

KECK-85

PANAGIOTIS CHLETSOS

BIRTH DATE: 1888

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 26, 1985

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INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT

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TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

TURKEY, 1904

AGE 15

PASSAGE ON A CUNARD LINE SHIP, EXACT NAME NOT RECALLED

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MR. CHLETSOS IS THE HUSBAND OF MARIANTHE CHLETSOS, INTERVIEW NUMBER AKRF-86. PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., DIRECTOR OF ORAL HISTORY, 1/17/96.

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett, and I'm speaking with Panagiotis Chletsos on Tuesday, November 26, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 12:30 PM and we are about interview Panagiotis Chletsos about his immigration experience from Greece in 1904. This is the beginning of side one of Interview Number 85. Okay, we are about to begin. Can you take me back to the beginning of your story and tell me where you were born.

CHLETSOS: I was born in Turkey. It was, uh, it was not Greece then. We only got free about 1912, when Greece took it back.

DALLETT: And what year were you born?

CHLETSOS: 1888.

DALLETT: 1888. Uh, tell me what it was like as young boy, uh, in Turkey at that time.

CHLETSOS: Well, I guess it was a school, that's all.

DALLETT: Tell me about your family. Tell me about your father. What did he do in Turkey?

CHLETSOS: My father was a, he had a garden. He was working on his father's garden.

DALLETT; What was in this garden? Do you remember his garden?

CHLETSOS: Oh, yes. I was there myself. I was eight years old when I lost my father.

DALLETT: And so, do you, how was it that you lost your father?

CHLETSOS: Well, he left by the, what they call the-- (Wife speaks.) Lightening.

DALLETT: Lightening.

CHLETSOS: It was a raining day. He used to go to grab the lamb, he was wearing a belt to pass back the water. At the same time he got hit, the lightening.

DALLETT: So he was struck by lightening.

CHLETSOS: By the lightening.

DALLETT: And he was killed.

CHLETSOS: He was killed, yeah.

DALLETT: And tell me about your mother.

CHLETSOS: My mother was living until she was around ninety years old, I guess.

DALLETT: Do you remember her as a young child in Turkey? Did she

come to this country?

CHLETSOS: No.

DALLETT: No.

CHLETSOS: No, she was, I left my mother and three brothers and a sister.

DALLETT: And why is it that you left home? When you say you left, you meant to come to this country?

CHLETSOS: Well, when I come to this country, yes. I had, my brother was here, and I come-- (Wife speaks.)

DALLETT: You had a brother that already lived in this country. Brother-in-law.

CHLETSOS: Brother-in-law.

DALLETT: And, and your sister, I assume, then, lived in this country. Is that right?

CHLETSOS: Well, I had a sister, yeah.

DALLETT: And do you remember when she left Turkey to come to America?

CHLETSOS: My sister?

DALLETT: Uh-huh. Your sister and your brother-in-law?

CHLETSOS: Oh, I guess about two years before I left.

DALLETT: And so once they were in this country did they write to you and say that you should come to America?

CHLETSOS: That's right.

DALLETT: What did they tell you about what life was like in America, can you remember?

CHLETSOS: Well, like (?). When I come in this country--

DALLETT: Did you have, did you have an idea, uh, what it was going to be like for you to come to this country?

CHLETSOS: No, nothing. (He laughs.)

DALLETT: But, did you want to leave Turkey and come?

CHLETSOS: Well, we had to leave Turkey, yes. I had to go find something to do for help my mother and brothers.

DALLETT: So you thought if you came to this country you could
raise some money and send it back to your mother
and brothers?

CHLETSOS: Yeah, my two brothers in this country back, and my
younger sister.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. Do you remember actually coming, packing up,
uh, your belongings and saying goodbye to your mother then, the first time
you came to this country?

CHLETSOS: To do what?

DALLETT: Do you remember when you left?

CHLETSOS: Oh, yes.

DALLETT: How did you feel about saying goodbye?

CHLETSOS: About two months I was driving from home to come to this country. I arrive on the Fourth of July in New York.

DALLETT: You came on the Fourth of July. And what year was that?

CHLETSOS: 1904.

DALLETT: 1904. Um, do you remember how you made that trip from, Turkey to New York?

CHLETSOS: Oh, yeah. (He laughs.) We had an awful time, driving from one place to another.

DALLETT: What were you, you were driving? What were you driving?

CHLETSOS: Well, it seems like, in Europe you had to walk to get the train from one place to another.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. So you took a series of--

CHLETSOS: Not so easy.

DALLETT: Right. So you took a series of trains?

CHLETSOS: Yeah. We, we took a train to go to, one train from Italy, another train from, uh, France or something. We had to change, a lot of trains, you know.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. And then, eventually, you, you took a boat?

CHLETSOS: Then we took the boat from, uh, Belgium.

DALLETT: The boat was from Belgium. Is there any way you remember what the name of the boat was?

CHLETSOS: I can't--

DALLETT: Can't remember that.

CHLETSOS: Cunard Line.

DALLETT: But it was the Cunard Line.

CHLETSOS: That's all I know, was the company.

DALLETT: Okay. Do you remember anything about the trip itself on the Cunard Line ship?

CHLETSOS: Yeah. (He laughs.) The first night, see, they had some spaghetti, macaroni or something and everybody get sick at night. So the next day I went up all the way on the top of the boat. When the food was coming in I was leaving, I was going up to, I couldn't stand it, so I had-- Sometimes I used to pass by the bar and they had some kind of fish on the table. The first day I took some money, I handed the man to get the food on the spot. So the next day I went there, there was nobody there, and I took it, and I used to run all the way up to the top, to sit there for a couple of hours, and then go down.

DALLETT: So you ate fish and never ate that, that macaroni again.

CHLETSOS: I never go back at that table again.

DALLETT: So did you find that you had plenty to eat?

CHLETSOS: Oh, yeah. (He laughs.)

DALLETT: And how about sleeping accommodations? Do you remember,
were there bunks or, where did you sleep on
the boat?

CHLETSOS: Over the, all the way down, one bed on another on the
top.

DALLETT: With a group of other people.

CHLETSOS: Oh, yeah.

DALLETT: And were there any other people that were traveling on
that boat from your town?

CHLETSOS: Yeah. I had two cousins.

DALLETT: Two cousins.

CHLETSOS: Was, one of my father and the other cousin from my mother's.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. Um, I'm sorry, I never asked you the name of the town where you were born, the town where you were born.

CHLETSOS: Lemnos. Lemnos. The island was Lemnos and the town was Lihna.

DALLETT: Would you know how to spell that?

CHLETSOS: Yes. Lemnos is L-E-M-N-O-S, and Lihna is L-I-H-N-A.

DALLETT: Um, okay. So back to the boat. You were traveling with two cousins, and they were also coming to America for the first time?

CHLETSOS: That's right.

DALLETT: U, how long did the voyage Take? How long was the boat ride?

CHLETSOS: I think it was, uh, we left Friday and we was, uh, back

to America on Saturday, next Saturday.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. So about a week.

CHLETSOS: About a week. Seven days, I think.

DALLETT: Do you remember, uh, when you came into the New York harbor and you were about to land?

CHLETSOS: Yeah. I was, uh, sleeping in Ellis Island for one night.

DALLETT: What was that like on Ellis Island?

CHLETSOS: On the Fourth of July, it was the day, and I come out the next day.

DALLETT: Were there lots of other people there?

CHLETSOS: Oh, yes. A lot of people, yeah. Except my two cousins, they left the same day.

DALLETT: Oh, how was it that they left and you stayed behind?

CHLETSOS: Well, the people, they come in, they took them out. But
brother-in-law didn't come in the same day, he
come in the next day.

DALLETT: So you had to wait until your brother-in-law came to
pick you up.

CHLETSOS: Yeah. I had breakfast on Ellis Island. Stewed prunes
and, uh, oatmeal. (He laughs.)

DALLETT: Were you used to eating stewed prunes and oatmeal? Had
you ever had those before?

CHLETSOS: No, I never had oatmeal.

DALLETT: No. Do you remember actually having that oatmeal? Did
you like it?

CHLETSOS: I didn't. (He laughs.) No.

DALLETT: Didn't like it. How about, where did you sleep in Ellis
Island?

CHLETSOS: Well, they had beds. Nice beds.

DALLETT: And did the people, did the officials there ask you a number of questions about why you were there?

CHLETSOS: The next day the, my brother-in-law come in and they asked him questions, what's he going to do with me. And he was telling him they was going to put me in school because fifteen is all, you're not supposed to have a, you can't get a job.

DALLETT: And that's how old you were when you came, fifteen?

CHLETSOS: Fifteen.

DALLETT: Um, so I imagine you were, you were speaking, would it be Turkish or Greek that you were speaking when you came?

CHLETSOS: Turkey. I mean, Greek, yeah. Greek. Not Turkey.

DALLETT: Okay. Um, did you understand what the people were saying at Ellis Island?

CHLETSOS: No.

DALLETT: So, how did you manage to, to figure out what to do there?

CHLETSOS: You see, they had a man, he was talking Greek. Every nationality had their own people that was asking questions.

DALLETT: So they could help interpret for you. Um, were you nervous when you were there? How did you feel? (They laugh.) You just thought your brother-in-law would come?

CHLETSOS: Was like a (?) man, what nervous could I--

DALLETT: So then your brother-in-law came and picked you up?

CHLETSOS: Yeah.

DALLETT: And what happened next? Did he bring you to Philadelphia?

CHLETSOS: Well, I had a job in New York. I worked in the factory, Notaros Brothers. They was making Nectar

cigarettes. I worked there for two months, and then they brought me here, Notaros Brothers. They had a factory, they had a store at 12th and Chestnut. They used me like a, a sawboy. They dressed me up with a Turkish suit, a Turkish cap and everything. Just to walk around the store there, just for show.

DALLETT: And you, and they were making cigarettes there.

CHLETSOS: They was making cigarettes.

DALLETT: And, uh, I'm sorry, was this in New York that this was happening, or, no, this was Philadelphia, 12th and Chestnut.

CHLETSOS: In Philadelphia, yeah.

DALLETT: Okay. Um, where did you live then? Where did your brother-in-law bring you to live?

CHLETSOS: Well, we had furnished room. We used to live in the furnished room. Couple of dollars a week.

DALLETT: And how did you feel about Philadelphia, coming here

from, from the islands?

CHLETSOS: We had a Greek restaurant. I used to go there, in the
greek restaurant, I used to eat for ten cents.
Maybe, night, fifteen cents for my dinner.

DALLETT; Ten cents would buy a meal.

CHLETSOS: Yeah. Good meal for ten cents.

DALLETT: Were there a lot of other--

CHLETSOS: You could eat stew, like Russia. Except the roast lamb
used to be fifteen cents. Stew you could buy for ten cents.

DALLETT: And were there a lot of other Greeks who lived in your
community?

CHLETSOS: It didn't, there was not so many Greeks then, when I
come in. There was only about five families in Greek but a couple of
hundred, uh, more people, young people that used to work there. Just five
families in 1904. Today we have, uh, five churches. (He laughs.)

DALLETT: How was it that you, uh, managed to send money to your two brothers to bring them to this country? How did you do that?

CHLETSOS: Uh, used to, used to send, uh, five dollars in English money, that's all.

DALLETT: So you'd send money and they saved up and then, how--

CHLETSOS: Once in a while I used to send about five dollars, that's all I could afford to send them.

DALLETT: And how many years later was it that they joined you in this country, your two brothers?

CHLETSOS: Well, in two years later, I think, I got my first brother and, uh, every two, two years they come other, four years different.

DALLETT: And did you stay in the Philadelphia area?

CHLETSOS: Yes. In Atlantic City sometimes.

DALLETT: And then how was it that you met your wife?

CHLETSOS: My wife, she was in New York. And I got married, I

took, from New York we went to Atlantic City. I was working in Atlantic City then.

(We go off record.)

DALLETT: Did you ever have to go through any kind of examination before you could come into the country, either in Belgium or--

CHLETSOS: Yes. I was all right everywhere. (Wife speaks.) Except in, in Belgium, before we went to the boat. There was a doctor, he was looking in your eyes, and he find that something wrong with my eyes. It was like a, I don't know, was a-- So he took me back. So he, he start with the next man. But my oldest cousin, he was the first one, he was passing by, he was waiting for me. Instead of me it was the other cousin he was passing by. And so he asked him, "Where is Panagiotis?" And I slipped out.

DALLETT: What did you do?

CHLETSOS: I passed by the (?).

DALLETT: You passed by?

CHLETSOS: Before the doctor see me I went up to the boat.

DALLETT: Ah, so you snuck by the doctor.

CHLETSOS: Yeah. I ran away.

DALLETT: So he didn't catch you. You just were able to get on the boat.

CHLETSOS: He didn't catch me. No.

DALLETT: Good. How about Ellis Island? Did you have to see a doctor there?

CHLETSOS: No.

DALLETT: No one looked at your eyes at Ellis Island.

CHLETSOS: I don't think so. No, I don't-- They didn't have anybody. Nobody paid--

DALLETT: So they only, at Ellis Island, they were only asking questions about what you were going to do here.

CHLETSOS: That's all. That's all.

DALLETT: Um, I'm sorry to jump around in time so much, but could
you just tell me something about your family
now, your children?

CHLETSOS: My oldest daughter, here, I've got the second daughter,
a son, third one, I got a daughter in the fourth, and the fifth is a boy,
and the sixth a girl.

DALLETT: Six children.

CHLETSOS: Six children.

DALLETT: Are they in Philadelphia?

CHLETSOS: Yeah. They're all here, Philadelphia, except my son.
He's in, uh, here, what they call that, (wife speaks), Levittown. He has,
uh, he has a pharmacy.

DALLETT: And you have grandchildren?

CHLETSOS: Yeah, I got ten.

DALLETT: Ten!

CHLETSOS: Ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

DALLETT: Two great-grandchildren.

CHLETSOS: Two.

DALLETT: Well, I'm glad we're, you're telling me your story, for your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren. And thank you very much. That is the end of side one and the Interview Number 85.