EI-86
LUCY NAHABEDIAN ATTARIAN
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TURKEY (ARMENIAN), 1921
AGE 5

SHIP: UNKNOWN
PORT: LE HAVRE
RESIDENCES:
? TURKEY: AINTAB
? US: ALBANY, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's September 5, 1991, and I'm here at Ellis Island with Lucy Attarian, who is of Armenian lineage and came to the United States from Turkey in 1921 at the age of five years old. It's very nice to have you with us today.

ATTARIAN: Thank you.

LEVINE: And I would like to start by asking you your birth date.

ATTARIAN: May 21, 1916.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born, Mrs. Attarian?

ATTARIAN: In Aintab, Turkey.

LEVINE: Okay. And do you remember much about the town of Aintab?

ATTARIAN : Well, of course I've heard a lot of descriptive conversation by my parents and other adults who remember much better than I do. I remember more specifically the house that we lived in.

LEVINE: Great. What was that like?

ATTARIAN: Well, um, I don't know whether you've heard this before, but there were no sidewalks in the town. And there were walls surrounding all the homes, so that the wall came directly to the street, and then there would be a gate going into the property. And we had two lawns. There was a lower lawn, and then a little higher lawn, and then beyond

that the house. That I remember very well. And behind the house was just fields. There was a pond, not a pond so much as a pool, a little pool in the yard which the women used for whatever they needed. Not that they particularly did laundry or anything in it, but it was there for other minor jobs. I remember that. As far as the town itself was concerned, there really was no town. I don't remember any shopping centers, or where stores or anything like that were, because I was much too young to have to do that. I remember the baths, the public baths.

LEVINE: What were they like?

ATTARIAN: Well, every Saturday, they had a time for the men, and a time for the women and children. And every Saturday you, the mothers gathered their children and then their equipment that they needed and packed a lunch and went to the public bath, and it was like having one big party and picnic. I remember the fountain where the water was heated and afterwards you came out to an outer room and dried off and dressed and ate before you came home. I remember that very well, because we used to go every single week.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how long would you stay in the baths?

ATTARIAN: Oh, several hours, because there'd be a large group of people there and they'd have to take their turns. There was a woman in charge of the water, and she would sit on the top of this, I don't know, like a high stool or something, and sort of dole out the water. You'd soap yourself and so forth, and the mother would do the children. Of course, that's the part that I remember. And then this lady would sort of dole out the water to rinse off, and then the next group would take their turn. So you came out, that's when you came out to the outer room and could dry off and eat, and it was like a picnic, an indoor picnic, and it was, I used to enjoy that. (She laughs)

LEVINE: It was like a family outing, I guess, in a way.

ATTARIAN: Yes, for the female members of the family, yeah. And then there was another time when the men went.

LEVINE: I see. Now, so was Aintab more like a small village, as you remember it?

ATTARIAN : I guess you could call it a village. It was very self-contained. I think if you looked far enough you'd find that almost everybody was related some way or other because there was no transportation, there was no communication outside of the town, and everyone knew everyone. And usually they married right in the town, people in the town. And one thing, wedding arrangements there, or marriages, it was the eldest member of the family had the decision as to who you were going to marry. It wasn't any like this today here where you fall in love and you meet somebody and that sort of thing. The elder member of the family determined whom you were to marry. My mother, for instance, was engaged to my father even without her knowledge at the consent of her grandfather. She was twelve, and my father was twelve years older than my mother. And, but she had been promised to my father.

And when she graduated from the American Seminary there she was sixteen. And she used to tell this story how her grandfather said to her, "Well, aren't you going to send Joseph an invitation to your graduation?" And she said, "Well, why should I invite him?" He said, "Well, you're going to marry him." (She laughs) So . . .

LEVINE: And that was her father's decision.

ATTARIAN: Her grandfather's. Her grandfather's decision, yes. And then, I don't know if you're interested to pursue this. It's a very interesting story. My father came to America. I think it was like nineteen, uh, it must have been around 1910 because they were married in 1913. No, it must have been before that, 1908. Because he came to America with the intent of eventually sending for my mother and marrying her. Five years went by. My mother was now twenty-one, and my father still hadn't returned. Of all they had been in communication. And her grandfather said, "Well, if he's not coming back to marry you, I'm going to break the engagement." (She laughs) She had other suitors, and she was twenty-one, and that's kind of old for, you know, not to be married. So the, when the word got back to my father that this was going to happen, he came back. This was in 1913. Because I know she said he had been here for five years, so he must have come in 1908. He came back and they were married. And then, of course, he got stuck there. And went into business, of course, and all that. But that's the way it was. So that the reason I mentioned that is because there was a lot of inter-marriages. In our immediate family, the two brothers married two sisters. My mother's aunt became her sister-in-law, and this sort of thing went on in the families all the time. Because the town was very self-contained.

LEVINE: I see, small. There weren't that many other people to choose from, I guess.

ATTARIAN: Well, I don't know what the population was, but it wasn't a very large town. And, as I say, I think, if you go look far enough you'd find that most everybody was married, or related in some way. And one good thing about that was that they knew their family history. And they knew if there had been any illnesses or whatever, and that's where the grandparents came in, you see. They knew about all that, and they would steer away from families that might have had, perhaps, some mental illness or something like that.

ATTARIAN: see. So they had certain considerations that they took into account when they made these matches between the . . .

ATTARIAN: Oh, yes, yes. They knew the background of the family since several generations back.

LEVINE: I see. Now, who was in your immediate family when you were in Aintab?

ATTARIAN: What do you mean?

LEVINE: It was your mother, your father, you, and did you have sisters or brothers there?

ATTARIAN: Well, I didn't have any surviving sisters. I'm the third child. My mother had two children before me. One was a miscarriage, and one died shortly after birth. And then after me there was a son who lived until he was about two years old, and he became ill and passed away. So when we left to come here I was the only child.

LEVINE: I see. Now, what was your father's full name?

ATTARIAN: Joseph Nahabedian.

LEVINE: And your mother's name and maiden name?

ATTARIAN: Our mother's name was Beatrice. Her maiden name was Nazarian.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, what do you remember about the house you lived in in Aintab? Can you remember the interior, the living space, what that was like?

ATTARIAN: Well, it was two stories. The first floor, the ground floor, really, wasn't paved or anything. It was mostly a dirt floor where they did their baking and that sort of thing. Sort of like the kitchen. And then we had the steps going up to the second floor, which was the living quarters, and there it was mostly one big room. They did everything. They slept in that room, they ate in that room. They lived in that room, really. The beds were mattresses which were rolled away in the morning and stored until the evening and they were put out again on the floor.

LEVINE: I see. And what did your father do for work when you were there?

ATTARIAN: Well, my father made fabric for the, manufactured fabric for the Turkish army uniforms. And that was what saved us from some of the atrocities and some of the, being sent away, you know, to the, so many of the families, if you remember reading about the Genocide. Which 1915 was the worst time of the Genocide, because I wasn't born yet. But my parents talked about it quite often, and my father was in the Turkish army, he had to be. But our family, Armenians were sent out, as you probably have read, they were sent out into the desert and driven away from their homes, and so many of them died. Our family was saved because of the fact that my father was engaged in this business and they needed the fabrics for the uniforms. So we were not, well, we were affected, but at least we weren't driven away from our home.

LEVINE: Well how, do you recall your parents talking about how they happened to come to live in Turkey?

ATTARIAN: Well, I don't know how many generations it goes back, but as you may have read in history, the Armenians were all driven away from their homeland, and they scattered all over the world. And a large number of them settled in Turkey, central Turkey there, which became, it

was a lot of small towns, but there were a lot of Armenians concentrated there. Now, I don't know how far back the first family came there. But my grandparents were there, of course, and my family, and beyond, and great-grandparents. Well, my mother's grandfather, you see, would be my great grandfather. And, so beyond that I really don't know.

LEVINE: Well, so they had been there. But your family had been there anyway.

ATTARIAN: Oh, they'd been there for quite a while.

LEVINE: Now, did you have a religious life while you were in Turkey, your family?

ATTARIAN: Well, our family was Protestant, and there was a Protestant church. And yes, they were very; religion is a very important part of the Armenian life. And our family went to the Protestant church in Aintab. My mother was in the choir. She had a, from what I heard, prior, when she was a young girl, and then of course I heard her afterwards singing here in this country. She had a very beautiful voice. And, so she was very much involved in the choir, in the music of the church. I don't remember specifically going myself to Sunday school or anything like that. I was much too young for that. But, oh, yes. They had a very strong religious background.

LEVINE: Now, in the town of Aintab were there mostly Armenians living?

ATTARIAN: Well, there were a lot of Armenians, but there were also a lot of Turks. Uh-huh. Oh, yes. There were a lot of Turks.

LEVINE: And could you say any more about the persecution of Armenians, in your experience, in that small village.

ATTARIAN: Well, what I remember is the various occasions when the Kurds came down into the village and caused a lot of damage. They used to live in the hills, in the mountains, around the town. And every once in a while, you never knew, of course, they would come swooping down. And they would rape, they would kidnap and they would burn and they would steal and kill, you know. And then, after they'd gotten what they wanted, they'd go back again. You never knew when this was going to happen. And I lived through an experience. That's why I know what it's like.

There was, there would be periods of peace, and then this kind of thing would happen, as I just described. I had gone to visit some cousins who lived up the street. And they couldn't have lived very far away because, at that age, you know, I wouldn't have been allowed to go by myself. And while I was visiting there they had one of these attacks by the Kurds and immediately we sought shelter, my aunt and her children and I, we sought shelter in a house across the street that had a, uh, it was a stronger home. It was better constructed and we felt we would be safer there. And a bomb landed on the staircase going up to the second floor of the house that we were in. We were on the ground floor, which

was just a dirt floor, and the stairs collapsed and closed us in. Well, it was my aunt and I guess five children. And, of course, it was a very frightening experience. The children were all screaming and yelling and you couldn't breathe because of all the dust that was raised. As I say, it was not a paved floor. In the meantime when the attacks began the men closed their businesses and rushed home.

And my father came home and found my mother standing at the gate looking up, staring up the street. And he said to her, "What are you doing out here? You'll get killed." Because, you see, from the hills they could shoot down, and she was an open target. And she told him that I was not at home, and where I had gone. So he told her to go inside, get off the open area there, and he came looking for me. He came to my aunt's house. Of course, we weren't there. And he saw what happened across the street, realized we were in there, and he clawed with his hands and made an opening. And, of course, we were all choking from the dust. We couldn't breathe in there. And there was, the only opening, which was this door, a doorway, it was actually an open doorway, had been sealed by the stairs that collapsed. So he pulled me out, and of course he opened it up enough so that the others could get air. And we came crawling along the wall on the street back to my house, and my mother was still standing in the doorway. Now both her daughter and her husband are gone, you know. But I remember her telling me that for three days I couldn't hear, from the noise of the explosion. And when I arrived she said every hair on my head was standing up straight like I had touched an electric socket or something, from the reaction to the bombing. This went on periodically, as I say. You never knew when. So they were really our worst source of terror than the people who lived in the town.

LEVINE: Yes. Well, how was it decided, then, that you would leave?

ATTARIAN: Well, everyone wanted to get away, if they could possibly do it. And we had to wait for the quota system. My uncle, my father's youngest brother had already come to America. Because families, all the families, tried to get somebody out of the country into America so that eventually the rest of the family could be sent over. And he was there, and he was our sponsor. So when our visa came through and our passports came through we left, because my father wanted to come back to America naturally. He'd already been here once. And they wanted to get away, because you never knew how long you had to live there. And most of the families, and most of our relatives, too, came back that way with a sponsor that they'd sent. They'd managed to send a son here somehow, and then eventually that person was responsible for bringing the rest of the family over. And you just had to wait. I mean, when we left Aintab it was under cover of night, and you couldn't let people know that you were going to be leaving. You know, it was kept very secret.

LEVINE: Because you might be prevented.

ATTARIAN: ou might be prevented, and if you had anything to sell, they knew that you weren't going to take it with you, you know. We left with very little. We left everything behind, practically.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything that your mother or father or you did take with you?

ATTARIAN: Well, my mother did manage to bring some of her jewelry. Not a lot, but a few pieces. I doubt that we brought anything at all. I know some people bring rugs and things like that, but we were just glad to get away with our lives, because we didn't have any car or a truck or anything like that to load materialistic things on. We were just glad to get out of there with our lives. So it was pretty much what we had on our backs and maybe a small satchel or something. There were a few needlework that my mother brought. We must have had a suitcase. I don't remember that, but we must have had a suitcase with some of these items in it, and a few pieces of her jewelry. Not too much.

LEVINE: So then did you sell the other things? What did you do with your . . .

ATTARIAN: Well, they still had family there. And I don't think my mother really sold very much. But she always used to reminisce about things, how life was and what she had there. But I don't think she really missed it, because they were so glad to get here.

LEVINE: Can you remember stories your mother told you that, the kinds of things that she remembered after she was here, the kinds of memories that she talked about from Turkey?

ATTARIAN: Well, she used to talk about her own childhood. She was the only daughter with four brothers. And, of course, the women there, the girls, they started at a very early age to learn housework. And I think from the age of about five or six she had, she was taught how to do all this beautiful needlework and embroidery, and so on. And she and her mother together, of course her mother taught her how to cook, and that sort of thing. But she and her mother more or less took care of the men. I remember many times she used to joke with her brothers about how she used to do this and that for them, and that was expected of the women.

LEVINE: Can you remember stories that your father told after he had come back to Turkey about the United States?

ATTARIAN: Well, my father never really learned how to speak English. And when he was here, one of the reasons he couldn't save much money to be effective in any way as far as bringing my mother over was concerned was because he worked in menial positions, in restaurants, dishwasher, and that sort of thing, which obviously didn't pay very much, and it was very difficult to save. He never, I don't remember his talking too much about his life here, except that his thoughts were all over there, obviously.

LEVINE: Well, he obviously wanted to marry your mother if he came back for that reason.

ATTARIAN : I would say so. He waited all those years for her to grow up. (They laugh)

LEVINE: maybe it was a matched marriage, but there must have been some feeling anyway.

ATTARIAN: My mother used to say, she always admired my father. He was a very good-looking young man, even though she was only twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and didn't know that this was her promised husband-to-be. She used to say how much she used to admire him when they got together at church or whatever social event that he might be at. But you know there the brides and grooms, once they're engaged they have very little contact with each other, and they're always chaperoned, and that sort of thing. But he left and came here, so they really didn't have too much of a time together as an engaged couple. But . . .

LEVINE: Would they be considered engaged from the time that the decision had been made, in this case by your . . .

ATTARIAN: By her grandfather, yeah, uh-huh. She was promised to him by her grandfather. Although she didn't know it. My father knew, but she didn't know.

LEVINE: Was it discussed between the groom-to-be and the deciding member of the girl's family? I mean, in other words, did your father have something to say about it, even though your mother apparently did not?

ATTARIAN Well, my mother always used to refer to it in this way. She says, "My grandfather promised me to your father." So I would gather from that that they had some conversation. It's really the girl's side that makes the decision as to who she will or will not marry.

LEVINE: I guess I was wondering if the groom had anything to say about it.

ATTARIAN: Oh, I'm sure he did. I'm sure he did. I'm sure he must have.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, can you remember leaving that village and going to, was it La Havre where you took the ship?

ATTARIAN: Yes, but we, now, I don't quite know how we got there. I know when we left, we left Aintab, it was at nighttime. It was in a station wagon. Somehow they had made arrangements. The roads there were not paved, and if there was rain or anything the roads were just mud. And evidently it must have rained the day before or something because, and the station wagon was overloaded. There were other families leaving with their possessions. And when everybody got on board, as soon as you got into one of these muddy areas, it would sink into the mud. The men would get off and raise it and when it got rolling again they'd run and catch up on it. And as soon as they all got on it, the thing would sink again. That part of it, even if I don't recall it distinctly myself, I know that they talked about it a lot. And at that point they could laugh about it. But, of course, when they were going through it it wasn't funny. But we got to Istanbul, which is now Constantinople, and we were there for a few days. And now, but I don't remember how we got from there to France, I really don't.

LEVINE: Do you remember if there was much time between when you left your village and when you actually boarded the ship?

ATTARIAN: Well, I don't know about the exact length of time. I know that it took us three weeks to get to America. Now, whether the three weeks was crossing the ocean or three weeks was the entire period from the time we left Aintab, I'm not sure. But I know we were on the ship a long time. It wasn't one of these four or five day crossings. It was a long time. So it might have been on the ship that long. I know my mother was deathly sick. Once she got on the ship she was deathly sick all the way until we hit Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the ship?

ATTARIAN: No, I don't.

LEVINE: But you think it left from La Havre.

ATTARIAN: Uh-huh. I know we left from France.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. Now, do you remember anything else about that voyage?

ATTARIAN: Well, my mother used to tell me how much my father and I enjoyed the crossing, because we didn't get seasick, and I enjoyed the food and all very much. And I would come down to her, and she was so ill, I don't think she ever left her bunk. Because we were down pretty close, I know we had a porthole, but we were pretty close down to the water. And I would tell her what was going on up above and they serve this and they serve that, and of course she didn't want to hear from anything about food. She didn't eat anything at all on that trip. She was constantly ill. And I know she used to plead with my father, they told me, not to bury her at sea. She was sure she wasn't going to make it, but as soon as the ship stopped she was fine.

LEVINE: Now, were you in, did you have a cabin, or were you in steerage? What was your . . .

ATTARIAN: There were a lot of, we weren't in a cabin, no. We weren't in a cabin. There were hammocks, like. Hammocks type thing, you know, like you see in some of the sailors, now. And there were quite a few in the area, so I don't know how many, you know, whether, we did not have a separate room. We didn't have any privacy. We didn't have any of that.

LEVINE: But you were served food in a dining room, or a dining area. How was the food?

ATTARIAN: Well, you couldn't eat down there. They must have had, I don't remember but they must have had dining areas upstairs. But they certainly couldn't serve you down there.

LEVINE: And was it a large ship? Do you remember that? Were there a lot of people aboard?

ATTARIAN: Oh, yes. There were a lot of people aboard, sure. Because I know when we landed here at Ellis Island it was just packed with people. Now, there might have been more than one boat that had arrived, but usually, you know, as I remember, or at least as I've heard, one boat would arrive and unload its passengers and they'd be processed, and the next one was right behind it. So I'm sure there were a lot of passengers on the ship, if we had to be that far down. And, of course, it depended upon how much you could afford as well.

LEVINE: Right, right. Now, do you remember coming in the New York, the Port of New York? Do you remember the Statue of Liberty?

ATTARIAN: No, I don't, unfortunately. I don't know. I guess I was more excited about the fact that we were arriving at all, after being at sea for such a long period of time. But, uh . . .

LEVINE: What did you do, like, during the day on the ship? Did you play? Were there other children there?

ATTARIAN: I don't remember anything like that. I know I was with my father a lot, when there were that many people on ship. And, of course, I couldn't speak the language either. I had no knowledge. I couldn't even say "yes" or "no." I knew no English at all. So the only one I had to converse with was my father. I don't remember any children; play with any children, at all.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing Ellis Island from the ship before you actually got off?

ATTARIAN: I don't have any vivid memories of the island, of arriving at the island. Only after we got here, when we were in this Great Hall, the processing of the immigrants. And, as I've indicated there, the principal experience that I remember is the . . .

LEVINE: I think maybe it would be a good idea to pause here until we turn the tape over.

ATTARIAN: All right. Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. You were beginning to recount your memory of being here at Ellis Island when you first arrived in this country.

ATTARIAN: Yes. Well, I remember the fact that we were in this great hall and we were separated. The men on one side and the women and children on the other. And after we'd gone through the various processes, and I don't recall exactly what they all were. I know there was a physical, and other things like that. We finally came to this one desk and we were together, my parents and I. And the agent looked at us, and he said to my parents, "She's not yours." And, of course, we had no birth certificates or anything like that. They didn't have such things over there. The reason for his saying that was because some immigrants were bringing refugee children because there were so many orphans, and

they were bringing them in as their own. I don't know how they could disprove it, really. As I say, there were no official papers. But in our case the reason he raised the question was because both my parents were so dark, and I was blonde hair, blue-eyed, light complexion. And he just had a doubt in his mind. (She laughs) So he said to my parents, "You will leave her here and walk away." Well, as soon as they walked away, you know, I yelled, "Ma," or "Pa," or whatever it is that I yelled. And he said, "Oh, she's yours." He said, "Go ahead." (They laugh) So we got off the island.

LEVINE: Great, great. So you weren't really detained here. You were just here briefly, processed, and left.

ATTARIAN: Yes. The process was very, very quick, as a matter of fact. There was no delay. We had to go through the whole procedure, but there was really no delay. And my uncle was waiting for us.

LEVINE: Now, where did he meet you?

ATTARIAN: I believe he met us here on the island.

LEVINE: Do you, could you recall the meeting between your parents and . . .

ATTARIAN: I remember, well, because I didn't know him. But I remember when we got to New York City, and we were going to Albany, for some reason or other, we had to ride the elevated. And that was, of course, such an experience for me, and for all of us, I would think. I remember the elevated, and then the train ride to Albany, and, of course, our home there. As a matter of fact, we lived right down the street from the governor's mansion, on Eagle Street, in Albany. It was just on the next block. And we were there for a couple of years, and then we moved to Delaware Avenue in Albany, and we were there for a couple of years, and then moved to Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Do you remember the impression that New York City made on a five-year-old? And, by the way, you turned five years old aboard ship. Is that right?

ATTARIAN: On the ship, yeah. My birthday was on the ship. Well, we really didn't see New York City. We didn't delay here at all. And my uncle had to get back to his business. We just went directly from here to the train and to Albany.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the train ride to Albany?

ATTARIAN: Uh-uh. No, I don't. I don't know why. I don't. I just remember the elevated ride. Now, where that was, I don't know. (She laughs)

LEVINE: I guess that's the elevated subway that took you to the train.

ATTARIAN: Probably. But I don't know where we took it, or, you know, where we went from there.

LEVINE: Now, what business did your uncle have in Albany?

ATTARIAN: My uncle was in a, he was a photographer, and he and, now this you'll be interested in. His partner was Governor Dicmagian's father. My uncle and the father were very good, close friends, and they were in partnership together. They had a photography studio on Pearl Street in Albany. And, of course, George, the father, Dicmagian, wasn't married at the time. While we were living in Albany he became engaged, so we knew the father, the governor's father and mother from way back then, which would be in the early '20s.

LEVINE: Now, that's an Armenian name?

ATTARIAN: Dicmagian, oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of Armenian's in the immediate area where your uncle was living at that time, in Albany?

ATTARIAN: No, not really. There were Armenian families. A lot of them were in Troy. Troy had a big concentration of Armenians. But, anyway, he had this photography studio, and whenever my mother and I went shopping downtown we always stopped in to see him, and he always took my picture. I have more photographs of me around that age than at any other time. (She laughs)

LEVINE: Great. Now, did you then start school in Albany?

ATTARIAN: Uh-huh. The first day I went to school, we were in Albany in June, and school started in September. And my mother could speak English, incidentally. She had had a very, well, the American seminary there in Aintab, she graduated from that. It was run by the American missionaries. So my mother knew English very well. She knew several languages. So she enrolled me in kindergarten and, of course, I was kind of frightened, I guess, and I cried and cried and cried, and they sent me home. So the next day my uncle, who lived with us, said he was going to take, he was going to take me, which he did, and somehow or other I stayed. The second day I stayed. So I got here just in time to start my education right from the bottom.

LEVINE: And what was it like being in school not knowing English?

ATTARIAN: Well, my mother came to visit me in the class a few days later, and the teacher said to her, "She's really picking it up very well. Just watch her." Well, she'd asked the children to do something, and of course I'd see them doing it, and I would do the same thing. Not because I understood, but I was following. But it didn't take me long. It didn't take me long at all to pick up the language. And this is why I can't understand why other children today can't do it. We have to have all of these special classes. I don't understand that at all. Children can pick up very easily. I have no accent. And whenever I tell anyone that I wasn't born here, they look at me and say, "Well, you don't even

have an accent." I say, "Why should I?" Of course, we spoke Turkish at home. You know, that is something you might be interested in knowing. When you lived in Aintab, the men and the women had to dress like Turks, and they were forbidden to use their language, the Armenian. They had to speak in Turkish. And since they, all they spoke was Turkish in the home, that's all I learned. I never learned Armenian. And, of course, I never learned any other language either, because I didn't even start school there.

LEVINE: I see. But did you, when you came here, then, did your mother speak English with you at home?

ATTARIAN: No, we always spoke Turkish at home because my father didn't understand English. I mean, he couldn't converse in English. My grandmother came to live with us. She didn't know any other language. She didn't even know Armenian, because through all her lifetime they spoke Turkish at home. So we didn't speak English at home at all. It was just among my friends and in school.

LEVINE: Now, your grandmother. Had she come here initially, when your father did, or she came over later?

ATTARIAN: No, they came, she came over later with my father's brother and his family. His wife and son. They came home; they came over about, I don't know, whether it was a year or two after we did. But just like they did in the old country, they all lived together. They moved right in with us.

LEVINE: So what were your living quarters like there, in Albany?

ATTARIAN: Oh, we had an apartment. Yes, we had an apartment. But I don't remember how many rooms it was, but it was a, I would imagine it was at least a five-room apartment.

LEVINE: I see. So it was enough room, ample room.

ATTARIAN: Yes. You have opening couches in the living room, and so forth, you know, to put everybody up. (She laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then, let's see. Then how did you meet your, when and how did you meet your husband?

ATTARIAN: Well, I met my husband when I was fifteen. I was in high school, and this uncle of mine, the one who's responsible for bringing us to this country, had taught me how to dance. This is interesting, when I was about five years old; he decided to teach me how to dance. And he was a tall man. He'd stoop way over so he could put his arm around my waist and teach me how to dance. But anyway, the same uncle took me to social events in the homes of some of his friends. They had developed a rather interesting group of young Armenian people. And these friends of his lived in Washington Heights, and they were on the wealthy side, and so they were the center of most of the social activity. And every weekend there were socials there.

So anyway, he decided, he invited me to go, or he didn't really invite me. He took me with him to one of the parties. And my parents, my father was very strict. He wouldn't allow any dating or anything like that. I was active in church work, but I never went out with any one person. It was always with a group of people, and mostly in the church, social activities at that time were centered in the church much more than they are now. And he took me to one of the parties that were taking place in, up in Washington Heights. We lived in Brooklyn. The idea being that there was a young man in this circle of friends whom they, who was interested in me, or became interested. I hadn't even met him, but again, going back to the old country way, you know, of the parents selecting the husband-to-be. Thought that, they thought that perhaps if I met him and we sort of got to know each other that maybe something would come of it. Well, I went to this party, which was in the home of my husband-to-be's sister, and I met my husband. He was a young man. He was eighteen. I was fifteen. And I met him, and the other gentleman didn't have a chance after that. I mean, I just, he was the one for me. And, of course, nothing further developed until I graduated from high school.

LEVINE: But you were immediately attracted to him?

ATTARIAN: Oh, yes, yes. I, if my girlfriends could talk to you they'd tell you that's all I ever talked about was Jim.

LEVINE: Really? Oh, that's great.

ATTARIAN: (she laughs) And the interesting part is he lived in West New York, New Jersey. And we had sort of, our families had sort of trailed each other, not intentionally, but when we lived in Boston, Massachusetts, they were living in Boston. We didn't meet. He and I didn't meet, but our parents knew each other. And then they moved to West New York and we moved to Brooklyn. And we still hadn't, he and I still hadn't met until this occasion of going to this social event. So I think it was destiny. (She laughs)

LEVINE: So then you saw each other for a while, or did you make contact?

ATTARIAN: Well, eventually, he was working for my uncle. But my uncle, at this time, of course, he'd left his photography business and moved to Brooklyn. And he was, he worked for Kuffel and Esser, which was a photo engraving, they made blueprints, and stuff like that. And my husband was working for him. And I had graduated, and I was working on Court Street, Borough Hall. So we were really just across the river from each other. And we continued to meet at social events, and it wasn't until I was maybe about nineteen that we decided that there was more to this than just friendship. But we didn't get married until I was twenty-three and he was twenty-six. But we knew each other for a good number of years, obviously, before that. And our parents knew each other because they were from the same town.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did your, your father worked, you said, at different kinds of jobs here in this country. Did he ever stick with any particular line of work when he was here?

ATTARIAN: Well, when we were living in Albany he got a job with the railroad company as a repairman, a carpenter and repairman. He was very good with tools. But they went on strike, and at that time the unions were not very supportive of the employees, and when he went on strike there was no income. So we had to look for other work, or he had to look for other work, and he ended up by getting a position in Boston. Originally we moved to Boston because my mother was a very good seamstress and they, my mother's family lived in Boston. And they said, "Well, why don't you come up here and we'll open up a little tailoring shop and you can do alterations and other tailoring jobs and make a living." But we moved to Boston, but it never materialized. And my father got a job in a boiler factory. We lived on Harrison Avenue, which was just down the street from Boston City Hospital. Cold water flat. And my father used to work six days a week in the boiler factory for something like fifteen dollars, from eight to six. Backbreaking work.

LEVINE: That would have been what, the late '20s, roughly?

ATTARIAN: Um, let's see. I think it was 1925 we moved to Boston. We were four years in Albany, and then we moved to Boston. And that's where my other two brothers passed away. The one that developed mastoid and had surgery and it turned into pneumonia, and the one, the son who was a year older than him, he also passed away when he was three. He fell down the stairs on his little bicycle that he had and got an infection in his mouth. And today with antibiotics, you know, it would be no problem, but they couldn't stop the infection, and he developed blood poisoning. So one year he passed away, and the next year the other one passed away.

LEVINE: And then your mother had still one more?

ATTARIAN: My mother had a girl after we moved to Watertown, Massachusetts. The boiler factory job faded away, and my father got a job as a presser at a company in Watertown, Massachusetts. So we moved there. And that's where my sister was born, after we moved to Watertown.

LEVINE: And what is your sister's name?

ATTARIAN: Rose. Her married name is Koundakjian. She lives in Belmont, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Could you spell her married name?

ATTARIAN: K-O-U-N-D-A-K-J-I-A-N. She's married to Richard Koundakjian. And my brother lives in Lexington, Massachusetts, and his name is Albert, Albert Attarian. So anyway, we lived in Watertown for a couple of years, and then they went on strike. And he was unemployed again, so we had a cousin who lived in Brooklyn who had a tailoring business and he offered my father a job to come as a presser, to work for him. And that's how we happened to move to Brooklyn, which was in 1929. Now, at this point I'm ready for high school, and I went right into high school, Girls

Commercial High, in Brooklyn, and took a commercial course, four years, which I enjoyed tremendously. And then when I came out of there in 1933, Depression, no jobs. You know, they said if you can, if you get a job for four dollars a week, don't ask for four-fifty, because they had college people selling apples on the corner. There were no jobs. But I was very fortunate again. I got a position paying twelve dollars a week in a law and real estate firm on Court Street in Brooklyn. And they were very good to me. And I, you know, advanced. Every six months I got an increase, and so forth, and was doing very well by the time I got married.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother work at all during this period, from Albany on?

ATTARIAN: No. My father passed away in 1941 and left my mother and my sister, who was twelve, and my brother, who was a senior in high school, with no income. And, see, I had given up my position when I was expecting my first child, never expecting to go back to work. I thought that I was going to stay home, be a housewife, raise a family. When my father passed away my son was only nine months old. My parents, my mother had no income, and so we were living together. We had bought a private home in Flatbush, and I said, "Well, somebody has to go back to work. My husband can't support us all." So it was obvious that it would be me, and that's when I got my position with the Downstate Medical Center as the Alumni Director and stayed on for forty years until I retired. (She laughs)

LEVINE: Let's see. I just wanted to ask you something about that. When your father died, and you were already married and had one child, it seems as though your father was a significant influence on your life. When you think of your father, are there ideas that you remember? Ways that he thought that he passed along to you that you've retained?

ATTARIAN: Well, my father was, of course, old country thinking, and girls stayed home and they didn't, they didn't go to business, of course, and they didn't date, they didn't see boys, or anything like that. And my being raised here, really, and going through public school and being very active in church work and so forth, I think I rebelled. I just couldn't understand his reasoning at all. And you try to a certain degree to abide by their wishes, but I think I was also a little bit rebellious. I wanted to go out, and I wanted to be with young people. I didn't believe in sitting home and waiting for somebody to come and ring the bell, you know, that sort of thing. But I know he was very strict in that respect. But somehow or other I managed to get around it. (She laughs) I think my mother turned out to be the intermediary, really, trying to keep peace between us. I know my father loved me very much, but he never got involved in my upbringing really. He was a breadwinner, and that was it.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. And how about your mother? Are there ideas that she maybe brought with her from Turkey, or ways that she thought that she passed along to you?

ATTARIAN: You see, her way of life and the way I was being raised in this country was so completely different. She was more understanding. My mother lived with me until she died. All through my marriage, married life. She was, she lived after my father passed away. Yes, well, my mother was very religious and I think a lot of that has rubbed off. We have a strong faith, and my children also were raised in the church. They were very much; my whole family was very much involved in the church. After we were married my husband moved to Brooklyn. He became involved in our church, the Durier Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn. I'm still a member there. I don't attend it any more from New Jersey, but I still support it. I joined that church in 1930, so I've been a member for sixty-one years. And my children were raised there, and they're very nostalgic about the church, even though now one is in North Carolina and one is in Michigan. They were raised there, they were baptized there, they were married there, and I was married there. So we have quite a lot of ties to that church. And I think, and it all started, I'm sure, with my parents and being raised with the religious background. Religion was very important to the women, particularly, in the family, the Armenian families. My grandmother was extremely religious. I remember her very well. And my mother also. My mother considered herself a Born Again Christian. And we had this upbringing of strong faith, and we always had prayers at mealtime. The family always ate together. Today sometimes, most of the time, the children all have different interests and they're not always home for dinner, but we were always home for dinner.

LEVINE: Could you give me the name of your husband, and your children's names?

ATTARIAN: Well, my husband's name was Casper, Casper James Attarian. My oldest son is Warren James Attarian. He's now fifty-one. And my second son is George Edward Attarian. He's forty-one, forty-two now, I guess. George is living in Carey, North Carolina, and Warren is in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

LEVINE: Now, is there anything else that you can think of that you feel as though your early life in Turkey, and coming here and then becoming an American and living here, is there anything that rings true to you that comes out of this kind of experience of changing from one country to really a different world, I guess you could say.

ATTARIAN: Well, I think the closeness of family is a definite outgrowth of being raised or being born into a family where they're very, very close knit. When a son married, he brought his wife into his home where his mother was, his father, if he was living, was, and also with his brothers and sisters who weren't married, all lived together. And then the only time that the son would move out would be after maybe another brother had gotten married and brought his wife in and the first one had several children, then they would move out, because it really would become very, very crowded. But when I was there, those of us who were all living in the one house were my grandmother, my parents, my two uncles, who were still single. Their sister had married and, of course, she had gone to her husband's family. And the oldest brother had several children, and he had moved out to another home, and that's the one that I had gone to visit at the time of this bombing. So, and even after we

came to this country. Again, as I said, my grandmother and my uncle and his wife and son came to this country and they moved right in with us. And the uncle who had brought us here was already living with us anyway, so we were a good-sized family living in a five-room apartment.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else that you can think of that you'd care to mention?

ATTARIAN: Well, I think I've exhausted everything I can remember of the old country, having been so young when I came here. And in this country I have no complaints. And my husband passed away about twenty-six years ago. He was only fifty-two. He became ill, and passed away. And I've had to, I continued working, of course, and put the boys through college and marriage and so forth. I have six grandchildren. And I've had a very successful life here, I think, a very happy life. And things have always seemed to break for me in the right way. Either that, or I happened to be in the right place at the right time. And this country has been good, you know. I have no complaints, except for the fact that my husband died so young.

LEVINE: Well, it's a pleasure to have been talking with you. Thank you very much. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.