

KECK-177
STEPHEN PETERS
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ALBANIA, 1920
AGE 14
PASSAGE ON "THE PRESIDENT WILSON"

DANE: This is Debbie Dane, and I'm speaking with Mr. Stephen Peters on Monday, June 2nd, 1986. We're Beginning the interview at 3:30 PM and we're about to interview Stephen Peters about his immigration experience from Albania in 1920. He was fourteen years old, and this is Interview Number 177. Mr. Peters, we'll start at the beginning. Where were you born, what town, and when?

PETERS: I was born in 1906 in a little village in southern Albania called Treske. I was the third of ten children my father had. When I was six years old the Balkan War started so I went to school between 1912, when I was six years old, until 1917, when we lost everything. I had only two years of schooling. And those two years were in a Greek school,

because there was no Albanian school allowed. So I was really illiterate, uh, when I came to this country in 1920. My father was a fairly well-to-do gentleman farmer and businessman. Then, in 1916, the area where we came from became a no man's land. The French were on one side, and the Austrians on the other. And they exterminated everything that we had. The houses were burnt down. Our livestock was lost. So, in April of 1917 we had to flee as refugees. We had, all we could take with us was what we could load on two mules. And we came to a, uh, near a city called Korce which is a large city in southern Albania. But we couldn't get into the city because it was French. We crossed into French territory. We couldn't get into the city because the French had surrounded it with barbed wire. So we had to stay in a, uh, in a village near there. This was in the summer of 1917. We almost starved to death. In fact, one of my brothers, tiny little brother. six months old, died of starvation, because we couldn't find anything to eat.

DANE: While you were waiting there.

PETERS: We were waiting to get into the city. But there was nothing to buy. There was no, we could get beans and, uh, grind the beans and try to make bread, but the taste was awful. In any case, finally, we got into the city, in Korce. This was in September of 1917. And there I managed to go one year in

an Albanian School. When the War was over, my father already sent my oldest brother here in the United States in 1915. So when the War was over, we received notice from my brother that he was ready to send us money if there was some way to send it to Albania. And we found means, and he sent four hundred dollars.

DANE: What was he doing? H did he, what was his job here?

PETERS: He was working as a, uh, uh, in a shoe factory somewhere. So that really revived us. And, uh, then my father decided that it was time for me to go and earn a living here and also help the family back home. So, on May the 15th, 1920, an agent of a shipping company, an Italian shipping company, collected 48 of us, mostly children, if I call myself a child, and women. And there were only four male adults in the group. And we waited all day, for Korce, that area over there was still a part of, uh, occupied by France, even though it was 1920. There was really no Albanian state as yet. So we waited all day outside the city there. The French trucks, which had promised to come, never came. So the next day we tried again, and the French trucks did come. We were loaded in trucks, and crossed into Greece, Florina, Greece, to take a train. Albania had no railroads in those days. There, uh, there was a train which came from Yugoslavia. The passenger cars were completely filled, so

they put us, they added two cattle cars, and they put us into those cattle cars, and, uh, we went to Solonika, Greece. From there, there was a better train, we went into Athens.

DANE: May I stop you for just a second. You were fourteen years old.

PETERS: Yes.

DANE: You'd left your family.

PETERS: That's right.

DANE: Put on a train with complete strangers into--

PETERS: Well, I wouldn't say strangers, because all these 48 people came from the same area. It was one group, all from the same villages. Actually, most of them either were cousins, and there was an uncle, who had been in United States with me.

DANE: Uh-huh. Were you, what were your thoughts when you said goodbye to your parents?

PETERS: Well, actually, I didn't want to go, and my father had to push me into the truck, because I was scared. But it was a

matter either of staying there starving or coming here.

DANE: But could you understand that as a fourteen year old?

PETERS: Yes, you could. I could understand. I'd been, actually, I'd been working for the last two years doing all kinds of chores in, uh, in the city there. So, no, I was pretty mature for that age. Actually, I think my father made me a little older than I was because he had heard that in the United States you could not have a full job if you were under fourteen. So he might have made me a little older in the passport. I had a French, L'Assez Passez they called it. It wasn't a passport. In any case, I understood pretty well. I knew.

And finally we landed in Patras, Greece, three days after we left, or three or four days. And there a shipping, uh, company, the doctor of a shipping company examined all of us. We didn't have any, any, uh, reservations yet. But the agent who was taking care of us had been in contact of an Italian shipping company. (?), uh, Shipping Lines, from Trieste, Italy. And a doctor examined us soon after we arrived in Patras, and they found me and some others to have trachoma. And the doctor said, "You can never go to the United States. They'll never, you'll never pass Ellis Island." He mentioned Ellis Island. That's the first time I heard of Ellis Island. But since there was no way of, uh,

going anyhow, there was no, we didn't have any reservations anywhere, he said, "Well, I'll treat you for \$25. And by the time you are ready to go, you'll be all right." So I began treatment, along with some others, for just trachoma. I didn't have TB, because he was looking for TB, too, the doctor. And we stayed in, uh, in Patras from about the 18th or 19th of May until the 28th of June. I was taking these treatments, and all the rest of them were waiting.

DANE: Where would you stay? Did they put you up, the steamship place, or how--

PETERS: No. There was a cheap hotel on the harbor there. A very cheap hotel with mice running around. And we all stayed in one single hotel. The shipping, uh, company, put us in there. I don't know how much we paid, maybe a dollar a day or something.

DANE: Would they check with you, would you check every day to see if there was a boat that day?

PETERS: No, no. It was decided that we would go on a boat that would leave Patras on the 28th of June. That was six weeks later. So we stayed there, and I recall we used to buy little canned, canned salmon, brought from the United

States and sold in the Greek market, and grapes, and things of that kind. Whatever we could find. But always ate in the rooms where we lived. So finally, on the 28th of June, a boat came from, uh, from Trieste, Italy. And the name of the boat was President Wilson. On the, uh, President Wilson, you could read that the real name was Emperor Franz Josef, the name of the boat. Apparently, the boat had been seized during the War in Trieste, by Italy, and changed the name from Emperor Joseph, Franz Josef, to, uh, President Wilson. In any case, we got on the boat. The boat had three classes. There was first class, small, second class, a little larger, and then steerage, or third class. That's where we were. There were two huge rooms, and they had bunks, and we slept in those bunks. Most of the passengers were Italian. Uh, Albanians and some Greeks, but most of them were Italians, very poor. There we were fed twice a day. We ate spaghetti and some wine at eight o'clock in the morning, and spaghetti and wine at four o'clock in the, uh, in the afternoon. And this lasted from June the 28th until about the 16th of July when we arrived in New York. We stopped. The boat sailed from Trieste and then Patras, Greece, and then Naples, where it took a number of Italians. Then we stopped again in Algiers for, uh, coal, and then in the Azores for coal, and

then finally in New York. We arrived in New York on a beautiful, I think it was July the 16th, a beautiful dawn. And the first thing I saw was the, uh, Statue of Liberty. It was a magnificent sight. Awesome sight. And also the sky-scrapers.

I can never forget the Bowery. Soon as we arrived, we were told that, uh, we would have to wait on the boat for at least three days before we could disembark,

because the Harbor was just replete with boats that come from all over Europe. So, there was no limit in those days as to the, uh, number of people who could come to the United States. We didn't need any visas of any kind. All you had to do was to have a passport,

that's all. So the day we arrived a, people from Public Health Service came. They weren't doctors. And examined us, and found that we had lice. Most of us had lice on our hairs, all over. So they packed all of us, all of the

Albanian group, 48. I don't know what they did with the Italians, and so on. And took us to a little island, not very far, somewhere there on the Harbor. I don't know what the name of the island was. And they undressed us, and gave

us pajamas. We looked like prisoners. And shaved our heads and washed us, and then threw our clothes into an oven. Now, they couldn't shave the women's heads, so they washed their heads with gasoline. And, uh, we

stayed there overnight. They gave us the clothes back, and we were sent back on the boat, and stayed two more days. And we were watching Ellis Island. It was, the boat was out in the Harbor there. And we could see Ellis Island, the place where we were hoping to get, and it looked beautiful. The, uh, the, uh, lawns, I could see the lawns today, were green and manicured perfectly. Finally the day came. It was a Sunday. Sunday morning. They said we are going. And I was shivering because I didn't know, personally, whether I was going to pass or not, because of my trachoma problem. In any case, we were put on a large ferry, I think it was a ferry boat, and taken to the island, to the, uh, Ellis Island. And disembarked there. We were, uh, only a small group in comparison with a large number of other people all over the, uh, the sidewalks in line, in preparation for going up to the clinic for examination. And the noise, and the languages, uh, uh, were absolutely incomprehensible. That scared me more than anything else. Another thing that scared me before, before we were sent to Ellis Island, was watching from, watching from the boat the people who were working in the piers. And in those days, you know, practically everything was done by hand, and I would see these porters with huge, uh, trunks on their backs, and I was saying to myself, "How can I do this?" You see, I was expecting to be a laborer, naturally. And,

uh, that scared me a lot, watching these porters, or whatever they were, with huge packages on their back. In any case, we landed and, uh, then finally our turn came. We were lined up outside, in one of the sidewalks there. It was a beautiful day, a Sunday, until our turn came. Then we were lined up and sent to an upper room, uh, and there was this clinic. The doctors, a large number of doctors there, and nurses. And, as I recall very clearly, the doctor undressed me up to here. I had some homespun clothes made by my mother, and examined me thoroughly. And I was shivering, and I could listen to the doctor telling something to the nurse, but I didn't understand what they were, I spoke only Albanian and some Greek. I couldn't understand a word of English, of course. Not a single word. So he examined, I recall he put something on my chest here, thoroughly. Then, when he was examining my eyes, I began shivering, because I was afraid. Uh, I noticed that the other doctors who were examining some of the members of our group, were putting an "X" on some of the, uh, on the lapels. And I was told beforehand that if you get an "X" you go back to the boat. And so I didn't know what was going to happen. Finally the doctor said, "Put the dress on." By sign. And he put no cross on my lapel. And I passed. Then, when the whole group had passed through, we were sent down. The noise was deafening, because there were children crying and women crying. These people who were, who had "X's" were sent to a room there. And that was awful to

listen to the noise. I just don't know where that, uh,
room was, but it must have been on the same level. In any case,
after we finished the examination, we were sent down to a
huge hall, and it had, uh, not desks, but benches. And you
sat on those benches and you pulled through. At the end of
the hall there were the investigators, not the investigators,
the examiners. And as each one, all of us speaking the same
language, we were put in one row, And we were examined, each
one of us was examined. When I went there, he asked me what
language I spoke, and I didn't understand what he said. But
there was, he had a Greek interpreter there. And, uh, uh,
he knew I came from Albania. He saw the little, uh, French
passport I had. So he told the Greek, the Greek interpreter,
to ask me where I was going, and I told him I was going to
Boston. And who was waiting for me there and I said I had
an older brother and an uncle in Boston. And then he asked
me whether I had twenty-five dollars with me, and I showed
him twenty-five dollars. Then he wrote on a small card,
2" x 4", my name and the place where I was going. It was 21
Wall Street, as I recall. West End, Boston. And, uh, he
pinned that on my lapel here. And said go through, and that
was the end of that. And after everybody passed, we were
taken to a, what looked like a restaurant. There were, uh,
tables there. And we were given the best sandwiches I ever
ate in my life. There were these Red Cross women, I think,

well dressed, old women. Very sweet, and they gave us ham sandwiches, and they gave us, I recall eating an orange and an apple. It was fantastic. Finally, after we had something to eat, and they gave us milk, too. Oh, it was good. Uh, I felt, then, that I was in the United States. So the whole of us were then put on a tugboat, or some kind of a, uh, ferryboat, and taken to the Bowery. Some of these women, old women, were accompanying us. In the Bowery we were taken down to the subway, and that was scary. I'd never seen a subway in my life. Never heard of a subway car. And the noise, because the windows were open, there was no air conditioning, apparently, in those days, the windows of the, uh, subway trains were open. The noise was awful. In any case, we, I was, as I recall, shivering all time. Finally we got to the, uh, railroad station. It was Grand Central Station. And there these women, uh, helped us get into the , well, we bought tickets, five dollars, I recall, of my twenty-five dollars, five dollars were gone. And we were all loaded into a, uh, train. And, uh, four or five hours later that evening, Sunday, we arrived in Boston, South Station. And from there my uncle, who was with me, and another man who had been in the United States before and had gone back to Albania to get married and came back, they knew how to take the subway. So we took the, uh, actually it was the elevator, in Boston, and took us to North Station. Then,

from there, we walked to where my brother and my uncle lived, in the worst slum you ever saw in your life. This was 21 Wall Street, near Causeway Street, North Station. And, uh, there I met my brother. I hadn't seen him for four years. He was five years older than I was. And that was it.

DANE: Do you remember, I'll start backwards, because I have a couple of questions. Did you remember what your brother even looked like? I mean--

PETERS: No. He had changed so much. He looked so grown up, so well dressed and so on. I didn't recognize him, but he grabbed me and loved me and kissed me. And he said, "You are with me." Tried to make me feel at home. He and four other men were living in a, uh, on one of those tenement house built by the factories for cheap labor, on the fourth floor. They were big buildings, but attached. They were all men because, women, all of them were single. There were three bedrooms there, and a kitchen. The bedrooms had no light. The kitchen had a, uh, gas light. And it had a stove. There was cold running water. No central heating, of course. And we were six in that apartment. There were five when I came. I was the sixth. Two slept in one room, three in another room, and one in another room. And there was no, no bathroom. There were two apartments there. We occupied one, and another one on the

other side was occupied by an Italian family of about six or seven children. And in the hallway there was a commode and we had to use that as a bathroom. So we had to wait in line very often. For bath, well, there were three showers in, uh, North End, near the North Church. So every Saturday afternoon, after we came back from work, we took a piece of soap and a towel, and walked down from West End to, do you know Boston? From West End to, uh, North End where the Italians lived. West End was a, uh, Jewish ghetto with some Albanians and a few Italians, but mostly Jewish, poor Jewish, from Eastern Europe. We used to go to the public baths there and take a shower. That was our weekly chore. We had to do that every week, otherwise we stunk. Well, I stayed a week, uh, uh, with my brother. He was working, of course, in a shoe factory, until, uh, he found me a job in another factory in South Boston, a shoe factory. So I began working a week after I got here. Uh, it was a piece of work. All I had to do was, shoes came to me through a belt and I had to put them through a last to see if they fitted. If they fitted, okay. Otherwise I threw them on the side. I didn't need any, uh, any language of any kind. It was purely piece work. I worked there for a while, making about six or seven dollars a week, because it was piece work. Then I realized that wasn't enough. So across the street was a huge American Can Company. Now, some of the boys who came with me were working there. And the said, "Look, we have, we are making fourteen dollars a week in here." So I left the shoe factory and went there and

worked two years. It was hard work. I still have cuts all over
my hands because they had no protective devices of any kind,
and no labor unions to protect you, of course, in those days.
And I stayed there for a couple of years.

DANE: Were you able to send money home during this, or--

PETERS: Oh, yes. Everything we made we sent, everything we made,
actually. We bought second hand stuff. I recall my brother
bought me second hand, there were Jewish, uh, little Jewish
shops around there, Causeway Street, which sold second hand
shoes and second hand clothing and so forth. So we bought
second hand stuff. And anything we could save, we sent it
back home. Uh, in any case, after two years of this American
Can factory, uh, one of the boys who came with me found that
the best place to work was in a restaurant because you can
eat there well. So one Sunday he said, "Come, come with me,"
he said. "I'll get you a job in Child's Restaurant." In
those days Child's Restaurants were a, uh, uh, well, no, uh,
they don't exist any more. So on a Sunday morning I went
there and I began washing dishes and I ate wonderful chicken
and so on. So I didn't go back to the American factory, to
American Can Company. I stayed there. And, uh--

DANE: Were you able to learn English during this time. or--

PETERS: Well, I was going to tell you about that. I came in July. Then, in September, I began going to school in the afternoon, after work. And that's when I began learning English. There was a, uh, grammar school around the corner there, on Normer Street, and I began going, uh, in September of 1920. Uh, the teachers were wonderful. They knew how to handle us. Uh, all of us were immigrants, either Italian or Albanian or Jews, Jewish boys and girls. So I began picking up English very quickly. And, uh, as I said, I only had about, an average of about three years of schooling when I came her. So be 1924 I finished grammar school and I got a, uh, a diploma, which I still have. Washington Elementary School in Boston, going evenings, after work, until about nine o'clock at night. In any case, uh, after working a couple of years at the American Can Company, I went to work at a restaurant. First washing dishes, and then washing floors and so on. And in the meantime I, uh, uh, was improving in my language, and so on. And, uh, I became a waiter. That was quite an advancement for me. That is, from washing dishes to a waiter. In the meantime, my brother had made me a member of YMCA. And that was really, uh, a tremendous change in my, uh, in my life. Because while I was a member of the YMCA, and when I finished the, uh, when I got through with my grammar school, I was told by somebody there that, uh, I could go to high school. The, uh,

at the YMCA, if I could afford to pay fifty dollars.

DANE: This is the end of Side One, Mr. Peters. Number 177.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DANE: This is the beginning of Side Two, Mr. Peters, Number 177.
It's 4:00 PM. You were saying, fifty dollars, then you
could--

PETERS: Well, yeah. I could, uh, uh, I could, uh, go to school
there instead of going to a public high school in Boston. So I
registered. The name of the school was Northwestern Prep
School. Actually, it was part of Northwestern University.
Northwestern University, in those days, had only about 600
students, and it met. It was part of the YMCA, actually.
And our classes were in the YMCA building, 316 Huntington
Avenue. It's still there. So I, uh, uh, enrolled at the
prep school. This was in 1926. That is, I stayed out. I
got my, uh, I finished my grammar school in 1924 and then
worked a couple of years, and I began going to the prep
school. In 1929, uh, when I was, uh, a junior, one of the,
uh, my English teacher, said, "Look, what are you going to

do the rest of your life?" I said, "Work as a waiter in a restaurant." They said, "Forget it. You should go to college." I said, "How can I?" They said, "Take the college entrance, college entrance examination." And I said, "Where should I go?" He said, "Go to the best." He was actually, this English teacher, was working for a Ph.D. at Harvard, he was somewhere from Midwest, middle of the West. He was really wonderful. So in 1929, in June, I took the college boards and, uh, I applied at Harvard. But I didn't have the money to go the first year. So I applied and, uh, Mrs. Pennypecker was the Dean of Admissions, uh, told me that, uh I didn't have, my grades weren't high enough for a scholarship. But she suggested that why didn't I work a year and enroll the following year. So I did, I continued working as a waiter. I, uh, by the end of the year I had saved one hundred dollars. That's all you needed for admission fee. And in September 1930 I was admitted as a freshman with the Class of '34.

DANE: Did you surprise yourself? I mean could you--

PETERS: No. I took everything as it came along. Going at Harvard was quite an experience. I majored in English and Social Studies. It was fantastic. Harvard in those days had some of the best, uh, professors. George Lyman Kertridge, for instance, was teaching Shakespeare. I had his course every

single year while I was there. So I got my A.B in '34, and then I decided to be an E.D.M., Master of Education, so I stayed two more years, Graduate School of Education. And in '36 I got my EDM and applied for a job in the Boston school system. And I got a job there, but in the meantime I decided to visit my family, because my family was still in Albania. Except another brother had arrived in 1930, but the rest of the family, my father and more, three or four other children, were still in Albania. So I decided to go to visit them during the summer. I saved enough money. So I left at the end of June and went to capitol city, Tirane and somebody told me there that I should go and see King Zog. Because he was looking for educated people. Well, I hesitated to do that, because I didn't have a,uh, good impression of Zog. But I decided to go and see the Minister of Education. So I went there and he convinced me to stay in Albania for a while and try to introduce the, the, uh, American educational methods, at a teacher's college in Elbasan. So I wrote back to the School Board in Boston and said that I decided to stay in Albania for a while. So I stayed there for about three years, until March of 1939. And, uh, I was professor of education at the Teacher's College, the only teacher's college they had in Elbasan. And then I came back here. But one of the main reasons really that I wanted to stay in Albania was to try to get my family back in the States. And if I stayed there, the pay was excellent. They paid very

well, all in gold. So I began sending my family here. First I sent my mother, because in order to bring the children here, outside of the (?), you had to have the parents here. So first I sent my mother here, and she joined my two other brothers in Boston, one of whom was already married. And then after she was here for six months she applied for one of my sisters and all my brothers. So they came here in 1937. So half of the family, more than half of the family was here. Then in 1938 I came back here with my younger sister, just for the summer, and I went back in September, after the Munich disaster. And I stayed there until, I stayed in Albania until March 15th, when Hitler, 1939, Hitler, uh, invaded Czechoslovakia and I left. I was very friendly with the American, uh, Minister in Tirane. A man, also a Harvard, uh, graduate, told me to get out and go back to the United States. So I left. But I left behind my father and a younger brother. In any case, we managed to get the younger brother here in 1940 before Hitler, I mean, Mussolini, got in the War. But my father got stuck there and, uh, when I went to Albania in 1944, working for OSS, I found him alive, and I sent him back here.

DANE: Uh. Oh, I'm so relieved. I can't stand it!

PETERS: (He laughs.) In any case, the whole family, then, was in the United States. So I don't know what more.

DANE: Wow. Well, I've got a few questions. It's an incredible story. But just for the record, also, the, um, you did work for the State Department.

PETERS: Oh, yes. Well, when I, when I got out of the Army During the War, I was drafted into the Army in early 1942, soon after Pear Harbor, and I was sent to Kansas, Camp Phillips, in the 94th Infantry Division. Then during the summer, the OSS was created, Office of Strategic Services. And they were apparently going around the universities looking for people who spoke the language. So they apparently found my name at Harvard. So One day, while we were in maneuvers in, uh, Tennessee somewhere, with the 94th Division, an order came to the commanding officer there saying that I should be sent to Kansas City for an interview. So he, uh, sent me there, a staff car, and I was given an address, and I went and knocked. It was in a basement somewhere in Kansas City, Kansas City, Kansas. I knocked on the door. There was tiny little opening. A woman, a girl, opened the door. It was like a speakeasy. And, uh, asked me who I was, and then I showed her the traveling papers. And she opened the door, she said, "Wait here. The Colonel will see you in a minute." So after about 15 or 20 minutes the Colonel called me in his office and he said, uh, "We have an organization which is looking for people to work behind the lines." And, he said,

"We understand you speak several languages, and we'd like to have you join it. But," he said, "it's, it's, it's spy work, and it's dangerous, risky work. We'll ship you behind lines, so whether you'll come back or not we don't know." And, uh, he said, "Think it over and come tell me tomorrow." So he sent me to a hotel. The next day, I thought the situation over. I was fed up with the Infantry. It was hard work. So I decided during the night that it was best to join the OSS, whatever it was, rather than stay in the Infantry. So I told the Colonel that, "I'll join." And he said, "Okay. I'll send you back to the Division and we'll notify Washington, see what they're going to do." So about two weeks later the order came from Washington to be shipped back to Q Building. Q Building is where the Watergate is now, and that's where the headquarters of OSS used to be. They were just, uh-- I was formally still in the Army, still, one night, I stayed two or three days somewhere up there in Q Building. One night they, a group of us, were loaded in a bus, huge Army bus, with curtains drawn. We left about twelve, we left Washington about twelve at night, and taken somewhere in Virginia, took about three hours, in a camp for training. Even today I don't know where the camp was. Uh, we were trained there for about two weeks, how to survive, how to build bridges and how to, uh,uh,uh, do spy work, how to collect information, how to send it. We were taught how to code, the code, encode and decode messages, and us radio

transmitters and so on. So after two weeks, that's the only training we had. We were sent to, uh, Hampton Roads, and there shipped on a Liberty ship to Oran, Algiers, which had already been taken over by our armed forces. So we landed in Algiers about a month after we left, uh, Hampton Roads. It was a convoy of about 150 Liberty ships and it zig zagged. That's really, it took so long to get to Oran. Finally we landed in Oran, stayed there for a little while, in the Lion Mountains overlooking the, overlooking the, uh, Mediterranean. The, from there, we were shipped to Egypt for more training before sent, uh, before infiltrated into the Balkans where we headed for. Stayed in Cairo for a little while. They trained us more, how to parachute from airplanes and so on. And finally they shipped us to Italy. The shipping to Italy was an interesting revelation to me. It was, we left Alexandria for Taranto. Taranto had already been taken over by our armed forces. And it was a luxury ship. It had three classes, first class, second class, and third class, run by the British. The first two classes contained a few British and American officers, and I was an officer. And the third class contained about 3,000 Australians and New Zealanders. We, up in the second house in the second class, there was a first class, too, for general, had several meals a day. I have the menu here. We had ham and eggs or bacon and eggs for breakfast,

and then tea for our eleven o'clock, and then dinner, they called it, one to two, and, uh, four o'clock tea again with cookies, and supper, and tea again eleven o'clock. The ranks had two meals a day, one about eight o'clock, one at four o'clock. And I asked the British officers, "How come the difference?" And there was no complaint of any kind. They said, "We paid for it, and they don't." That's the only explanation they had. That was the class, uh, structure of the British Army, because this was the Sixth Army, the Eighth Army, the Eighth Army. Uh, I will never forget that. Somewhere in my library upstairs I think I have a menu. In any case, from Italy, from Taranto we went to Bari. And then from Bari, uh, John Hamilton, Captain John Hamilton, who died last week, uh, was running the blockade from Italy into the Balkans every single night. Now, you know who John Hamilton was, who he is? There was a long obituary of him in the Post last week. Sterling Hayden.

DANE: Oh, yes. Played-- Sterling Hayden?

PETERS: Yeah. He was, his name, real name was John--

DANE: Of course. He won Silver Stars. He was--

PETERS: Yeah. that's the man. He took us across the border. He

was fantastic in reading charts, and he never lost a man. He
was a Captain in those days. And he was married to this
beautiful Madeline Carroll. And she was in Bari, working,
she was a beautiful actress, but she wanted to be near him,
and she was working in the USO and serving coffee and donuts
to the GI's. Well, Hamilton, I knew Hamilton pretty well.
He took us across to this, in, uh, Yugoslavia, where Tito
was. And then, from there, I went to Albania. In any case,
when, I stayed in Albania from September 1945. We had a
mission there, an OSS mission. And when I came back, then
instead of going back to teaching in Boston, I joined the
State Department. And stayed there until I
retired many years later.

DANE: Okay. We have about ten or fifteen minutes to fill in some
spaces and get your thoughtful analysis of your life. Uh,
a couple of questions that are historical in nature. When
did you become an American citizen?

PETERS: In 1927, when I was 21 years of age.

DANE: While you were at Harvard, or--

PETERS: No. I was in high school then. You see, I didn't get into
Harvard until 1930.

DANE: That's right.

PETERS: So, in 1927 I became an American citizen.

DANE: Was that your idea, or just--

PETERS: Oh, that was, that was an expectation. In those days, you could not become an American citizen until you were 21, and you had to have been in the country at least five years. So that was, I was looking forward to that. That was, that was a big day. I'll never forget the day I went, with two witnesses, to the Federal Building in Boston on State Street. And there were only three or four of us and I was given a, uh, I was given an examination about American history, and a piece from the Constitution, as I recall, to read. And the judge, uh, said, gave us a little speech about what America meant and said, "Now you're an American citizen." So I became an American citizen in 1927.

DANE: Was that--

PETERS: I have that, uh, I haven't framed it, but, uh, I will frame it. My citizenship papers. The reason I haven't framed it is occasionally I've needed it, because I have no Birth Certificate. And that's the only birth certificate i have,

so--

DANE: You had done this all on your own. You were fourteen when you came. Your family was still in Albania.

PETERS: Except for my older brother.

DANE: And yet you seem so directed. Was it, what were the influences? Was it just who you were, or--

PETERS: I don't know. We had this idea that you had to work and, uh, I just took it for granted that I had to work. And the education came without my even being aware of it, really.

This English teacher, I think, played a major part. And also, strangely enough, an article, an editorial, in the Boston Globe. On Sunday mornings I used to go, I was a member of the YMCA. Sunday mornings I used to go, because I didn't work on Sundays, I used to go to the YMCA in the lobby there to read the Globe, free. And one day, the Sunday Globe in those days had a two column editorial signed Uncle Dudley. And this particular editorial spoke about ennobling. The title of it, I'll never forget the title of it, "Ennoble Yourself." And it talked about education per se as the value of education. And that really did tremendously for me. I discussed that article, I recall, with my English teacher, because he had already given me the idea that I shouldn't

stop my education in 1929 or 1930 when I graduated from Northeastern Prep. But to go on. But that played a major part, that very article. And I recall, when I got my EDM in 1936 from Harvard Graduate School of Education, I wrote a letter to the Globe stating that I owed part of my education to the particular article. I got a beautiful letter back from Uncle Dudley. I don't know who Uncle Dudley was. That was a pen name. So the education, but it may be also the fact that my father was quite an educated person. He had, he was a Greek scholar. He had attended Greek schools and, uh, he was an educated person. Maybe that had something to do with it, even though, uh, because of the War, he had no chance to send us to school. See, the Balkan War started in 1912, and then 1914 the World War started, so he had, he couldn't educate his children the way that his father had educated him. But we probably got the idea that education was part of the family, that may have been part of it. But I wasn't conscious of this. I just did things as they came along.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And then, another thought. You worked internationally, and you went back to your home country and yet your success has been made through American institutions.

PETERS: That's right.

DANE: So I guess I'm asking you to be thoughtful about your heritage, and what does it mean for you to be Albanian and American.

PETERS: Well, I don't feel Albanian any more. No. That, I never feel Albanian. I speak the language fluently, but I never use it. My children don't speak one single word of language. I have two children. I have a son who graduated from Harvard in '68 and then went to medical school. He's there now. Yeah. And he lives in McLean. He's a very successful doctor. And I have a beautiful daughter. She's up there somewhere. Way on the top. (Showing pictures.) She is, uh, she graduated from Berkeley, Phi Beta Kappa, and is now a bank inspector in San Francisco. Both of them got their education abroad, mostly in Italy. My son graduated from the Notre Dame International School in Rome before he went to Harvard. That was high school in Rome, run by the, uh, Brothers of the Holy Cross, same as Notre Dame University, part of Notre Dame University High School. And my daughter went to, have you been to Rome? Oh, you have. At the top of the Spanish steps, there is a school there next to the, there is a cathedral there, and a school, and she went to that school until she came back here and went to Smith. Then, from Smith, she transferred to Berkeley where, she didn't have any dates at Smith, they had too many girls. So she went to Berkeley, got her,

she's very successful. Both of them. My son has a tremendous house in McLean built it a few years ago. It cost him half a million dollars.

DANE: Wow. Now, this speaks to, to my, I want you, to America. This was an opportunity.

PETERS: Of course. It's only here that you can do it. No other place you can, a poor little boy. I don't have a picture of the time, but I recall I was a scary little thing when I came here, with a cap on and woolen trousers and woolen jacket made by my mother, because we didn't have any money to buy it, and it just, it just happened. Only here. I don't think, if I had stayed in Albania I would have been just nothing, I'm sure of that. But, uh, the chances here, the only thing you have to do is to work, that's all. To work, and that's what I, I teach part-time now in the Fairfax Public Schools. And that's what I tell the boys and girls. All you have to do is to work and keep away from trouble and you'll succeed.

DANE: When did you first think of yourself as an American?

PETERS: When I got my citizenship papers. I really felt an American then. But I have never felt an Albanian since then. Of course, maybe the marriage, too. I married a girl from South

Carolina, so, an American girl, tremendous beauty. And, uh, I felt that I belonged here. As I said, I was supposed to be fourteen, but whether I was 14 or not-- You know, there were no, there are now vital statistics in Albania, or there weren't at that time. And I have a suspicion that my father may have made me, when he got the L'Assez Passez, the passport from France, a little older, so that, he knew that you had to be fourteen years of age in order to get a full-time job here. But in any case my, uh, my age is as 1906. That's how it was in my citizenship papers. How did I get my name, that's fascinating. My, my name in the passport was Stephan Petra. In Albania we have no last names. You had your first name and your father's name. And that's how it was in my L'Assez Passez. And when I registered here in Boston, in grammar school, Boston elementary school, the teacher, I gave her my little passport, French passport. And she said, "Oh, this is Stephen." And Petra, she said, "Peters." And she wrote Stephen Peters, and that's how my name stuck. And the rest of the family is Stephen Peters. All my brothers have Peters, from Petra, which is the same, same thing. So that's--

DANE: That's wonderful. I think we should be, I don't want to get into-- (Addresses sound engineer.) How are we doing? Okay. We've got a couple more, I keep thinking we're going to run out, so I'm not encouraging.

PETERS: We have, how much more time do we have?

DANE: We have about three more minutes.

PETERS: Any questions?

DANE: Well one that I feel comfortable asking you, when you came here, did you feel, were you treated as an outsider? Were you discriminated against? Were you--

PETERS: No. No discrimination of any kind. That's because where I lived we were all immigrants. I don't think there were any, uh, of course, in Boston, the Bostonians, the real Brahmins lived on Beacon Hill. Which was way up, not very far from, from West End. But where I lived we were all foreigners, and there was not indication of any, uh, and there were no Blacks. The blacks lived, they were, the Black colony in Boston was very tiny in those days, and they lived in the South End somewhere. So there were no Blacks in, either in the elementary school, or in the high school. Of course, there were no Blacks in the high school anyhow, in the prep school where I went, Northeastern Prep School. So I saw no-- The only, the only misuse, if there was a misuse, was in the factory, in the can factory. I'll give you an example. We

were, we worked on the basis of piece work. There was a huge belt, and there were machines every ten feet or so and the cans, coffee cans, Chase & Sanborn coffee cans, pound coffee cans, came through that belt. And you picked up one of those cans as it came through you, and put the bottom and stuck it in the machine. That's where I got all my cuts. And then a girl worked next to you. She picked it up while I did it and put it in a box. And you worked on the basis of piece work. And they paid, I think it was 25 cents for 100 cans. As you became more efficient, you produced more. But instead of paying you 25 cents for a hundred they reduced the rate to 20 cents, so you won't make any more. That's the only, uh, that's the reason I've always been a Democrat, I think, in a sense that the management had no pity of any kind. It's different now, of course, because you have laws, and also the trade unions. That's the only regret. Not regret, but the only, uh, bad feelings I had about the exploitation of the poor immigrant kids. We were really kids. All of us worked, uh, in those factories in Boston and then in restaurants.

DANE: When you arrived and saw this tenement that your brother was living in, saw the work, saw these men and this bathroom down the hall, did you think, "I'd just as soon be back in Albania?" Or-- Were you horrified, or not?

PETERS: I thought of that. I thought of that. Uh, I thought more

of that before I passed through Ellis Island. But once I passed-- Yeah, I thought of that. And in fact, I came here to stay only for a couple of years, make some money and go back. Uh, but, uh, you just get used to that. Actually, if you don't know anything better, you don't miss it. The improvement came gradual. We moved, after four years in this terrible place on Wall Street, 21 Wall Street, we moved to Roxbury, which was much better. And we had running water there, and a bath. And then from there to Huntington Avenue, which was still better, and then finally to (?). So it came gradually, little by little.

DANE: This is the end of Side Two, Mr. Peters, Number 177.