American name?

SIMOS: Oh, it's Flynn.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's Ann Flynn. That's—

SIMOS: Oh, that's after she got married.

SIGRIST: Right, right. That's the woman that I talked to on the phone.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. All right, so Anastasia is the oldest.

SIMOS: Yeah, and then I had Baraskavi, Beatrice.

SIGRIST: Say—

SIMOS: Beatrice.

SIGRIST: Yeah, but say it in Greek slowly.

SIMOS: Baraskavi.

SIGRIST: Bara-skavi. Baraskavi. B-A-R-A, ska, S-K-A.

SIMOS: I-V-E or whatever.

SIGRIST: Or V-I-E.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay, that's Beatrice.

- SIMOS: Yeah, and she's—she's two years younger than my oldest one.
- SIGRIST: Uh-huh.
- SIMOS: Yeah.
- SIGRIST: The two kids.
- SIMOS: That's all.
- SIGRIST: That's all. Did you ever go back to Greece?
- SIMOS: Yes, after my husband passed away. Oh, he died in 1961 I think it was or '62. I—everybody was ask—calling, writing to me, his parents and his relatives, to go so they could meet me because I'd never them.
- SIGRIST: Were his parents still living?
- SIMOS: They were at that time.
- SIGRIST: Wow.
- SIMOS: He's got sisters there that are living.
- SIGRIST: Now.
- SIMOS: So I says—see, I didn't want to go because we couldn't make it together. We couldn't afford to go together. So I says, "Well, I can't go right now." So finally, after five years, I decided, I was working, "I'll save some money and I'll go." That's when he paced—passed away. So I did. I decided and I went and I met all his family there and it was a sad meeting. Very sad. First I time I met them and they didn't know me and I didn't know them, but they were very, very nice.
- SIGRIST: Was he from—was his family in Cyprus?
- SIMOS: In Cyprus. It was governed by the British subject, and he was a British subject.
- SIGRIST: Did you—when you went over there did you also go to where you were from, to Smyrna?
- SIMOS: No. I went to Smyrna after.

SIGRIST: After. What did it feel like—

SIMOS: I mean before. Before I went to Smyrna. Before I went to Cyprus.

SIGRIST: Oh, how—when—when did you go to—on the same trip?

SIMOS: No, that was after my husband died.

SIGRIST: Yeah, you went to Cyprus after your father [sic] died.

SIMOS: Cyprus, yeah.

SIGRIST: When did you go to—

SIMOS: And I went—after that, I went to Greece.

SIGRIST: Oh, on a—on—

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. And what did it feel like? Did it feel like—

SIMOS: Sad.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SIMOS: Sad. Crying, meeting them because you don't know them, they don't know me.

SIGRIST: But—but what about when you—when you were in Smyrna which is where you were from?

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did that feel to you? If it felt anything to you.

SIMOS: Well, it—yeah, it felt sad the same because I had aunts and uncles there, cousins. That's the only relatives I had there. I didn't have anybody else of mine. The only thing I had is my mother's sister. She had one sister there and—two sisters. Two sisters there and that's the only ones that I met when I went there.

SIGRIST: Did you feel—did you feel any kind of an emotional connection to being there or did it just feel like another place to visit?

SIMOS: No, I felt—I had the emotionally there. I did.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Helen, when you think of yourself in terms of what your nationality is, how do you think about your nationality? Do you think of yourself as being Greek or being American or—

SIMOS: Well, at that time I thought of nothing else but Greek.

SIGRIST: But now.

SIMOS: Now.

SIGRIST: When you think about who you are.

SIMOS: Now. Now.

SIGRIST: What do you—

SIMOS: Now, after I—I think I became a citizen before my husband did. Before he passed away. I says, “Well, I’m here in America now, I’ve got to become a citizen.” So I went and I became a citizen.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

SIMOS: Oh, I can’t remember. That was before my husband passed away.

SIGRIST: Your children, how—

SIMOS: Oh, they were born. My children were born.

SIGRIST: Oh, they were all born. Do you remember what you had to go through to become a citizen?

SIMOS: I had to study the ritual, whatever they do. That’s the only thing.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, and do you remember—

SIMOS: And I passed.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the ceremony itself?

SIMOS: No, that I don’t remember.

SIGRIST: No. How did it feel when you became a citizen?

SIMOS: I felt, I was proud. I was proud.

SIGRIST: Did anyone give you some kind of a little gift for becoming a citizen?

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: No.

SIMOS: No.

SIGRIST: Had your husband ever become a citizen?

SIMOS: He did after awhile.

SIGRIST: He did.

SIMOS: He didn't want to lose his British subject. He was a British subject.

SIGRIST: Oh, right from—

SIMOS: And he didn't want to lose it. Then after I says to him, here, "We have to," I says, "because after all, when we get older, we got to be together. You can't be one place, me in another." So he decided and he became a citizen after I became.

SIGRIST: Oh. Helen, when you look back on your life, what did you do that made you the most proud? In all your life, when you look back, what—what are you the most proud of doing in your life?

SIMOS: To be an American citizen because there's so much going on. In other words, to get help. Now there were—I couldn't get help from Greece anyplace, but here in America if I needed help or some kind of a support, I had to go to the—Washington, wherever they go, and get some help. I would say it did help my father.

SIGRIST: The government helped your father?

SIMOS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh.

SIMOS: Well, the government, whoever put a word in there.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: If you had to give a young person some advice about how to lead a long, happy life, what advice would you give them?

SIMOS: To become a citizen this—we're living in America now.

SIGRIST: But—but—but not necessarily a person who's not a citizen. I mean like—like if you wanted to tell me, you know, "This is—these—this is a rule for you to live by. This is what has given me happiness all my life." What would you tell me?

SIMOS: Just be a happy-go-lucky guy and enjoy yourself. Don't put no bad ideas into your head.

SIGRIST: Great. Helen, thank you very much.

SIMOS: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: You—you've been wonderful and I'm very glad that—that Christine, who is your grand niece—

SIMOS: My grand niece.

SIGRIST: Read the article in the paper. It was a pleasure spending the afternoon here.

SIMOS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Helen Simos on Friday, November 29th, 1996. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]