

KECK-110

VICTORIA SARFATTI FERNANDEZ

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INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT

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MACEDONIA, 1916

AGE 4

SHIP RECALLED AS "THE GRAZIA OF ITALIA"

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett, and I'm speaking with Victoria Sarfatti Fernandez on Wednesday, December 18, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 9:55 AM, and we're about to interview Mrs. Fernandez about her immigration experience from Macedonia in 1916. This is the beginning of Interview Number 110, side one. Okay. Why don't we start back at the beginning? Why don't you tell me where and when you were born?

FERNANDEZ: Uh-huh. I was born in 1912. And that was the same year that the Balkan Wars, first Balkan Wars, started. Uh, all I recall-- 1912, and I was born in December of that year.

DALLETT; And where?

FERNANDEZ: In Kavala. Kavala.

DALLETT: Can you spell that for me?

FERNANDEZ: K-A-V-A-L-A. K-A-V-A-L-A. That's not too far from, uh, Salonik, which was the main city. Uh, it's also, interestingly, it's also the first place that St. Paul stopped at when he went to preach his epistle to the Macedonians. Uh, also, uh, there's a Mohammed, a famous Mohammed leader of the eighth century who was born in Kavala. And it's just a few miles from Pella, where Alexander The Great and Philip of Macedon were born. So it's quite an historical place. I'm very glad that I was born there. But all I remember during the four years that I was there was, uh, war and famine. There was nothing to eat because we had, our town was surrounded by all the enemies that were getting together to push Turkey out of Macedonia. They wanted to push Turkey out of Europe. And Turkey owned all that land. Now, there were the Bulgarians, the Serbians, the Greeks and a small area called Monte Negro. There were also Roumanians living there and the bottom of all this intrigue was Russia because Russia wanted to see the conflict going and the small places destroying each other, I guess, so that she could get control of, of the whole territory and, uh, push the Turks out and get control of the Dardenelles, which was the sea, the

seaport. Uh, now, the first Balkan War, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Monte Negro got together and defeated the Turks. They were too strong. The Turks, actually, were not a, uh, didn't care much about fighting. The Turks were very peaceful, and they wanted everybody to-- In fact, they gave the Greeks and all the nations their own, their freedom of religion and, uh, freedom of speech. But, uh, the territorial disputes, the land, and that's the cause of most wars, is the land that somebody has and somebody wants.

DALLETT: How did that all come to affect your father and, uh, your--

FERNANDEZ: My father had to flee, I guess, from one city to another. Well, perhaps, uh, to evade the draft, to find, uh, a better place to live, more food, and the fact that his father lived in, uh, Salonik, see. Big city, so we went to the big city.

DALLETT: So how, how old were you when you left Kavala to Salonik?

FERNANDEZ: I was, well, I really don't know. I must have been about two or three years old. I don't think we stayed very long in Salonik. My grandmother--

DALLETT: Do you have any memories at all of, of, uh, life there?

FERNANDEZ: I remember, my grandmother had left two years before with my, uh, from Monastia (?), had left, had sold her possessions. She was very well off. I understand she lived in a big house and she and my uncles, my two uncles, left. No, there were more than two. It was a big family.

DALLETT; Where did they go?

FERNANDEZ: They came directly to New York. American was the promised land. America was, uh, was freedom. Everybody thought of America, coming to America. So they came, uh, two years before because the conflicts really started in 1910, 1911. And they got out first. Then they had to accumulate money to send for us to come over.

DALLETT: Your grandfather was still in Salonik?

FERNANDEZ: My grandfather, who was not, no, not my mother's father, my father's father was in Salonik, and his wife. My mother's, uh, mother died right after she was born. She had, uh, I guess T.B. or something, or in childbirth, so that he remarried and he had the wife who had three children. They lived in Salonik. Uh, my, mother's parents, both parents, came over and the, and the children. It was several, several

children. One son remained in Turkey, because I remember his coming over from Istanbul years after that. I remember when they arrived at my house. He was the oldest of the sons. He had remained during the wars. I guess, uh, Turkey, the mainland of Turkey hadn't suffered as much. It was only Macedonia, the European side, because of the European nations fighting each other and together and fighting the Turks. Now, the Turks didn't have a chance, because they had all these people fighting.

DALLETT; Can you tell me what your earliest memory was?

FERNANDEZ: My earliest memory is going up some stone steps. Uh, there were little houses around the courtyard and a narrow stairs led up to the top there. We must have had the whole house, because the bottom must have been the basement, but we lived upstairs, up a flight. And I used to go up there, just my little, uh, practically half clothed, half clothed. And my sister tells me that I used to hang onto the wall. There was this, uh, clay, this, uh, stucco, whatever they, they, this, uh, crumbling stuff that they made the houses of. I used to grab and eat some of it. So I still have ny teeth, I guess. That had a lot of calcium. And I used to hun in the bread box for crumbs. There was nothing to eat. I was so skinny. They say that I was born and I weighed about two pounds. Uh, the Bulgarians were at the door at the time, they were fighting. And the Greeks were actually the enemy because we were Turkish citizens. So that the Greeks and

the Bulgarians were fighting against each other. That night the Bulgarians were outside the door. My father could not go for the midwife because they would shoot ant man on sight, so that my sister, who was about nine years old at the time, went out in the dark to get the midwife so that I could be born. And I think the trauma of that, with that, remained with me. They say that the trauma of birth can remain, because you have the fear. And I always lived in fear. Then I remember the bomb, the sound of the bombs, because they started throwing bombs there around 1911 or '12, is when they started throwing bombs.

DALLETT; And you remember hearing them?

FERNANDEZ: I remember hearing bombs. I remember the mothers shouting for the children to, "Come inside, come inside." I remember that.

DALLETT; Were there any special persecution, uh, of the Jews, at that time?

FERNANDEZ: No, no. Not at that time, no. The, the Turks were very good to us, to the Jews. Uh, there was no religious, no. There was no religious, uh, and there were many of us. Uh, the city of Salonik had a, a majority of our people, Jews. Out of, uh, say, one hundred seventy five thousand there were one hundred thousand of our people. And we all had the

freedom of religion that we wanted. The Turks gave us all the freedom. They didn't, uh, sometimes the Turks and the, now, Russia interceded under the pretext that she wanted to save the Christians from the Mohammadans, the Muslims in Turkey. That was her pretext, because she didn't care about religion, But by telling the Roumanians and the Serbians and the Greeks that she was coming in to save them because they were Christians and the Turks were Muslims, she, uh, she captured their imagination and their support so that, uh, she was able to, uh, get them together to fight against the Turks, the enemy Muslims, so to speak. But the Turks were always good to us. We had no conflict with them. They were good to us in Spain. We lived under the Turks in Spain for five hundred years. They never bothered us. (She laughs.)

DALLETT; Do you remember, uh, when the time came that it was time for you and your family to, to leave and come to America? Do you remember that period?

FERNANDEZ: It's just a period of fear. I, uh, don't remember. I know we took trains, we were fleeing, we took boats. But I don't recall that very well.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. You don't remember actually picking up what you might have carried with you?

FERNANDEZ: No. But I remember what my mother had when she came to this country.

DALLETT: What was that, that she had?

FERNANDEZ: She, uh, well, I know that she had tapestries, because we had , our walls were covered with tapestries. She had silken cloth, the kind the harem girls wear, threaded in gold and this, oh, this fine, she had copper pots, because she still used them for cooking, copper pans that too-- Uh, she had a gold necklace. I remember, and I think my older sister still has it. I remember the necklace so well. Three heavy strands of gold chain round and round. And, uh, I guess she, she had some more jewelry. How she managed to carry that, and perhaps she had, uh, uh, linens. She might have had embroidered linens, fancy linens. But she came from a pretty well-to-do family even though Monaster, the people in Monasta, that's a mountain, mountains. But, I know we had possessions, and slowly they disappeared, because they were being sold.

DALLETT; Once you came here.

FERNANDEZ: We had no money, yes. So they were sold.

DALLETT: Can you, tell me, what's your earliest memory of, of actually beginning the voyage, or being on the ship?

FERNANDEZ: Well, all I remember is the darkness because we were in steerage and we had to hide. We had to hide because, uh, the, uh, Italians had joined the war on the allied side. The Germans had received directives to use their, uh, submarines against the enemy ships.

DALLETT: And you were, you were--

FERNANDEZ: We were on an Italian ship called the Grazia of Italia. It was a freighter. Because that's all we could get. The Germans were after all freighters, and they were using their, uh, torpedoes.

DALLETT: What was the port that you left from?

FERNANDEZ: Naples.

DALLETT: Naples. How did you get to Naples, do you know?

FERNANDEZ: From Piraeus. The boat, yeah.

DALLETT: Piraeus. Okay.

FERNANDEZ: Yeah. By boat. And, uh, the, uh, luckily, I thank God for that Italian captain, because he dodged those submarines. The submarines did not hit us. How he did it I'll never know. We got to Ellis Island safely. And, uh--

DALLETT: Did the captain make everyone aware that, uh, submarines were there, or?

FERNANDEZ: No, no. We were in the bottom, we were in the bottom of the ship, and we didn't know. We were afraid. We knew that war, that's all we knew was war, so we knew that, uh, we were in danger and we had to keep quiet. I guess I spent the voyage just lying down on a cot or something. I wasn't that strong. In fact, I was weak, you know, malnourished and all.

DALLETT; Who were you traveling with?

FERNANDEZ: I was traveling with my father, Manuel. They call him Emanuel here. And my mother, her name was Buena, Buena, but they called her

Bertha because they couldn't understand the name. They asked, "What's your name?" My mother would say "Buena." "Oh, Bertha?" "All right, Bertha." Anything to it. Bertha Aroesti was my mother's maiden name, Aroesti, A-R-O-E-S-T-I, Sarfatti. My sister Regina, she was about thirteen, my brother Samuel, he was about eleven. I was about four, Victoria, four, and my brother Hyman was about a year and a half or two, about two years old.

DALLETT: So the whole family was, uh, lived together on the ship.

FERNANDEZ: Yes. Two were born in this country, yeah. We were all together. We were fortunate. I guess the passports from the, uh, chief rabbi helped us get over. And, uh, my sister said that we were detained in Italy until things were, well, I guess they kept us. They kept us for about forty days in Naples. Maybe because, uh, well, they were wondering who we were, the fact that, uh, we came from enemy territory, so to speak. And, they wanted to be sure that we weren't, uh, Turks. That's why the passport came in handy. We were Israelites. They called us Israelites. We were-- In fact, we were the original Israelites. We, uh, we came from Babylonia. That's another story. We came from

Babylonia. And then Nebuchadnezzar, and all that. So we were the original Israelites.

DALLETT: Okay. Back in 1916 when you were on the boat, tell me, anything else you can remember about that voyage?

FERNANDEZ: That the darkness, I remember that we had plenty to eat, because my mother helped the cooks, uh, cook food. She offered her services. She just couldn't sit around there. She was busy in the kitchen, and, uh, she got enough food. She got extra food so that we could eat. So we were able to eat. I think we were able to eat there. In fact, we ate more than we ever had in Greece so that, uh, when we came to this country, anything, to this very day, anything that's put before me I will eat, and I hate to see food wasted because I think that in my childhood I didn't have anything to eat. So that stays with you. So America was the promised land. I mean, we came to America. Well, we were detained in Ellis Island. Then we were afraid that they would deport us. Here we came to America and we were afraid of being deported.

DALLETT; Why were you afraid of being deported?

FERNANDEZ: My, my sister-- Well, they examined you. They were very strict about physical examinations, and mental, too. I remember going,

standing on lines. We were always standing on lines. A long hall, and separated into sections. I guess they called by countries or by families. And, uh, they'd examine each person. They'd bring you to another room for physical examination. Unfortunately, my sister--

DALLETT: Did they separate you, or were you alone when they examined you?

FERNANDEZ: Well, yeah. I guess we were, yeah. They brought us into another room. My sister developed warts on, on the back of her hand. And that was very suspicious. I mean, uh, anything, they would just re-examine you for that so that they put a chalk "X" on the back of her coat. She had to be put aside. The "X's" were put aside to see whether they had to be re-examined or deported. Now, they couldn't very well deport the whole family. If they deported my sister we couldn't let her go. Where would she go if they deported? Some kind man, I don't know who he, I don't know who he was, he might have been an official, or one of our people who worked in Ellis Island, somebody, just somebody, or perhaps a stranger, I don't know, told my sister to turn her coat around. She had a plush coat, a nice plush coat with a silk lining, and she, and they turned her coat around. They said, "For this? For warts we're not going to deport a whole family. That we cannot do. Where would they go? Back to the wars?" And they said, "Well, this is a little girl, she doesn't speak." They put the

cross on me. I didn't speak. I knew some Spanish, because we spoke Spanish. Our parents spoke Turkish and Greek. My father, my father spoke, uh, could get along with anybody there. Could speak to a Serbian, could speak to a Bulgarian. But our native language was Spanish, the Spanish of the Middle Ages. Because we had left Spain during the Renaissance, Middle Ages, Renaissance. We spoke that old Spanish, which sounded very much like Italian. We were taken as Italians. We were taken as Italians. With our name, coming from Italy, we were taken as Italians. My father spoke Italian. If he met a Greek he could speak Greek. If he met a Turk he spoke Turkish. We were cosmopolitan, we could do anything. So I don't know who that man was.

DALLETT: Do you know which language the officials were speaking?

FERNANDEZ: In Ellis Island?

DALLETT: Yeah.

FERNANDEZ: English.

DALLETT: English.

FERNANDEZ: Oh, yes. That's why they got our names. We were

English. I don't know. Perhaps there was an interpreter or somebody. But if they said, "Manuel Sarfatti." I guess they, they just, uh, did things. They didn't ask us too much. They just did things and looked at our documents and, uh, so that we didn't have to know too much.

DALLETT: Now how, now, tell me, again, how did they, uh, mispronounce the names?

FERNANDEZ: Well, uh, my father was Manuel, they say Manuel. Manuel's the Spanish of Emanuel. So they put Emanuel. And up till this time there was always Emanuel.

DALLETT: So that's what they put on his papers.

FERNANDEZ: Emanuel. And my mother was Buena, B-U-E-N-A, means "good" in Spanish. They said, "Oh, Bertha. Oh, yes, Bertha. Yes, Bertha." Regina's is easy. They couldn't mistake that. Sam, Samuel is easy. And Victoria, in Italian, Victoria is spelled with two T's instead of a C, so I don't know whether they put me down with "C-T" or two T's because in Spanish, in, uh, Spanish it's "C-T", but in Italian it's Vittoria. I was always called Vittoria anyway, at home. Vittoria. And, uh, Hyman. Hyman.

DALLETT: And how about the last name? Was that changed in any

way?

FERNANDEZ: Sarfatti, yes. That was changed in Italy. Uh, let's see what the passport, if it's still, no, I think it's changed, it must have been changed. Oh, yeah. I think that passport still had the "T-I", but I guess the documents from Italy, uh, doubled the T because the Italians never had one T. It's either two T's or two L's. The double L's. So that how our name was doubled. So we left it that way. During the Second World War, that was another thing. Sarfatti happened to be the secretary to Mussolini and they used to ask me whether she was my aunt, Marguerite Sarfatti. She was not of our, uh, she was of our people, you see. She was also a Spanish Jew. She was an Italian Jew. Italy and Spain always had commerce, they always, so that, uh, they were the same thing.

DALLETT; Uh-huh. Do you know if the officials there asked to see how much money your father had? Was there some sort of requirement that he have not only good health but money?

FERNANDEZ: Perhaps. I'm not sure. Well, they had possessions and, uh, luckily they didn't take anything. I mean, they were very honest.

DALLETT; Did they have to prove that someone was there--

FERNANDEZ: Yes. That's why we were detained also, besides that. After that we were detained, because nobody came to, to get us. See, they couldn't let us out. We had to be claimed by somebody. So we waited even longer. After I was cleared, see after the cross, they brought me up to a room, a classroom, I remember the classroom very well. It was a typical classroom with little desks where you have, in elementary school, little desks. They put a, uh, pegboard before me with little sticks of different shapes and little holes on the pegboard, and I had to put them. That was the intelligence test they gave me. I had to put them in place, the round ones and the square ones and all of that. And I did it perfectly. They said, "Oh, we must have made a mistake. This little girl, she doesn't speak English. Naturally, she doesn't know English, but she's very bright, intelligent." So they took the cross off me. So we were cleared. Now we had to wait to be, to be picked up by somebody.

DALLETT: Did they take you up there by yourself? They took you away from your mother?

FERNANDEZ: By myself. Uh-huh. By myself.

DALLETT: It must have been very frightening.

FERNANDEZ: It was frightening. Oh, the whole experience was frightening, the whole thing. I was frightened the first day of school later on. I was frightened living in the ghetto in Manhattan. I mean, that was the ghetto, I had to fight my way. The kids would pick on me, the kids would fight, and I'd be running. It was a frightening thing.

DALLETT: Do you remember, uh, being fed at Ellis Island, in a dining room?

FERNANDEZ: Yes, yes. I think I still, I could still smell that, uh, mutton or whatever. They used to give us a lot of stew. Stew, with vegetables, that didn't actually smell so good. Yeah. Oh, they gave us milk. Yes, they fed us, they fed us. And we ate everything because we were-- But I still recall the, uh, years later, when we used to go to, uh, a couple of times my mother would take us and go to the boat rides. They had free boat rides for the immigrants later on and they'd serve that same smelly stew. On long tables. I remember the long tables. We used to sit at long tables, lots of people all around. And the stew, and it smelled kind of strange. I don't know what they threw in it. But they fed us, oh yes.

DALLETT: How about the sleeping accommodations? Do you remember, did they separate your father, or were you all together?

FERNANDEZ: Hmm. I think we were all together, but I don't recall.  
I just don't recall.

DALLETT: And do you, do you know how long it was that your  
sister was separated because of the warts on her hand?

FERNANDEZ: Not long.

DALLETT: Or was it right away, the man--

FERNANDEZ: Right away somebody, some Good Samaritan, helped us. I  
don't know who he was. He didn't think that  
that was cause to send a whole family back. Besides,  
if they had sent us back on the boat after the boat  
unloaded it's cargo, I really don't know what the cargo  
was, it might have been oil or, well, from Italy, the  
Italian oil, or wine, or something. Couldn't be  
anything explosive or anything. Uh, it went back. And  
I understand that the Germans torpedoed the boat on the  
way back. So, uh, we were the last people that it, uh,  
brought back. Yes, so--

DALLETT: How many day were you at Ellis Island?

FERNANDEZ: We were there about two, three weeks, I imagine.

DALLETT: Three weeks?

FERNANDEZ: I imagine that.

DALLETT: My goodness. Do you remember what you would have done during the day? How did you pass the time?

FERNANDEZ: Just sitting around with each other talking, I guess. Talking and eating and just being afraid that they would get other notions about, uh, deporting us or something. We were just waiting.

DALLETT: And you were waiting to hear from your grandmother? Who was it--

FERNANDEZ: We were waiting. Yes, we were waiting to hear, because they didn't know we were there. They didn't know on which ship we were coming. We couldn't communicate with them in any way.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. You had their address.

FERNANDEZ: No.

DALLETT; You didn't.

FERNANDEZ: No. We didn't have any address.

DALLETT: So how were they going to be notified?

FERNANDEZ: Well, somebody, well, I, I really don't know. I don't think we could have said anything even if we had known the address. We didn't have it in writing. We couldn't say anything. We were just fortunate that, uh, somebody came to get one of his relatives. And, uh, my father heard him speaking in Spanish and, uh, so he went to him and said, "Oh, we're here and nobody's come for us." And, uh, my mother said, "My mother is here and my brothers are here, but they don't know we're here." So he, he, uh, he asked, "Well, what's your name?" The family, so, said, "Sarfatti." And my mother's name was Aroesti. So when he went back, the man, he left, he said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." He happened to go to a cafe, because that was a custom for the men to sip coffee in the Turkish cafes. And he was telling the story. You know, the men tell stories when they're in the cafe. He said, "Oh, this family I saw yesterday, they're

waiting for their relatives. One was named Manuel Sarfatti and, uh, his wife Buena Aroesti." So a man said, "Why, that's my sister. Buena's my sister." Oh, well. So he went to, my uncles, two uncles went, and they got us out. And we went to Allen Street, where my grandmother lived, on Allen Street. Allen, uh, near Delancey. Allen and, well, around Delancey. Delancey, sort of south of Delancey.

DALLETT: So, do you remember that day that your uncle would have come to Ellis Island, and you were then allowed to leave?

FERNANDEZ: I remember that we left, but that's, everything is vague. But I remember Allen Street.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. Tell me about Allen Street.

FERNANDEZ: Allen Street we had to go up stairs. Up, up, up, up. Must have been the fourth or the fifth floor. We lived high. And there was an elevated line running along Allen Street. That was all very strange because we never, we had never seen elevators. Trains rumbling across. I remember hearing the trains. You could look out the window and see the trains coming by. Well, a short time later, because it was, uh, winter time, I guess, uh, my grandmother waited for about a month or two and then

brought me to school, perhaps in January.

DALLETT; Just one second. We have to just flip over the tape. That is the end of side one of Interview Number 110 with Victoria Sarfatti Fernandez.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of Interview Number 110 with Victoria Fernandez.

FERNANDEZ: My grandmother thought that it was time for me to start learning about this country. to learn the language. So she, uh, brought me to school that day.

DALLETT; How long after you had arrived in New York was this?

FERNANDEZ: Perhaps, uh, about a month or two. She left me, she left me with a group of children sitting around there, and this teacher. I remember the teacher, very stern teacher, who used to make us bend our heads. When somebody was out of order we all had to put our heads down on

the desks, cover, and, uh, she would slap her ruler on the desk and shout. All this was very strange and very frightening to me. I didn't like it a bit. I didn't like it at all. Strange language being spoken. So my grandmother had told the daughter of a neighbor to bring me home at lunchtime. I was so afraid of everybody, including the teacher, the children, the whole place that when it was time to leave I ran away. I didn't wait for the girl. I ran out of the, out of the school, I ran. And I kept on walking. I remember passing a cigar store with an Indian statue, a cigar store Indian in front. I remember that Indian very well, because later on I used to go back to look for that Indian, to pass by. And I saw the elevated trains. I figured well, if I go up those stairs I'll be home. So I went up the stairs thinking those were the stairs to my, to the place where I lived, the elevated. I tried to get under the turnstile and, of course, the station master took me and, uh, brought me to a shelter, a police shelter, as a lost child.

DALLETT: Were you speaking any English by then? Had your grandmother--

FERNANDEZ: No. I couldn't speak, I didn't speak Spanish. They didn't understand, I didn't understand them. Little girl, where do you live? I didn't know what they were saying. I didn't know. They were these men. They were kind men, the police, I remember. They put me on the table,

to lie down on the table. They brought me a glass of milk and a big, round sugar cookie with sugar, pieces of sugar, sprinkled on top of the cookie. I remember that sugar. I could never eat a sugar cookie after that. I didn't like sugar on top of cookies. But they were kind, and, uh, I was lying down there on the table. I guess they put a blanket on. And I waited. And then suddenly in the dark, my uncle started calling around, and I hadn't come home. And they called around, until they found where I was, the police station. A little girl lost there, and they came and got me out. That was another time I was retrieved from danger. (They laugh.) So I was home. After that, all I know was that I was determined to learn. Whatever was going on I wanted to know. I learned English very well. I was very proud when I got my first library card. I just spent my days studying and, uh, I didn't want to worry about the world because the dangers. I knew it was dangerous. Of course I'd go out, go to school. We had to walk blocks and blocks to school by that time. But I learned my way around fast. And, uh, I read a lot, went to the library.

DALLETT;       Was there any kind of community?

FERNANDEZ: No. Our people, our people stayed, no, our people stayed, uh, within the family circle and there were others, our, others of our people. In fact, Allen Street, that street, I think, was full of our people, because that's, uh, how we would congregate in one area the way we

did in Europe. There was this all together. Now there were other Jews there in, uh, New York, but we were very different from them, and they thought we were Arabs or something. We were strange to them. They spoke Yiddish. We didn't understand Yiddish. We spoke Spanish. So we never had any contact with the, uh, Ashkenazy Jews, as they called them. We were the Sephardic Jews and they were the Ashkenazy Jews.

DALLETT: So there was a synagogue there that--

FERNANDEZ: Uh, there was a Spanish Portuguese synagogue. See, we were Spanish Portuguese, yes. I remember the synagogue. But only the men went amongst, only men went to synagogues. The women would go once a year on high holy days. Because I remember my, my mother would go and fast all day. That was a fast day. She'd sit in the synagogue to fast, I remember that.

DALLETT: What did your father do when he came here?

FERNANDEZ: My father, uh, he had, uh, weak lungs, because he had worked in the tobacco factories. Kavala was a tobacco center of Europe. That's where they had the Scanasi Tobacco Factories. Like the Reynolds here, it was Scanasi there. He worked a while. He also, uh, had a fruit market. I think his father had a fruit market, so that, he had to work

outdoors. He could no longer work in the, uh, because his lungs were weakened. When he came to this country he started working in the factory. And, uh, then he told us a story. He was fired from the factory because he didn't understand English at the time and somebody said to him, "Push." I guess he had to push a machine or something, he had to push something. And "push" in Turkish is an insult, it's a big insult. I don't know what it means. It could be anything, you know. I mean, a terrible insult. So my father had a fight with the man. I guess he hit him or something. "You're not going to me a 'push.'" So then, uh, and then, of course, uh, the factory he worked was, uh, difficult for him, because he had to be outdoors. So, uh, he took a stand at the Italian market around Mulberry and Thompson Streets. That was the Italian neighborhood there. And he, uh spoke Italian. Of course, he was with the Italians there. And, uh, I remember, it wasn't actually a stand, it was something spread on the floor. And, uh, we had relatives who were in the lingerie business. They made women's panties and things. So he sold, uh, those things. I remember. He sold, once he brought me there, and my mother used to help him, my mother used to, we kids were left alone and we went to school, we took care of ourselves, until our parents came home. My mother would come home about three, four o'clock, loaded with two bags, shopping bags, of food. We, we waited because we were hungry. We didn't know how to cook or anything, so we waited for my mother to come back and then she'd put the beans on, because we liked to eat beans and rice, you know, Italian beans, and she'd put the

beans, and we'd wait. "When are the beans going to be ready?" And I'd take a bowl and I'd crumble up some bread, any bread, the bottom of the bowl, and I was waiting for the beans. They were half cooked. I said, "That's all right. I'll eat them." I remember my mother pouring the beans over the bread. I liked that. Big bowl of beans, or whatever vegetables from the Italian market. My father would bring home, uh, heads. The Italians used to eat, uh, beef heads. I remember eating heads. I like to eat the, I think I used to eat the eyes. Oh, I don't know, but I think I used to eat the eyes, but it was so good, the meat. My father would bring home chestnuts and roast them. I would watch him roast them. We had a coal stove, a big coal stove and he would, he would roast the chestnuts and I would, he'd give them to me to eat. And he also used to bring home from the Turkish cafes, he always spent some time at the Turkish cafes with his cronies and all the Turks. And, uh, he'd bring home if he won a card game, he would bring home meringues, a bagful of meringues. They were my favorites. He knew that. He'd say, I'd say, "What's in the bag?" He'd say, "Oh, something you don't like." I'd say. "Let me see. I think I like it. Let me see." He'd tease me. And they were meringues. To this day I'm crazy about meringues. So that was what these little treats, things that I remember. But, uh, we had plenty to eat. My mother made sure. She made sure of it on the boat, and she made sure of it there, that we always had enough to eat. She, she shopped, and she worked very hard helping my father. One day my father brought me, because my mother had a headache.

She used to get these migraine headaches. And, uh, one Saturday he brought me to the market to watch. And I sat there, and all these people milling around, you know, very crowded. And I'm looking, and staring. I must have been about six or seven years old. And, uh, next to us was a man who sold umbrellas. I always remember those umbrellas. And, uh, a man, uh, a tall, dark haired man, as I'm looking, the man is, is, had his back turned making change or something, and I see the man take an umbrella. And he sees me, he catches my eyes, and I'm watching as he's taking the umbrella, and the man does that, with a menacing look on his face. While I was doing that, somebody stole a couple of panties that my father was selling, but I never told my father that a man had stolen the umbrella. Never. Because I thought that that man, that frightening man, would do something to my father. Even as a child, I knew enough to protect him. And I never told him, all through the years. And my father would say, "I brought you here." And my mother, when she found out, "You went there to watch. I brought you there to watch and they stole things from me. What kind of watcher are you?" I said, "I don't want to go there any more. I don't want to go there any more." They never brought me again. But I didn't tell them why. See, I didn't defend myself. I didn't say, "Well, a bad man was stealing there and I was looking." I never said I had the fear the man would somehow find out and get after my father.

DALLETT: Yeah. You had to protect him. Yeah. How long was it

before you, uh, started to feel Americanized in some sense? How long was it before everything wasn't so strange, like you said it was in the beginning?

FERNANDEZ: Oh, well, as soon as I, uh, got my library card, started reading and, uh, and I loved school.

DALLETT: How long did it take you to learn the language?

FERNANDEZ: Not long. I learned, uh, very quickly. In fact, I was skipped. I think, uh, I went into 1-A, and then I went to 3-B. I was a very good student. I wanted to learn fast. And I read all the time. Every Saturday I'd go to the public library and take out two or three books in the morning. In the afternoon I would get five cents. That was my weekly five cents, and I'd spend it in the movies. That's Saturday afternoon. I'd spend about five or six hours because we had double features, we'd have Pathe news, uh, episodes, two episodes. Perils of Pauline and something else. And, uh, we'd be there about five hours. Not we, I, I would go alone with my little bag of fruit or cookies. I always had something. And I was there for the first show. Must have been about

twelve o'clock, so I could spend till five o'clock. So I learned my way around. I was very independent. And I was a good student.

DALLETT: Uh, this is hard to do, but can you sort of give me a nutshell after, you know, you were only seven years old at this point, but can you give me a nutshell of, uh, the events of your life after that, once you were settled in this country?

FERNANDEZ: You mean all, all through the years?

DALLETT; Well, yes.

FERNANDEZ: You want to know? Well, I went to school and I, since I was, I, they told me that I was put in school, I was made two years older, I was not to have to wait around. They didn't take us until we were six at the time, so I was six. That made me nineteen, my birthday 1910. Uh, I, uh, I studied, I went to, and I was graduated, uh, from Seward Park High School in January, 1928. And I'd gotten a scholarship. Yes. So that I went into Hunter College immediately. That was in February of 1928. I majored in Spanish, I minored in French. I took all the languages I could. I had a term of Latin and a term of German, a term of Italian. And I had education courses, and all the Spanish courses that they gave at Hunter

College, and a few French courses. So about a hundred thirty-one and a half credits, I think. Now, I had graduated first in my class in high school, but in college, I did pretty well, but of course I was not completely an A student, but, uh, I did all right. Uh, and I was graduated from college in, June of '31.

DALLETT: You had your family in New York.

FERNANDEZ: No. I met, uh, we lived in Brooklyn. We moved over the bridge. We lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on Barry Street. I remember Barry Street. It was close to the water. I guess it reminded us of, of the old country, you know Greece, with the water there. So, a few of our family lived there. Later on we moved to, uh, New Lots, which is all the way in the country. We wanted country instead of city so we were all the way out in New Lots. That's near Canarsie. And I traveled from New Lots on the train to get to Hunter College then. And I used to take courses, some courses were given at night, so that, uh, one or two times a week I would spend all day in school. I would sit around. We didn't have a campus, but we had a field outside the school. And I'd bring food so that I'd have something to eat, and I'd spend, and then go home with a girl that I used to study with. She also took the same courses, my friend Millie. We studied in Spanish and we went home together in Brooklyn. We, uh, we had a, uh, some cousins living nearby and they, uh, they had friends. The Mexicans

had started coming in from Mexico in the, the 30's, in the 20's, after the Revolution. And they were giving a party, some people on the corner and, uh, these two cousins of mine said, "Oh--" We call them cousins. They might have been distantly related. "Oh, they're having a party. Come on. I'm going. You want to come?" I said, "All right." "Oh, they're Spanish people." I said, "Oh, good." I was studying Spanish. You know, I was interested. So we went to the party, and that's where I met my husband. He was there. Then he found out where I lived and he used to pass by and I used to look out the window. We lived on the first floor. And I used to look out the window. All very romantic. But he was not of my religion so, uh, he was Catholic. We knew each other about a year. You know, just friendship, platonic. And, uh, I had, and we'd just go to, uh, sit in the park or something. Of course, I, I didn't dare tell my parents. And, uh, and we eloped, we got married in New Jersey, Newark, New Jersey.

DALLETT: Had you already become a citizen by that point?

FERNANDEZ: Uh, I became a citizen in 1925, through my father's papers. Then I got my derivative citizen papers in 1950, because I didn't have any documents. I wanted my own documents. My father was so proud of his citizenship papers. I wonder what happened to them now. He was so proud after he passed that test and he got his papers. He used to carry that wallet around with him to show them, "I'm a citizen, I'm a citizen."

He was so proud.

DALLETT: Do you have any of the original papers that, uh, you showed me one of the papers. Could you just say what that was? Are there any other papers that you brought from, uh--

FERNANDEZ: The only thing I have is the passport.

DALLETT; The passport.

FERNANDEZ: Yeah.

DALLETT: I hope--

FERNANDEZ: It's over there.

DALLETT; Yeah. If you could just mention it, I'm asking, the National Park Service wants to know who has what.

FERNANDEZ: Oh. I have the passport. Okay. I have the passport that was issued to us by the chief rabbi of Athens so that we could leave the port, the country. They were going to close the borders. We got out just before they closed the borders, because, uh, after that they didn't

allow any people to come out. That was the height of the, uh, First World War at that time and they had shot the, uh, not too far from where we lived, they shot the Austrian Arch Duke, Francis, uh-- (Telephone rings.) I won't answer the phone. It might be a neighbor, you know. Uh, Francis, uh, Francis Ferdinand and his wife (?). The Serbian had done that. Serbia and, uh, and that, of course. Then, uh, Germany declared war on Russia, and, uh, Russia was in it all the time. And the, uh, different countries started, and then Britain declared war on Germany, and this whole thing. And then Italy joined in. And that's, uh, so they were closing the borders. Now, the Greeks were now in control, so we were actually the enemy. We were, we had to get out. We couldn't live under Greek domination. We were the Turks. So that, uh, we were lucky to get out before they closed the borders.

DALLETT: Have you ever gone back to visit?

FERNANDEZ: No. In 1970 I got a charter flight with the school teachers and, uh, I had, and I belonged to a co-op in Washington, DC, a co-op, and they, they were sharing a plane, the charter flight. There was a cancellation at the last minute, and I got on the flight and went to England. And it was the summer time and I had just gotten over a sore throat. And, uh, in Washington. I lived in Washington, DC at that time. And I had just finished teaching a year and a half so that I had the money

to go. It was only Two hundred and three dollars round trip, those days. We landed in, uh, England, and then I was on my own for, but, uh, I was not feeling too well, and I meant to go to Greece, but I never got there. Instead I went to England, I went to Paris, and from Paris I went to, uh, Madrid and then I, then I went to, uh, Barcelona, and I still wasn't feeling too well, so I thought, well, perhaps if I go to Amsterdam where I'm supposed to meet people for the return trip, I would stay in Amsterdam. But the weather was terrible. I couldn't get any place to stay. So I stayed overnight in some place the taxi driver brought me to, and then went back. And on the train, I had a Eurorail pass, on the train I met a German couple and I asked them whether they knew of any place, a resort, where I could just stay and rest and get some good food because I wasn't feeling too well. Staying in France, I must have eaten the wrong things. And, uh, they brought me to Baden-Baden, because they lived nearby, and they told the taxi driver exactly where to take me. See, in Europe you, uh, you trust people. They were strangers. And I, uh, I went to a hotel in Baden-Baden. It was very cheap. Fifteen dollars, and three meals a day. So I had a chance to see Germany. I recuperated there, and I went to Munich and Frankfort. And from Frankfort I went to Amsterdam.

DALLETT: But you never got a chance to go back to--

FERNANDEZ: Never got a chance to go back to Greece because by that

time I couldn't travel too much. I was alone and not feeling that well, being in strange countries.

So I never went. But I want to go. My son wants to send me. "Any time you want to go," he says, "I'll send you." And I could just take my savings and whatever he wanted to give me, so I can go any time. I hope to be able to go, even though I'm hijacked I'll go, I don't care. I'll go.

DALLETT; Okay. I think I've asked you everything I need to, unless there's anything else you want to add.

FERNANDEZ: Oh, I don't know. No, I think I've told you everything. I'm happy to be here and, uh, of course, uh, you have to live according, you have to live according to circumstances. Now I think, oh, well, I think back to the Depression. In Depression, uh, I remember the Depression. I remember it very well. My father had a WPA job. He used to clean the parks. He used to pick up trash in the parks. Anything that had money. Because we didn't want to take any, uh, those days they called it relief. We didn't want to take relief. I remember once my mother went to get surplus food somewhere, things that we never ate. Powdered eggs and powdered milk. I used to have, in those days, we had milk from cows. When we went to New Lots we had cows across the street. We got fresh milk to

drink. And, uh, lard, which we never ate, we never used, and corned beef, which we never used because we were used to lamb and the good things. And I'd say, "Oh, ma, why'd you go and carry all these heavy things and we don't even eat it?" She'd day, "Don't worry. I'll give it to the neighbors. They will eat it." So she got the surplus food once or twice. But I was very proud. I didn't even want to take that scholarship because I had pride. I was interviewed by a couple of society ladies there, and I didn't like the way they spoke to me. I mean, they're so high and mighty. So I, uh, I said I wasn't interested in going away to school I'd rather go to the city college. So that's how my life--

DALLETT: Uh, that is the end of side two and the end of Interview Number 110 with Victoria Sarfatti Fernandez and the time is 10:55.