**Janet:** This is December 7th 1994. I’m here in Worcester, Massachusetts with James John. Who came from, what was technically an Albanian town although it was Greek, right over the border. He came here in 1933, when he was five years old. Let’s start at the beginning by your saying your birth date.

**James:** June 17th 1928.

**Janet:** You were born in what town?

**James:** Terihati, that’s what they told me.

**Janet:** Can you spell that one?

**James:** I really can’t, we’ll get it later.

**Janet:** Say it again Terihati?

**James:** Terihati.

**Janet:** You were there the whole five years before you left?

**James:** Yes.

**Janet:** When you think back to Terihati, what is it that you remember about it?

**James:** I guess I was about four years old. There is several things, getting a ride on a donkey by my grandfather, which I remember very well because my father was not there. Going to the mill, where the ox goes around with the stones, and crushing the corn to make corn meal.

Always looking forward to the ride to go down the hill, we were on a hill. I remember that well because when it rained we used to look out and the water is rushing down by the house that we lived in. That’s why I know it was on a hill, and very rocky.

The other thing was we had a beautiful fig tree. I was always on the tree and I was always getting heck, “Come on down. Get out of the tree.” I guess I never fell off, and maybe I did I can’t remember.

Another thing I was told, that I don’t remember doing, it’s a little bit I think I do, that I almost set the house on fire lighting a little fire in the back underneath the steps to go into the house. I was underneath there doing things.

One of the craziest things I remember, I’ll never forget. My grandfather had a shepherd that used to go out with the sheep in the hills. Then come back maybe weeks, months, I have no idea. I liked him an awful lot, but my mother used to bring his food and put it on the table under the grapevine, because she would not let him in the house. Because he lived with the sheep and he had fleas I guess.

I would grab my dish and run and sit down and eat with him. My mother would [inaudible 00:02:47], she wouldn’t come after me, she wouldn’t go near him. After it was all over, I remember being on her lap and she’s picking fleas out of my hair. Those things I can remember well over there. That’s about it, some of the things I remember.

**Janet:** Do you remember any experiences with your grandfather?

**James:** Most of the things I did was with my grandfather.

**Janet:** What kind of a person was he?

**James:** He was a big fellow too. He was a six foot -Very religious. Even in church he was, I don’t know what you would call, a deacon like so. He was well known.

I remember he used to sew leather and make slippers and shoes for us to wear. That’s about it that I can remember there to be honest with you.

**Janet:** How about your grandmother? Do you remember her?

**James:** No I do not remember my grandmother; it’s amazing I just cannot picture her. I know my mother was there, yes. My grandfather was like my father let’s say because he was not there. One thing when my father did come, I’ll never forget it, they were telling me, “That’s your father.” They were in a big room …

**Janet:** Where was this?

**James:** In Greece, when he came to pick us all up to come to the United States. Not knowing my father, they’re telling me, that’s your father, go over there and follow. They almost had to force me, I was a little afraid I’ve never seen him before. Finally I did.

I remember that’s the first time I ever heard a wristwatch, he would say, “Well come here, you want to hear something?” Put it to my ear. Then I got to like him naturally and I sat with him. That was the first time that I saw my father. It’s the wristwatch, I remember, I’d never heard a watch tick. We didn’t have one up there.

**Janet:** How about your mother, what do you remember about her in the old country?

**James:** Just as the mother, feeding me and things like that. I’ll be honest with you. It was my grandfather that I can remember more. Because he would take me out, in other words to do the things that I would like to do.

Because women, I believe, what my mother told me, they had to go out in the fields and work out in the corn. They had to work. My grandfather I guess he used to take me along with him to do this and that.

**Janet:** Do you remember any food that you particularly liked [inaudible 00:05:23]?

**James:** Yeah, what do you call it? [Inaudible 00:05:25] it’s mostly corn meal and of course you’d butcher a lamb. He had a lot of lamb there; there was a shepherd that he had out there. It was mostly mash of some kind that we ate vegetables during the summer.

**Janet:** How about the house, what do you remember about the house where you lived?

**James:** Stone, brick or cement I believe. Square windows something about because I used to look out the window. As far as rooms and everything, no I can’t remember.

**Janet:** How about cooking or water or?

**James:** Water a well, I know that. I know we had an outhouse, I guess everybody had there it wasn’t just us. That’s about it.

**Janet:** Did you play with other children, do you remember?

**James:** I can’t remember that too much. If I did, that person probably never came here and said, “I played with you.” I can’t remember the children no, I really can’t.

**Janet:** Being a twin was there anything particular to that that you recall?

**James:** No. Actually, like I just said, I can’t even remember my older brother in the way of playing or whatever, or even my sister. I really can’t, I wish I could.

**Janet:** Do you remember coming to this country at all?

**James:** Yes, very well. I remember the boat, because I used to hang on the railing to look at the ocean. They were always afraid, my mother was always there or father to hold on to me. I don’t know what kind of boat we came on to but it wasn’t -Could have been a banana boat, let’s say, they used to call them.

**Janet:** Do you remember the name of it?

**James:** No.

**Janet:** Was it usual, you think, for the father to come back and come back over here with the family?

**James:** At that time I didn’t know, but what I heard is a lot of times its -Maybe at that time a lot of the father’s came, if they had enough money to spend to go and then come back. I know of an awful lot of people, Greek people especially, the father did he stay here and then send for them. I remember …

**Janet:** That’s mostly what I’ve heard.

**James:** I’m guessing at that, I never asked whether my father came and came back with us on a boat. I can’t remember that, unless he just came for a visit that I just met him. I’m going to have to ask [inaudible 00:08:15]. It’s amazing I never asked that question whether we all came together. I just remember my father when I was four at that time about to be five that I remember him for the first time.

**Janet:** At the voyage?

**James:** No, only at the inn which really stands out in my mind. My sister and I were in a room, my parents left and we had to stay there. They wouldn’t let us out of the room.

**Janet:** This is at Ellis Island?

**James:** Ellis Island. I believe it was, I didn’t really know whether it was aboard ship or not, all I know is they left us, “You have to stay, we’ll be back.”

The only way they’d stop us from crying, I guess we kept crying after for the fellow to come again and do it. He used to whistle and the light would go on, and it was amazing to see a light go on. He’d whistle again and the light would go out.

I remember we could walk around, but I think they had a half a door or something we just couldn’t get out. I don’t even know if there was a window for me to look out if it was Ellis Island to see something else. I can’t remember seeing anything but being in that room.

**Janet:** Do you remember how long you were there?

**James:** No I really don’t. I was told I got the measles.

**Janet:** You had the measles?

**James:** That’s what they told me, as I grew up and I was saying -Or something, I guess it was the measles, I don’t know if it was something else but we did stay there.

**Janet:** You were there for a while?

**James:** Yeah. Could have been a week, could have been four or five days, but it’s the first time that we were left alone as children, just two children at that. Not knowing the language.

**Janet:** Do you remember how you were treated?

**James:** I can’t even remember a doctor looking at us and things like that, it was just that here we are in this room. That was it. We just don’t forget that. It’s the first bad experience of separation I ever had.

**Janet:** Then do you remember when you got let out and you met back …

**James:** No, it’s funny I can’t remember that, only where we went to live, because there was a river in the backyard in this house. I’ve seen it many times as I got older looking, my God did we live there? There was a big brass mill, I guess it’s gone now too but way back -This is in Taunton, Mass.

I remember I caught a lot of heck because I didn’t want to wear shoes. Every time my father bought them I’d just throw them away in the river. Finally I learned not to throw my shoes away.

School, I don’t remember too much in the first grade mostly in the second. The reason why I remember they kept us back in the second. The teacher liked us so much, two kids from Europe come. We didn’t understand the language completely to catch it right away. They threw us right in the first grade.

The reason why they kept us back is we didn’t know how to read yet enough and everything. As far as arithmetic, I remember I used to go up on the chalkboard and add things together. Because that’s universal you can add do arithmetic. As far as reading and writing very well we couldn’t so we were kept back one year.

**Janet:** You remember your teacher?

**James:** No.

**Janet:** You remember anything about learning the language that sticks out in your mind?

**James:** They used to pick on us a lot, not pick on us, to give us heck for us to get up and try to read or come up in front of the class and speak more. I remember that they worked very hard in the second grade to make us do that. I guess the first grade we got away with a lot, okay you don’t understand we’ll promote you to the second grade. That stands out in my mind.

Being in that school I remember Landon was running for President. I forgot what year but I mean I must have been seven or eight years old.

**Janet:** 1934, that’s what [inaudible 00:12:43].

**James:** See I can remember. Landon and people with signs and I remember that. Then I just grew up normally after getting along in school.

**Janet:** Was it a comfort having your sister right along with you through all this?

**James:** Yeah. We never had any trouble, we never argued. I mean kids probably do, who knows, they still do today, brother and sister. We get along very well.

**Janet:** How did your mother like being here?

**James:** She didn’t mind. We did have relatives so that kept happy. Let’s say we would come to Worcester to visit another town or they would come and visit us.

My mother, being a European Greek woman, really stayed in the house because she had another child, and another child, and another, ended up being six of us in the family. She was really a housewife in the house. She never went out to work.

That’s why she never really learned how to speak English. That’s how we kept on speaking Greek because we had to talk Greek to her at home. She does understand now and speak, but as far as reading, my mother does not.

**Janet:** Did your father become a citizen?

**James:** He was a citizen before he brought us to the United States, he became a citizen here. Because I was told this in school after that at that year was probably one of the last years where, because my father was a citizen, we automatically became one.

I didn’t realize that until I wanted to get a passport and I never had a citizenship paper. “You were born overseas and you don’t have a citizenship papers?” I said, “No, I went through school.”

Then it was a [inaudible 00:14:50] person from immigration or something, he says, “Well in case you didn’t know it,” he says, “you were automatically a citizen as soon as you stepped foot in this country.”

That was in 1933, and I think they ended it in 34, 35. Because there’s a law after said that you had to live with your father, which was a citizen, for seven years then you automatically became a citizen. I didn’t realize I was a citizen right away, I was just told that by the immigration person. I got a passport now I can go overseas.

**Janet:** How about your mother, did she keep up any customs that?

**James:** All of them, not some of them, all of them. We keep them up too.

**Janet:** Like what things do you do that?

**James:** Our holidays are very important. We have an Easter, Christmas like everybody else. We are Greek Orthodox, it’s very close to Catholic it’s just a difference between a pope, and a few other things, and dates sometimes are different. A name day is very important to us, we don’t celebrate our birthday.

**Janet:** What is yours?

**James:** June 17th. My name day is, I believe in September, I forgot the date, St James. I was told that that custom is that’s my day, that’s my big day. You are king of your household at that time, they prepare a big meal and you invite people to come over to join you. “Happy name day,” they tell you.

It’s just a big day, a name day. It may sound foolish to some people but it’s more important than our regular birthday.

**Janet:** Is there something about a particular saint that if you’re named after that saint, it means something?

**James:** That’s it. That saint, when say my name day comes up, is the saint’s birthday.

**Janet:** It’s the saint’s birthday I see.

**James:** That’s, he became a saint, don’t quote me that it is his birthday but I believe that’s how we celebrate saints. The Greek Orthodox really believe in their saints and celebrate that day. The Saint Nicholas, the Saint -All were named after saints, even women.

**Janet:** Are named after male saints?

**James:** No, female there is …

**Janet:** Either way?

**James:** Close, sometimes they have the name if it’s –It’s hard to explain. I hope I’ll find out some day, I got to ask father about that. Not all the women but there is …

**Janet:** Some have it?

**James:** Yeah. We have Saint Irene, my wife’s name is Irene and it was the Saint Irene. Way back then even women were made saints I guess.

**Janet:** Do you think the fact that you came here from Europe as a little boy, do you think that made a difference in your life or the way you are?

**James:** No. I can remember the small things like I told you about Greece. Once I was here, I’m an American, I went through school, played with all types of children and all my friends are all type.

What we kept very sacred is our religion, and our customs, and what we liked to eat. It just stayed. Because, like I said, it was especially because of my mother. My father had to work every day, my father observed every -We observed them very seriously.

**Janet:** What did your father do once he came here?

**James:** He was in the restaurant business, he worked in a restaurant. That I can remember. What restaurant I guess it was the A-1 Restaurant in Taunton. I remember he was in partner with someone at the time.

**Janet:** You stayed in Taunton before you came to Worcester?

**James:** I think 54 I came to Worcester, around that year, 54.

**Janet:** You were already married?

**James:** Yes I was married. I’d be 23, 24 years old, something like that, I came to Worcester and I’ve been here since.

**Janet:** Were you always within a Greek community when you were in this country?

**James:** No. Taunton was not a big Greek community, but because of church, we had to go to Fall River. What few families we had we were close with all the families we all knew each other, because we observed the holidays.

Worcester is a big Greek community. I had relatives here. It’s even bigger here because there was more Greek. It’s not that I am that religious, but I’ve been on the board here at the church for so many years. I’ve got one more year and I’m retiring.

Those that my brother know and my sister, we know a great deal of people of Greek descent. We know them personally because we see them all the time. We do have dances that we get together. We do keep it up.

**Janet:** How did you meet your wife?

**James:** First she lived near me, near us down the street. I went to school especially with her. I figured she was too young because at that age you can be two years older or three and -Went to the service and when I got out of the service, I went to visit her brother.

Then she was there. She remembered me, I was older and that was it at that time. Then I met her down at the city one time she had the bus terminal to go home and we talked. I went to get a date and that was it. We went to the movies and that’s how it begun.

**Janet:** Was she also a Greek?

**James:** No she was not. I married a non-Greek. That’s what it is mostly today; we have more mixed marriages than we have. It works out fine we have no problem.

**Janet:** How about you, you finished school and then you went in the service?

**James:** Yeah. I did not go to college; it was war years at that time. War was just over and I decided to go into the service to get the G.I. Bill of Rights. They only gave us so much time in 1946, the last month was October I can remember that well.

That was one of the biggest volunteered armies they had. Because all the young fellows wanted to go into the service to get the G.I. Bill of Rights to get job training after or the government would help you.

My job training was I went right into the restaurant my father had it and I’m still in that business. I don’t mind it. It’s been very successful for me. It turned out all right, everything turned out great.

**Janet:** What would you say you’re most proud of that you’ve done in your life? Big question I know.

**James:** It is. To be honest with you, one of the first times I went in business was with my older brother Chris. We had a bus terminal. Going into business [inaudible 00:22:51] was quite a thing, why work for somebody all your life? We worked hard at it.

We had to leave that business because they tore down the building for redevelopment. I went to work for someone else. Being in business I missed it, and I ended up buying one here in Worcester.

It was a bar and I rented next door. Then I bought a building next door and made it into a restaurant. Right now it’s a restaurant, a bar, a pizza house and a package store, all in one, because I bought it off a fellow who owned the package store.

He just came up to me he says, “You’re going to buy me out,” just like that and he says, “We’ll take care of it.” He did, he was very good. That’s why I’m working seven days a week.

**Janet:** It’s a real accomplishment. How about any heroes, have you ever had in your life heroes? Either people you knew or people that you looked up to that were like public figures or anything like that?

**James:** Not one in particular, but there’s, by meeting them here in this community, Greeks let’s say. I admired even a lawyer, gave me a lot of good advice, free advice which was great was Peter Bell.

I can remember even the owners of, there used to be Table Talk Pies here, very big, getting to know them. Because the nice things that he did and the donations that he did for the church here and the money. Everybody really loves that man. He is a man that he will give and not say like he wants anything in return.

**Janet:** This is Mr. Cotsidas?

**James:** Cotsidas yes and Mr. Tonna which had passed away, they were two great men, and, like I said, the lawyer. Then even other friends that I met through the AHEPA, a club that we have, the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association. We give out scholarships, it’s a nonprofit organization.

They are a lot of great people, all over the country because we have a national convention. I’ve been lucky. I’ve known people almost in every state by going to the convention. I’ve been going for over 20 years to the conventions, I enjoy them very much. So has my brother, we go together, my wife comes quite a few times sometimes she can’t.

A lot of nice things happen. I know a lot of good people that stick to my mind. It isn’t just like one individual or two. Except Tonna and Cotsidas and Mr. Bell, I’ll always remember them because they’ve helped me with advice I mean and the nice things they did. Then I try to do some nice things as much as I can, because of those two, three people.

**Janet:** It sounds like you really feel very much a part of the Greek American …

**James:** Yes. I’m also involved in other American activities belonging to other clubs, don’t get me wrong. I help in political things sometimes. It’s not all Greek that I do, don’t get me wrong. I guess we’re talking about where I was born and my Greek heritage, but I’m more American than anything else.

**Janet:** I was just going to ask you that question. If you could divide yourself up between Greek and American …?

**James:** I’m an American all the way. I mean I work towards that even with government, city, I’ll help, you know what I’m trying to say. This is it. This is where everything happened for me.

**Janet:** What do you think the importance to you is of having a Greek heritage?

**James:** Didn’t do me any harm in my religion, in my children, in my grandchildren, it’s just been fine, our heritage that we have just like and the others too not just the Greek. We really are a family and we will help one another out.

If someone gets in a problem, one of us was always there to help in any way we could. If it had to do with a little money, yes, but I’m not using the word, money. Family, very close family. That was very important to me. That came to me by being Greek let’s say.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with coming to this country or?

**James:** No I would only be lying or trying to make up something else, I’ll be perfectly honest with you. There’s only those few things that I can remember well and that’s about it.

**Janet:** That’s great. Thank you very much.

**James:** You’re welcome. I enjoyed this very much. First time I really started from as young as I was and you’re asking all these questions, it was very good. It comes back to me now all these things even more so.

**Janet:** Good, now you remember all kinds of things.

**James:** Even more.

**Janet:** Even when you leave? I’m talking with James John and its December 7th 1994. Mr. John came from Albania as a Greek person when he was five years old in 1933.

**James:** Right.