

NPS-70

GEORGE AVGERAKIS

BIRTH DATE: 1898

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 21, 1974

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INTERVIEWER: MARGO NASH

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TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: CHARLENE A. KEYLOR, 6/1979

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TURKEY, 1913

AGE 16 (AS RECORDED IN THE INTERVIEW)

PASSAGE ON "THE MARTHA WASHINGTON"

NASH: Today is August 21, 1974. I am visiting in the home of Mr. George Avgerakis. Mr. Avgerakis came to the United States in 1913 at the age of sixteen years old. He was born in 1898. Mr. Avgerakis, where were you born?

AVGERAKIS: I born in a little village they call it Exasteror, twenty miles outside of Constantinople. And I had a mother, she was , I was orphaned, and in 1913 there was the Balkan War, and I was only sixteen years old and the Turks they tried to draft me in the army. And being that I know that they are going to get us, the mayor of our town, he told us to have our birth certificate with us so that we can prove that we really are sixteen, not twenty-one the way the age wa to go in the Turkish Army.

so one day I was standing in one street in my little town, and I see a cop, he came over and grabbed me by the neck and took me to a coffee house, and you see there was another fifty boys my age, all sixteen and under. So the same time my mother find out that they got me, and asked my mother to come to the coffee house, she was crying.

So the Turk captain asked the mayor of the town, he says, "Why, who she is?" So they told him that I was her son. "Well, why she is crying?" "She's crying because her boy is only sixteen." So the Turk told the mayor, he says, "Call up, who is this name.?" So the mayor he says, "George get up," so I got up. So the Turk captain says, "Sit down, you are in the army." So I says, "I have my birth certificate, I am only sixteen." He says, "Never mind, you sit down, you are in the army." Alright, then, they told one of the guards there, the captain said, "Get this woman out of the coffee house." So they send my mother out of the coffee house. And I wasn't on the one side. And this coffee house was a narrow and long and had two doors, one in the front and one in the back. The one door in the front was guarded by two policemen,

on the back there was nobody. So then it was September it was kind of drizzly outside, and there was yet dark. So the captain he told the mayor, he says, "Tell all the people here to notify their parents to bring the shirt, I mean to bring their underwear and piece of bread or something because we have to walk all night to get to Constantinople, we are walking to Constantinople. So right back of this coffee house was the house of my grandmother's, so they notified my grandmother and she brought me a little valise, not valise, a little towel and had a piece of bread, a little cheese and everything. she hugged me and she kissed me and she look around and says, "There is no Turk around here, why don't you quit?" So that's how I . so I sure there was nobody, and she told me where to go. so I went to a house, there was only girls because they were going in bricked doors and watch for the house who had boys, you know, men. This house had only three girls. So I went there and the girl was surprised, so I told them what's all about it. I stay there and around five o'clock the captain give order to start walking, all the boys, so then they call the names.

Everyone get out of the coffee house and they call the names and my name was missing.

NASH:You were missing.

AVGERAKIS:Knew I was missing. So he says, "Go out and search, find him." So then started blow the whistle all over in the town looking for me and while I was hide in this house. So they couldn't wait for me, they went to Constantinople. So next day the local, because we had local cops in and they were looking for me all over, they couldn't get me. And my grandfather had a nephew, he was a captain of a sailboat, who had ten sailboats, they sail from out of our little village to Constantinople every day, bringing grapes to Constantinople every day. Grapes and vegetables, everything. So they only way for me to go because they were watching the sailboat, you can't get in because they watching.

NASH:They were what?

AVGERAKIS:They were watching, they were watching to catch the boys, maybe, they know we were through because

all roads they were blocked. So anyway, they hide me in the shell. Next day, it takes nine hours to go to Constantinople, sailboat, so we went to Constantinople, and the Russian, our patriarch, his name was \_\_\_\_\_, you know what patriarch is? Our religious leader. They fix up with Russian Embassy so he can help us, the boys to protect us, the boys under the army age. So one of these Russian representatives --there was a pier and there was all the sailboats parked there, you know, so this Russian Embassy man came in there and asked the captain of the boat, his name was Danille, he says, "Danille, you got any boys with you?" He says, "Yes, I got one." So I got out, he says, "Don't be scared," I was scared, you know, he says, "Don't be scared, you are under Russian protection." You know, Russian Embassy and Patriarch, they come to Turkish government so they can let us leave the Turkey, you know what I mean? So, he says, "Get in line." There was about a hundred children in my age.

NASH:All Greeks?

AVGERAKIS: All Greeks, yes, all Greeks. They go us all. They had three buses, four buses, they put us on the buses. And in Constantinople, I don't know, in 1884 or something there was a war between Turkey and Russia. The Russians they reached the outside of Constantinople and when they sign agreement, the Russians they build a monastery. They call it Saint Stephen, and that monastery was still there now, I think. Well, they took us over to that monastery, they had beds, they had the kitchen ready for us, and they said, "We will keep you here, you stay here, you eat here, sleep here, till we have a boat from Russia or Rumania. Then we will put you in the boat and you go to Greece." And sure thing, after a week there was the Queen Olga from Russia with a Russian flag, they took us, they put us, as I said before, there was two guards, they watching all the people who used to go on the boat, but us, it was all fixed up, you know what I mean? So they let us go in then and a day or two, I don't know how long it took us. From Constantinople I went to Piraeus, Greece, that's the big port of Greece. And I stayed then three days. And in the boat I met four other boys from

from my village, but they were going, there was thirty-five, they were going to America. So I meet them in the boat and one of them was my Godfather.

So we stayed in Piraeus two days and then the boat that we had to get to come to America was in Patras, that's another port, they call it Patras.

NASH:When did you decide that you wanted to go to America?

AVGERAKIS:Well, it was only --I had the ticket, the Russian Embassy in Patras, they had my tickets already, everything was made by them.

NASH:In other words, the russians were going to send you to America?

AVGERAKIS:The Russian Patriarch, our Patriarch, Patriarch. So they brought the ticket, everything was ready, we stayed in Patras for a week I think, and then the boat came from America to Patras and then it was going back. The name of the boat was Martha Washington America line.

NASH:So, did you have any choice? Is that what happened to all

the boys, they sent them all to America?

AVGERAKIS;No, no, no. A few of the boys we came to America, the rest of them they stayed in Greece. I myself and a few other boys, we got tickets for New York.

NASH:Why did you decide to go to New York?

AVGERAKIS:Because they advise me to go to Greece, poor Greece I had no future. He says, "You better go to New York," which in those days like today, we know we are the richest country in the world, more chances, more future you have, and I was only sixteen. That's why I decide to come to America.

NASH:So, did your mother know that you were going to America?

AVGERAKIS:Oh, yes.

NASH:How did she know?

AVGERAKIS:Well, they notified because they know that I was hiding in the town for three or four days, and it was all fixed up that I had a few dollars,

and my mother she had nothing, but my grandmother had a few dollars so that they gathered the whole thing and they told me you better go to America because you have a future there. you are a young boy it its better to go to America instead of going to Greece.

NASH:What happened to the boys that fought for the Turks, who went into the Army?

AVGERAKIS:None of them came back. All got killed, died. And I come to America October 23, 1913.

NASH:What was the trip like?

AVGERAKIS:What do you mean, the trip?

NASH:The boat trip.

AVGERAKIS;Oh, stormy weather. oh, I was sick all the way. first time I get in the boat, all my life I don't know anything about sailing a distance like that. I got sick. And anyway, when we come to the New york, we

only know one boy, I don't know his name, and as I told you before, we meet four people from the village that I come. And they were in the army, they were drafted, and one of them, my Godfather, so we all went to this address in downtown New York, Battery, they call it Battery whatever.

NASH:Battery.

AVGERAKIS:Battery, right. There was a Greek restaurant what they call it Athens, and there was an interpreter because we don't know the English language so they give us an interpreter and you know, he speak in twelve languages. And he was an Italian, a real Italian, but he was speaking many language. So, he says, "Where do you want to go?" We had the address, that's all. Before, at first we went to Castle Garden we used to call it, the Ellis Island. The only thing they examine was the eyes, that's alright, go ahead.

NASH:Now, you say you went to Castle Garden, i think you went to Ellis Island because --

AVGERAKIS:Ellis Island.

NASH:But, you call it Castle Garden, right? Because everybody  
thought --

AVGERAKIS:That's right, I went to Ellis Island.

NASH:What do you remember about it?

AVGERAKIS;That was the Ellis, but in those days we used to call it  
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NASH:What happened there?

AVGERAKIS:Nothing, they just examined our eyes, that's all. And then I don't know, I had four or five dollars, I don't know. That's all. He says, "Now you go." Now they had an interpreter and they asked us, "Where are you going now?" Five of us we went to one address downtown somewhere Battery, I don't know. Well, they took us to this restaurant, they call it Athens Restaurant, and really I find a friend we were looking for. So when he saw us he was surprised. now he says, "Where are you people going?" We says, "We coming to you." He says, "What I am going to do?" Well, we beg him, you know, we have not a place, your father he give us the address, and that's all you need. Address and your eyes, if you were alright you go in America, otherwise they send you back. And he took us to his apartment, poor guy, he was a labored, he was very weak and sick, and he used to sell cigarettes from a coffee house to a coffee house from his store to a store to make his living. So we were

not expecting any financial help of him. But, at least he give us a room to sleep. He had one bed with mattress, the rest of it there was nothing but newspapers and all that. So we stayed there two or three days.

NASH:How did New York look to you when you first came?

AVGERAKIS:I was very surprised to see a city like that because I brought up in a small village, I don't know much about big buildings like that. And we were scared and no money, we didn't know anybody, you know how it is, you are only sixteen years old. The first time I get out of my home. And he had no room, of course, and he said, "Three people you are going to stay here with me, and two will go on 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue," there was a coffee house and he knew a friend of his, he says, "I will try to take you down there and you can sleep, he has a room for you people. We will try to get a room for you anyway." Sure the three of them, one of the three I was, we stayed with his friends apartment, and the rest of two, one his name was Jimmy and the other was Demetrius, and the other name is .

So he talked to the man, his name was Chiriouquis, so he said, "What are we going to do, we have to find a place to sleep for these boys, they just come from Ellis Island, they got no money, they got nothing." He say, "Well, alright, I have got a room." So we went upstairs room, and they sleep in that room that night. Next morning this friend where I stay in his apartment said, "George, you are the youngest, you had better get up and come down to the coffee house a couple of blocks from the apartment where we stayed, and see how Demetrius and are doing." So I went down there and I asked, "Mr. Chiriouquis, they didn't get up yet?" I says, "How is and Demetrius?" He says, "I don't know." He says, "You had better go up and see." There was a door closed, you have to get in the door and go upstairs from the coffee house to the apartment upstairs. So, when I opened the door, I smell something bad. So I run back in the coffee house, smells something bad. And right away he noticed there was something wrong, there was the gas. Why was it, you know that those days there was no electricity in every house, there was this gas they have. And they had to light by

gas. So when the time come to sleep they were talking these two friends, when the time come to sleep in the old country we had the lantern, the kerosene lamps, you put the light out, so they thought they could do the same thing with the gas.

so when the time came to sleep or Demetrius just blew the light out. So either one of them he blow out and the light went out, but the gas was coming all night. Middle of the night they go sick, they vomiting, but they used their heads, they open the window, and they put their heads in the window. And right away when we went up with Mr. Chiriouquis, we find them, their heads in the window. We drag them out, he called help from the coffee house, we got them out and he started to give them black coffee right away, he give them black coffee and we call the doctor come and they come alright. Can I stop for a minute, I am tired.

NASH;You can talk slower.

AVGERAKIS:Well, they had friends in Provo, Utah, these three. And they came to go West. I come to stay in New York

because I am younger and I get a better job and I had more future in a big city. Anyway, they wrote a letter to their friend in Provo, Utah, asking him to send them the ticket because we only had enough money to in New York. So, sure thing, in three or four days, I don't remember how many days, their friend send them the ticket, two tickets from Provo, Utah, from New York to Provo, Utah, So, in a weeks time they left. And I stay all by myself with this friend of mine. And every morning I used to go to the coffee house and this fellow who had the coffee house, he treat me coffee, sandwich sometime. And he know why I was crying all by myself, you know. He says, "Don't cry, we will find a job." I had no money, I had nothing. So finally, one morning I was sitting on the corner, and I see johnny walk in, his name was John. Chiriouquis called and said, "Hey, John, I got a young fellow here for you." He says, "What do you mean?" Well he says, "I have a young fellow just come from the other side, how about you give him a job?" He was steward in the dishwashers in Bookinhelm Hotel, Fifth Avenue and 5th Street, 5th Street.

NASH:Steward.

AVGERAKIS:He was a steward, he always take care of the dishwashers, the silver men, all the kitchen. He says, "Have you got a job for the young fellow?" So he says, "Not now," he says, "but I will help him." So soon after he comes, he says, "George, come over here. I have got a job for you." I went down there, he took me down to the cellar, you know, the kitchens always down in the basement. Anyway, big hotel on 5th Street. So I went down then and he showed me how to use the machines to wash the dishes, the dishwashing machine in those days were different then what it is today anyway. Well, anyway, I worked then four months and I got some money, but I didn't like it, too much indoor, and I used to an outdoor life. And my Godfather used to write me from California. From Provo, Utah, they went to Provo, Utah and then they went to California working for the western Pacific Company, railroads. And keep on writing me letters and says, "You better come with us, we live like we used to live in the country, and all that." And

all by myself. Well, I says, godfather and all that. So, I got fifty-four dollars, that was the ticket in those days, I got my ticket and four days I went to salt Lake City. I went to Salt Lake City, I had an address, they gave me an address.

NASH:ow did you get to Salt Lake City?

AVGERAKIS:By train. I got the Pennsylvania Railroad from New York Chicago. From Chicago I transferred to another train through Union Pacific or something, I went to Salt Lake City with Denver , I went to Salt Lake City.

NASH:With what?

AVGERAKIS:Denver Rio Grande Railroad Company. Denver Rio Grand Railroad Company. I remember the name. And they send me an address There were two brothers Popolopolus, they had a grocery store, I have to go to him. I went over there. He didn't know me, I didn't know them. Well, he says, "My boy," I know these two friends, you know, the other boys, they had two friends, well, I was going to them. So I went to Popolopolus, and I told him I wanted to go

to this address, they were in Provo, it is only a little town outside of Salt Lake City, about ten miles outside of Salt Lake City. Well, he says, "I know these gentlemen, they are two brothers." He says, "I have to call them up to come over and get you." Well, I stayed, in the afternoon they came. They came they took me to Provo. They took care of me, they feed me, they, you know --

NASH:Did they have a telephone, did he have a telephone he could call?

AVGERAKIS:He did, they did, yes, they did. And then I stayed with them a week. And then after a week I want to go and meet my Godfather.

NASH:What was Utah, or Provo, Utah like in those days?

AVGERAKIS:Provo, Utah? It's more farm town, to many vegetable farms around there. And then was this there, and they were working as a but most of it is farms down there.

NASH:Were then many Greeks?

AVGERAKIS:No, not many Greeks in Provo, no. And then in a couple of days my --there by the name Louis Kleris. This gentleman, he had an agency, employment agency, and he used to send all the Greeks to Western Pacific Railroad, and you didn't have to pay. The ticket was paid by the railroad, there was no ticket, you didn't pay a ticket anyway. So in three or four days he got the ticket and they send me to --there was a gang, there was about forty or fifty people who was working in the Western Pacific, you know, they change the rail, they change ties, you know, in those days it was different. now, they do everything by machine, but in those days it was by hand. And there was extra gangs, every strong man, all these railroad companies they had extra gang to replace the old tires or ties and all that. so that's what they had been doing. No only that, but this guy, , he had an understanding with the company that all the groceries and bread, he had to supply all these gangs from his, he had his own bakery, he had his own grocery, and all these gangs in Nevada, in California, had to supply those things from him for m Salt Lake City. And that day

they were going to ship food and bread and everything to this gang and I had to go with this train. And I did. So around twelve, one o'clock, while the train was going, the train all of a sudden stopped, and I was quite sleepy, they wake me up and says to get off. I got out and I got all by myself, they unload the packages they had, the boxes, food, the groceries, whatever bread, whatever we had, and the train left.

NASH:Did you speak English by this time?

AVGERAKIS:No, a little bit. I understood a little bit, yes. I understood a little bit, yes. Well, the place where I was working, Bookinhelm Hotel, all Greeks, waiters and dishwashers and silvermen, they were all Greeks, but I understood. Then I see all over it was dark. Nobody was there, I don't know what to do. A little distance I see a little light. Well, I says, I walk to the light and see what is it. So I went there, and what was it was tool room, all these workers they used to put, you know, they have these hank cars years ago, how they work, they used to work in railroad, now they have

motors, but in those days you used to do by hand. And they had it for all of them that was there, and they had their tools, and there was a little light, so I says, I sit down, they had a wheelbarrow, I sit down in the wheelbarrow. And day break I got out and about a half a mile away I see a boxcar, and that where they worked and they used to sleep, boxcar. So I see a man jump from the boxcar and he happened to be one of my countrymen, one that I know. Well, we crawl up the rest of it, my Godfather got out and they got me and they cooked breakfast, everything else, and the same day they gave me a job as a waterboy. Same day. They give me a bucket, and one of those, you know, that you give them water. And we had bottles of water on the flatcars, you know, they were isolated, there was woods, there was nothing, no city, no water, nothing, but they have water, their own water in the bottles. And I used to go and fill the bucket bottles and I used to give the workers. And I worked there for about four, all summer, I think. And when the weather started getting cold, why the company stopped these extra gangs. And I went back to Salt Lake City.

NASH:On the railroad, who worked on the railroads? Where did they come from, what countries?

AVGERAKIS:Who?

NASH:The railroads, people working on the railroad.

AVGERAKIS:From different countries. Hungarians, Austrians, Albanians, Turks, from all countries. You know, in those days they used to come, the doors were open free for the states. You can go in the States anytime you, as long as you had a ticket and you was in good health. It is not like today, you have to go through examinations and . So they were workers from all over the country. And I went to Salt Lake city and I find a Greek family. And there was a gentleman had a coffee house and I went to the coffee house. And he and his family was living in back of the coffee house and they had a couple of rooms upstairs, and his name was Andrew. And I told my story, who I am and all that. "Well," he says, "I think I have a room for you," he says. And he says, "Alright." He give me a

room, a bed, and everything else. I had a few dollars because I worked for five months. And his father-in-law had a restaurant back then. And he gave me a job in the restaurant. And I was working there till summer comes, but he wasn't paying me much, so I was looking to get something else. So in the coffee house, my other three countrymen, we always talking about something, we find out that if I can get a better job, we make a few dollars more, that's what we come here for, we make a few dollars more. So I went to Ogden, Utah. There were more jobs in Ogden, Utah, there were more employment agencies. You get a job go to the office. So I went over then and I find a job in Evanston, Wyoming. There was a big tunnel, I used to repair that tunnel. It's in Evanston, it's about seven miles. They were repairing that tunnel. So I went there and got a job.

NASH:Tell me something, throughout all this were you happy? How did you feel?

AVGERAKIS:Well, I was happy. Well, I was happy, yes. Well, how, how do you expect to be very happy. The

surrounding, I don't know anybody. Well, anyway, I went there and I had a job what I was doing, I don't know how to explain to you. There was a car like funnel, you know, they were making the cement right in the tunnel. There was one car ahead sand, and the other car had stone. And there was on the bottom of this box, there was an open hole like this, and the they call it, how they call it?

It used to come and take the sand and the stone and they threw another box so they mixed up and make the cement out of it. And then was extra track when all those boxcars, flatcars, there was a bout a hundred people who were working then. We had our own train. It used to bring all the equipment, all the cement, everything else, and if the train --was with the Line, and if a train had to go through that, the Union Pacific train, they had to pull us out. You know what I mean? Because those days the trains used to go by coal and the train comes up with the coal and that smoke, well, all the people in there working they would get sick. So they pull us out and the train goes by and we wait another half hour, they had big fans pull all this gas smell out and then they put

us in. So one day while I working, and then I was  
and lever and let the door open and belt under  
used to go and take the sand and the gravel. So  
one day, then was another friend of mine trains  
going by, and then it was kind of quiet. So I call  
up to my friend was his name, I says, "  
, what's going on, what's going on there?" She  
says, "I don't know, everybody is stopping, "  
Anyway, complete, nobody was working. So we got  
out, we see on the flatcars all the workers they  
fell asleep, the train went by and the fireman he  
make a mistake and he put coal, fresh coal, there  
was orders by Green River about ten miles before  
you reach Evanston it's a town, they call it Green  
River, and as soon as they reached Green River they  
should put no coal on the engine because by  
reaching Evanston they will have the smoke, and it  
will happen what happened, but this fireman he made  
a mistake and he put the coal in. By the time he  
reached Evanston, they didn't give enough time to  
pull the smell out, we go in and everybody got  
sick. And we were lucky, a train come, express  
train come up, and they stop it. There was a  
little village, all by Germans, all Germans, a

little village, about fifty houses were there. And they stopped the train and call if then is any doctors in there. Of course, I said before, they pull us out anyway, but everybody they put us in the ground, no me and my friend, I don't know because we were low we didn't smell too much of that smoke, but the other ones were working up higher on the ceiling, you know, they were cementing. They got sick right away. So then doctors say right away, coffee, black coffee, black coffee, black coffee. And you see, all the workers they were lying in the grass and they give them by force, drink coffee. So me and we were up and down, so they told us they said, "You been working in there?" We said, "Yes, we are alright." They said, "You're not alright," he says, "You had better have some of this coffee," so we got some coffee, and nobody died. We didn't work that day, that day, but I like to stop new, can I?

NASH:Yes. It seems that the coffee houses must have been a very important place?

AVGERAKIS:n those days, of yes, very important. That was the only

place you could go and meet your friends, even today, they are very important, but the young generation, they don't go much to the coffee house now, but the old-timers they still go. There are still a few houses, a few coffee houses. Before it was every corner you found a coffee house, but now they don't go. Well, after I worked --as I said before, then was a little town about ten miles, I think, I don't remember exactly, it is the name of Green River, and they told us they pay a few cents more, it was fifteen, seventeen cents an hour in those days. So I left this job and I went down to Green River, and I got a job in Green River cleaning switches from the snow, wintertime. You know, the switches, the railroad switches, you know, sometimes there was plenty of snow, oh, those days there was snow, not like today. And they had a special gang, they used to go clean up the switches, but was too cold. And they told me there was another town farther down, the name was Laramie, Wyoming, and they told me that there was a mine there, coal mine, and you could make fifty cents an hour and it's better. It's wintertime, you go in the ground and it is warmer. So I went

there, but I didn't like the surroundings because they were telling that they were expecting that mine to collapse. So, there were a few Greeks, they used to work there and when I went back to Green River, they told me, says, "No, don't go. You make good idea, you didn't work because they expect that mine to collapse." So one day sure, the people, they work, they start leaving the mine. And the superintendent to encourage the workers, he took one day his family and he went to inspect the mine inside. And that was the day the mine collapsed, and even today that mine is burning, even today. That was 19--what I am talking about was 1915, and I went the same town in '57 and the mine was burning yet, not much coal, was plenty coal, but I don't know it collapse.

NASH:I wanted to ask you, were you sending money home at this time?

AVGERAKIS:No, after this, that was 1913, 1914 the First World War started. There was everything that Black Turkey was against us, you see. Turkey was with Germany, and we couldn't send no money, nothing. That's why

I didn't send no money the First World War. After everything was settled, till we had the Second World War, oh, yes, I send. My mother died right after I left. My mother she live about two months, too much, you know, I was the only boy she had and I left, so she was worrying and she was sick, she died. Well, then I quit, I didn't go back to Green River to clean the switches, I heard in Cheyenne, Wyoming, they wanted people to work in round house, where they clean up the engines, the railroad engines. And I went there and I work all winter inside though. So then I quit and I went back to Salt Lake City and I got job with the same people that in restaurant. And I had a friend of mine, lot of different works, but I had a friend of mine they were coming east. In Chester, Pennsylvania, I had brother-in-law, he had pool room and grocery store, and many times he wrote me a letter to come up east. Well, I like down west, I meet people, I make friends, and I don't want to come, so this friend of mine, he wrote me a letter one day, and he said, "George you better come because your brother is very sick, he is dying. He is very sick, so he wants you to come up." So that

was the First World War, well, I got the train from Salt Lake City and I came north and when I got out in Chester, Pennsylvania, I see ambulances and nurses, I see, and there was nothing in Utah, nothing in the west. There was the war, I mean, the First World War. And I see a couple of French officers, there was the Liberty Drive in those days for the Liberty , and I went down to the address that I had from the coffee house and I find a sign in the door, "We are closed on account of sickness." So I says, "My God," I says, "really my brother must be very sick." So I was standing outside thinking of where to go. I heard two gentlemen that were going by and they were speaking Greek, so I told them, I says, "Excuse me," I says, "maybe you know where it is this gentlemen lives?" He says, "That grocery store that's his." So I went across the street and really I find my brother living in that grocery store. I thought he was really sick, but they play a trick on me to bring me north, they told me that he was very sick. And when I see a sign that the store was closed --but those days the coffee house, any gathering it was closed.

NASH:

AVGERAKIS:Dances, the village was closed because, you know, there was the Spanish flu, was the sickness I remember, I don't know, I think you read that in the papers. There was Spanish flu. And then I stay a couple of days and I got a job in Sand Shipbuilding Company, in Edystone, Edystone, Pennsylvania. I work there for a few months, three or four months and then one day I see two guys. They were working in there and they fell in and they both got killed. When i see them, I says, no more, that is not job for me.

NASH:Were you married?

AVGERAKIS:Oh, no. Now I am coming to this. Then I quit this job. There was another company, the Baldwin Locomotive, and they used to build the locomotives, trains. I went and got a job there.

NASH:How old were you?

AVGERAKIS:Then the Chester and New Brunswick is not far, it is

just about a hundred miles I think it is, so I find out through friends that my wife's family they arrive in the states and they are in New Brunswick.

And I wanted to come to New Brunswick and meet my friend because my wife's two brothers they were good friends of mine.

NASH:But she wasn't your wife yet?

AVGERAKIS:No, no.

NASH:So you knew that this family that you knew --

AVGERAKIS:I knew them on the other side, we were brought up together. Yes, we were from the same village that I come, I know them from the other side. I know my wife from the other side.

NASH:Let me ask you a question. All these places that you were in like, Wyoming, Utah, I guess there weren't very many women around, it was really a man's sort of society?

AVGERAKIS:Now, . No, there was women, but not Greek girls.

There was a few Greek families about sixty years ago, then was only a few. I know this family I told you I stayed with them for some time. There was very few, then was as many today. We were talking about, my friends, we go someday and visit this family that I know. So one day me and another friend of mine, we went to new Brunsick and we met my wife and all that. So we knew each other, I said before, and then I went back to Chester. And then they had to move to New York, no, I moved to New York, I went to New York. And I was working in 104 Amsterdam Avenue, I don't know, I was an oyster man. Club, there's a club there, I don't know the name. There was a night club and I was working then was an oyster man. And there was another friend of mine and he went to the coffee house, and at the same time, I didn't know it, my wife's family moved to New York. And this friend of mine happened to know my wife's family, through the coffee house, and he says, "I work with somebody," he told them my name. " And this is his name, well," they said, "we know the guy, tell him to come and meet us." He gave us the address, they give him that address. So I got the address and I

went, they used to live at 104 Park, well, anyway, I forgot that name. I found the address, anyway. I went and met them, and he says, "George, we have a room in here because you come and live with us. So that's what I wanted, I wanted to live with them because a bachelor all these years I like to go with a family and I know the mother, the father, brother so I went there and stayed, four or five months.

NASH:How old were you when you went to stay with them?

AVGERAKIS:How old I was? Oh, about twenty, about twenty, but four years I was in Utah, about twenty. So then they decided to move in Trenton, New Jersey because they had a daughter married in Trenton, and they decide to go to Trenton. And they begged me to go with them, but at some time we started to love, my wife, so I don't know what to do. I had a good job as an oyster man and at the same time I want to stay and go, and so finally, they convince me to go with them, my brother-in-law, he says, "Come go with us, we will be alright." So we went to Trenton and we started to work with my two brothers-in-law in some

Salon Linoleum Company in Trenton, New Jersey. And we eat together, I used to sleep to them, live with them for six or seven months and sometime my future mother-in-law told my cousin that they were thinking to fix up me and my wife, so my cousin told me, he says, "You know, they are thinking to tell you to get married with Myropi." "Well," I says, "Okay," so anyway, we got married, we live fifty-nine years together and I have a family of six children, four girls, two boys, they are all married, they all have families, they live nice. and being that we got old, and I couldn't work anymore, me and my wife we decide to go live in Florida. In 1964, we went to Florida, and we got a house and we used to live then in Florida seven or eight months and come to New Brunswick three or four months. And 1968 my wife got sick and she died and I am a all a bachelor by, she died Christmas day, December 25, 1964, no, '68, '68, 1968, December 25. Now I have a farm, I forget to tell you, I have a little property and I live with my big daughter, her name is Katrina, and I live with her and I visit all my children. Sometime I come stay with this daughter, sometime, I have a

daughter that lives in Trenton, I have a son that lives in Trenton, I have another daughter that lives in Freehold, so that's how I pass my time now.

NASH:What was your main occupation, did you have one main occupation after you got married?

AVGERAKIS:My occupation was a cook. I had a little restaurant, this property, I still have that property, but I rent it out. Since 1958 I went to Greece with my wife, after I retired in 1958, I became 64, well, anyway, and I went to Greece and I stay all summer. And when I come back, I still got that business, I have the store, but I rent it out, now I am not doing nothing, I just have a little garden and I pass my time. But still, I have a trailer in Tarpon Springs, Florida, I own my own trailer and every year I go there and I spend my winter with other friends that I have down there, and the summertime I come back here and I have a little garden and that's how I pass my time.

NASH:Was it a Greek restaurant when you were a cook?

AVGERAKIS:No, an American restaurant. I have this store now, I have right now, I have it for eighteen years and I have another store, but now this --the last restaurant I have this one here, I sold it and I went to Greece.

NASH:When your children were growing up did you try to teach them about Greece so that they would remember greece, did you try to teach your children about Greece?

AVGERAKIS:Oh, yes.

NASH:How did you do that?

AVGERAKIS:Well, how to teach them to learn Greek? Well, I was mixed up with our church, and we had the Greek teacher, and I could, the store where I was working, five o'clock p.m., and the Greek school was from two to five. I used to get the Greek teacher, I used to have big farm eight miles out of New Brunswick, now the one I have is right in New Brunswick close, but the big farm I had, I had one hundred and five acre farm that was in Mammoth

Junction, New Jersey. And I used to get the teacher from the church, from the Greek school after he was finished with teaching the Greek school, take him up on the farm eight miles, teach my children Greek in two hours, have a nice supper, bring him back again to New Brunswick. And I was going all wintertime when the school was open. Three times a week, and not only that, and we told them the American language you are going to learn, may as well learn Greek too because in the future they going to have, , now that's how they learn. Me and my wife, she couldn't speak the language, that's why all my children they speak perfect Greek, even my grandchildren, ask her, she speaks perfect Greek. And Myropi the same thing. All my daughters and my boys they speak perfect Greek.

NASH:It must have been very important to you to pick the man up and drive him home everyday.

AVGERAKIS:I didn't hear you with that.

NASH:I said, "It must have been very important to you for them to

learn Greek."

AVGERAKIS:Yes, yes, it is. They learn, of course, American first, but now the United States spends money and he needs people to speak foreign languages. Even this is encouraged by the government so why they should speak their own language, of course, they could learn any language in Chinese, any kind, any kind of language will help not only yourself you help your country because nowadays we have missions all over the world. We send missions all over, they should speak their own language, but years ago they couldn't, but now they do. Now, from New Brunswick we have about ten girls and boys, they have good jobs in Athens, Greece because they speak the Greek language. Not only that, even other towns, even here, now the other day Maropi, she got a new job so they asked her, he says, there were two girls they were looking for the same job. And when Maropi applied for the job, "Well," he says, "we have another girl." "But," he says, now may as well see what you know and all that?" So he says, "Do you speak any other language besides the American?" She says, "I speak Greek." They hired her because

they have greeks they can't speak the language well so Maropi speak to them in Greek. So that's where it helps. Well the first immigrants, Greeks, Turks, Serbians, all over the Europe, we used to come here. We only had a few dollars in your pocket. Then you had help, you come and they are the ones who built America because sixty years ago when I came here America was not, that's why many times I tell my family this is not America. I see two Americas. When I come to America like used to be, not exactly like Europe, little better than the Europeans, but now is the America, the real America is now in your age, you know what I mean? Because they think America was like this fifty, sixty years, it wasn't. I was working in California in the Western Pacific Railroad Company, there was a section, not big only A workers. And we had a Japanese foreman, he was a Japanese , but this guy was about six or seven feet high. I remember his name Takas Tasima, I won't forget his name. he's a wild man. And we were only eight workers and he was standing on top of us like that, so you had to work, build the railroads. One time I was working on a sewer line, they used to

put sewer lines and then was two of us, they gave us to build a tunnel. They were going to put five feet diameter pipe under the tunnel, and me and my other friend we have to dig and make the tunnel under. So one side he was my friend and the other side I was. Now, we have to meet together, you see. And we were digging, digging, digging, but the foreman was Albanian, the foreman was Albanian. He says, "What are you doing?" Well, I says, "We working," but he went down it and measured and we passed each other sideways. We didn't meet together, see? Well, what do you expect. So he came down, he measured it, he says, "You boys, you crazy, you went by." So we find out we were working along side of each of us. So he says, he started to curse and and we were yelling we can't, we says, "Uncle and uncle," you know, kids because big can curse like he did to us. "Well," we says, "we didn't know, well ."

And there was a trolley car, those days then were trolley cars, and the trolley car had to go over this tunnel. And he put us out and put twelve Albanians under there and two. About an hour later, I don't know exactly how long later, a

trolley car go by and it went over and the opening was too high and the trolley car went down and killed both of them. Well, what else?

NASH:Well, thank you very much.

AVGERAKIS:You're welcome.

NASH:It was a pleasure speaking with you.

AVGERAKIS:Thank you.