**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It’s August 10th 1993. I’m here in the [inaudible 00:00:07] Gardens Housing in Western Massachusetts. I’m here with Phyllis Vani who came from Albania in 1936 when she was 17 years old. I’m looking forward to hearing your story. Let’s start with your birth date.

**Phyllis:** My birth date is February 2nd 1917.

**Janet:** Where were you born?

**Phyllis:** I born at Korca, Albanian.

**Janet:** Did you live in Korca until you were 17?

**Phyllis:** Yes.

**Janet:** When you were born your name wasn’t called Phyllis, what was it called?

**Phyllis:** When I born, my name was Phylli [inaudible 00:01:16] Vani.

**Janet:** Can you spell the last part, the last name?

**Phyllis:** I can’t. Vani I know V-A-N-I [inaudible 00:01:32] there, then Phylli.

**Janet:** When you were born, who were you named after?

**Phyllis:** My name? Phylli.

**Janet:** Was it [inaudible 00:01:32] name?

**Phyllis:** Yes.

**Janet:** When you were born did you have sisters and brothers?

**Phyllis:** Yes.

**Janet:** How many?

**Phyllis:** Two sisters and three brothers.

**Janet:** What was your mother’s name?

**Phyllis:** [Inaudible 00:02:12] Eva.

**Janet:** [Inaudible 00:02:12] Eda?

**Phyllis:** Yeah, Eva.

**Janet:** Your father’s name?

**Phyllis:** Nom.

**Janet:** N-O-M?

**Phyllis:** Yes.

**Janet:** Were you the youngest or your brother was?

**Phyllis:** I was the middle of the family, six in the family, three girls and three boys.

**Janet:** Did your brothers and sisters come also to this country?

**Phyllis:** No, no one, just me. After four years, when I came here, my sister came here, the oldest sister, and I’m the middle one here.

**Janet:** Do you remember the house you lived in in Korca?

**Phyllis:** Yes.

**Janet:** Could you describe it?

**Phyllis:** Yeah. [Inaudible 00:03:04] Korca, Albanian.

**Janet:** What did it look like?

**Phyllis:** Nice house, very nice house.

**Janet:** What was it made out of?

**Phyllis:** Stone.

**Janet:** Did it have a lot of rooms? How many rooms?

**Phyllis:** We have six.

**Janet:** Do you remember what your mother cooked on? What kind of …?

**Phyllis:** My mother cook all the time nice things. In the morning, winter time I sleep upstairs, and I can smell shish kebab. Then I come down, I wash myself and I sit down. They give us bread and those piece of meat, dry meat but they cook it, what do you call that?

**Janet:** Sausage?

**Phyllis:** Pastirma. They cook, we eat and we go to school after.

**Janet:** What kind of school was it?

**Phyllis:** Albanian language.

**Janet:** Did you learn other languages too?

**Phyllis:** No, just Albanian.

**Janet:** Did you go to school with boys or was it girls’ school and the boys’ school?

**Phyllis:** No, the boys separate the girls separate those days. Not together, no separate.

**Janet:** When you were not in school would you play with boys in [inaudible 00:04:38]?

**Phyllis:** We played yeah, but most with the girls. We feel more comfortable with the girls.

**Janet:** What kinds of things would you play?

**Phyllis:** We make lines and jump.

**Janet:** Hopscotch?

**Phyllis:** Yeah, hopscotch right.

**Janet:** Did you have dolls?

**Phyllis:** We make it ourselves, dolls.

**Janet:** How were they made? What were they made out of?

**Phyllis:** You know those poppies, those poppies in the garden.

**Janet:** Flowers?

**Phyllis:** Yeah. We make it like a dolls, you remember those [foreign language 00:05:18]?

**Female:** Yes.

**Phyllis:** We make it with cloth or something.

**Janet:** The poppy flower?

**Phyllis:** Yeah.

**Janet:** You would use?

**Phyllis:** To make dolls.

**Janet:** What did your father do?

**Phyllis:** My father have a factory make a mill. My father was three time in United State here, they have a brother there. The brother take care of the mill there. They build a factory with machine to make a mill in the city in the winter …

**Janet:** Milk?

**Phyllis:** No, mill to make flour. Then the summer time we used the machines. The winter time, we go in another town [inaudible 00:06:09], they have a [inaudible 00:06:12] that way. They make a mill, for many years.

**Janet:** Tell me about your father, when did he first go in the United States?

**Phyllis:** 1889.

**Janet:** 1890?

**Phyllis:** No 1887. 1894 come to Albania and then got married, stay for a couple of years he come back [inaudible 00:06:40] years, 1912 he went to Albania and back again to United States.

**Janet:** Did your mother go back with him?

**Phyllis:** No, stay there my mother, take care of one daughter there that time.

**Janet:** What was your father doing in the United States?

**Phyllis:** He worked in Uniontown Pennsylvania in those mines. He don’t like that job, he comes South Beach, Massachusetts, he work in a glass factory there for many years.

**Janet:** Eye glasses?

**Phyllis:** Eye glasses. He work for many years here and he went to Albania, he don’t come back again here. When I come back here he said, “Phylli if you’re going to South Beach, not too far from [inaudible 00:07:20], just check there. Maybe because when I left there I don’t give a notice I leave the place and I feel bad, but I got two pays two weeks pays there. Maybe they’ve not [inaudible 00:07:34] just look.” I don’t bother that, no.

**Janet:** Your mother never came to the United States?

**Phyllis:** No.

**Janet:** It was just that he was there, he was in the mining town.

**Phyllis:** Yeah Uniontown, Pennsylvania and they work in the mine.

**Janet:** Then he went back and brought all of you over or he was here when you came?

**Phyllis:** No, all the family there with the children and everything. I born 1917, many years after he came in Albania to stay for good.

**Janet:** How many years did you go to school?

**Phyllis:** I was 14 years old after, they stop me because I have to learn how to stitch, to be dressmaker. I go there for six months and they stop me, because my mother need help in the house.

When I got 17 years old, my brother went to the city to make a picnic or something Albanian, there are a lot of people that time those days like [inaudible 00:08:53]. My husband came from the United States [inaudible 00:08:56]. My brother he was 10 years older than me, he go and check him everywhere he go, maybe he’s drunk, maybe he’s alcoholic or he’s gambling.

My brother come in the house Sunday morning he said, “Phyllis, iron my shirt because I need that shirt.” “For what?” I said. “I’m going out.” You know he said, “I meet guy from United States so and so [inaudible 00:09:25] look like so and so.” I said, “Why are you talking this [inaudible 00:09:31]?”

“They come from America, you don’t want to get [inaudible 00:09:34] Korca, so come from America. If you like it I can fix you with him.” I said, “Huh?” He fix everything with the family, three people from the family watching me [inaudible 00:09:51].

I was going to take some water, cold water, he said, “Phyllis go take some water in the [inaudible 00:09:56] the corner.” I said, “It’s too hot.” “Go” Three people stay in the corner, they asking me, “Can I have some water?” I said, “I don’t have any cups here,” and my face go red.

I said to my brother when I went, “No I don’t like that kind of trick you did to me, why you do that?” Three people asking me so and so, there was American men there because I know he’s American because dressed up like that.

He said, “So [inaudible 00:10:25]?” I said, “No I don’t like him.” “You don’t like him but everything gets done,” he said, “you’re going to marry.” That’s it, I don’t open mouth anymore.

My father tells my mother, “Why you rush those things to marry her? She’s young, she can help you, she can do something and everything to you, she got a lot of chances here. Why you want to marry guy from America?” He said.

“Well we are too many people here so send her there to help us here sometime.” I said to myself, well. I marry him, I stay nine months there, after that I got pregnant.

**Janet:** You married him then?

**Phyllis:** Yes.

**Janet:** Right after that?

**Phyllis:** Five weeks engaged that’s it, I got married there.

**Janet:** Did your family have to give the dowry?

**Phyllis:** Yeah.

**Janet:** Do you know what they gave?

**Phyllis:** Yes, 80 gold coins. Then my father was talking to my mother he said, “We sell this thing we’re go [inaudible 00:11:41] now I’m going to sell the vineyard.”

**Janet:** The vineyard?

**Phyllis:** Yeah. Make [inaudible 00:11:49].

**Janet:** One?

**Phyllis:** “We’re going to sell that one to marry her because I don’t have any gold money to give to my daughter. We sell this thing [inaudible 00:11:58].”

I cry one night I said, they’re going to sell that one to marry me? I’m not blind, I’m not cripple, why to pay? I don’t say nothing to anybody, so I make letter to my aunt in Boston. I said, “Auntie, I’m engaged I’m going to get marry and we don’t have money.” My aunt talked to the brothers, they make a cheque, in five days I got cheque in Albanian. Those days the letters come in very fast.

I got the letter and the cheque inside and I said, “Papa, you don’t have to sell that I got cheque from United States from auntie and uncle.” He said, “How?” I said, “Here” He felt so happy.

**Janet:** He didn’t have to sell the …

**Phyllis:** He blessed me, he don’t have to sell that one. Because I live that country because nobody -It’s terrible country so we came here.

**Janet:** Tell me how you felt about your husband, about marrying him?

**Phyllis:** In the beginning, I don’t like him really, to tell the truth. He said, “Well we’re going in America, we’ve got two brothers there, two sister-in-law and we’re going to live together in a new house.”

My father said to me, “Listen dear, you’re going to United States now, your husband don’t have any education,” he didn’t know anything. He said, “Maybe you don’t get in the house you don’t have money you got two eyes, two hands, you have to use it and go to work to make a good life in United States. If you work, you’re going to be somebody, go to work.”

I stay seven years with my sister-in-law my brother-in-law and I have my daughter there. They love her very much because they don’t have their own children. I stay very close with my family.

I was one month vacation with my cousin, my uncle’s daughter, in a farm, Whitinsville, I stay one month there. When I come to the house, my husband never talked to me to be separate, nothing. I got [inaudible 00:14:18], don’t say anything to nobody, my husband.

When I come home, the house, my brother-in-law, my sister-in-law, looked at me and looked different like something happened in the family. My husband was in the second shift job, I said, “What happened?” “You don’t know?” I said, “No, I don’t know nothing.” I start crying.

When I think of those days I cry now. I came to the city, I said, girl with good family in Albanian I came here, I came in a good house and everything, [inaudible 00:14:54] city. The train go by, I can’t sleep for four months here, because the train go every minute, every time there. I don’t say nothing.

Little by little, seven years after, I have my son. My son he was five years old, six almost, I started working myself. My husband said, because he was in a strike [inaudible 00:15:25], I said to my husband, “How the money we have in the bank we spend everything, what can we do now? We have to go.”

“Where are we going to [inaudible 00:15:36],” he said, “If we don’t make it.” I said, “Not me.” I remember my father when he told me, “You’ve got two hands you’ve got eyes, use them and go to work.” I went to work.

When I went to work in a priest shop, making clothes for a priest and I said to myself, “Well I got to work.” I learned the job, I work good. My husband he was mad, he don’t beat me to take social security card. He said, “No, for you in the strike [inaudible 00:16:11] the bank hold on, what can I do? I can’t stay this way.” I said, “I don’t want to go on welfare, no.” I said, “I’m going to work.”

I went to work. I went to an office there and I said, “Can I have some work. I’m so and so, this and that.” He said, “Yes, you got the social security card?” I said, “No.” I went to [inaudible 00:16:35] there was in the main street my cousin.

I said, “Cousin, where is this place to go to take card?”They bring me there I got the card and I put it in pocket and I show in the office and I got the job. The first time I work two day $15 and I give to my husband. [Inaudible 00:16:58] told me, “You don’t talk to me for five months, just because I start working.”

I said to myself, I’m doing wrong, I’m doing bad, I don’t tell anybody, I won’t talk to anybody why he feel that way. I said, “Listen you have to be with me together, we suffer together we’re going to make it together, okay?” After that, little by little, he started working and everything be all right, all these things in the life.

**Janet:** Let’s back up.

**Phyllis:** We stayed there almost in June, that was July. I stayed in my country come here in this country. My husband said, “We’re going to live a little longer, but we can leave because you can’t have the baby here. We’ve got a lot of paperwork and everything, you can’t do those things.”

I said, “What can we do?” “We going in United States.” He got the ticket for us and everything, we went on a ship. We went there, seven women pregnant like me, one four months, one five months, one six, I was six.

**Janet:** On the ship?

**Phyllis:** The ship. The doctor [inaudible 00:18:15] I said, “They’re going to send me back in Albania, better to throw me in the ocean because I don’t want to go back in Albania.” Through that one, there was girls nice to me, two women in a room, they put everybody in first class.

We had the doctor and nurses with us. They’re checking us every hour, the blood pressure. They take care of us good. The breakfast I can’t eat it for two, three days. I said to myself, I can eat that. I couldn’t.

They gave me eggs, scrambled, they gave me eggs hard boiled, I don’t want it, I want it, [inaudible 00:18:51]. Can I have the pencil I said piece of paper? I can write, I make a chicken there, I make the eggs. I put for a minutes boil and understand this, now they bring it to me. Everything go all right.

**Janet:** Where was your husband while you were up in the first class?

**Phyllis:** I don’t see my husband for six days.

**Janet:** He’s down …

**Phyllis:** He was there, he was in a different room. The last day together [inaudible 00:19:21] we got together and we get out in New York there. My husband, who have a woman and girl bring from Albanian, we were charged for that. My husband said, “I’m going to take care of those people who, so and so, I’ll be back here.” Now nine hours I stay there in that place.

**Janet:** Ellis Island?

**Phyllis:** Yeah. The people come, the police said, “You need any help? You want anything?” No language, no nothing, what can I do? What can I say? I have the -What do you call luggage and all?

**Janet:** Suitcase?

**Phyllis:** Yeah, suitcases and a lot of things from, I wait there. What happened to my husband? I don’t know, I don’t have telephone for my family to call in Boston or something …

**Janet:** I’m sorry, what did your husband say he was going to do?

**Phyllis:** They have a woman and girl, bring from Albanian here, they have to meet the husband, those women the two men in restaurant. They give restaurant there, they talk over this and that. When he come I was so tired up and pregnant, I said, “What you do to me? Why you do this to me?”

He said, “Don’t cry, everything going to be all right. I can’t leave them because the husband got sick and they put him in the hospital so I can’t leave them.” They have the right one to do yes, but for me that was very bad. After that we have good life, good 58 years married, we got together.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about Ellis Island in particular, besides when you were stuck there?

**Phyllis:** Yeah there was big building and everything, nice, but the people very nice. When I see the people take care of me, they bring me lunch, they bring me everything, I was surprised I said.

Just I was worried for my husband, what did he do, maybe something happened, maybe something is wrong. Everything go all right.

**Janet:** Do you remember the first few days in this country, the first few weeks, different things that you saw that you never saw before?

**Phyllis:** Yes. When I came here, I stayed in the mountain, because Albanian they don’t have this tree like here, so many trees. Why I see those building with the wood, they don’t have the stone houses.

When I came in my sister-in-law, brother-in-law house, brand new home, I was crying, I was not too happy. I looked like [inaudible 00:22:02] just brand new home and I was still crying.

My aunt from Boston said, “Listen Phyllis these people live in a [inaudible 00:22:13] state and this and that.” It was bad, but bad. You come in a new house and complaining? don’t complain honey, because it’s beautiful here, nice house.

I was happy with my brother-in-law, my sister-in-law, lived together for seven years, happy. All that time happy all those [inaudible 00:22:33].

**Janet:** You lived in Worcester?

**Phyllis:** Worcester yes, that’s my story. I work for four years and after that I retired. I went to Albanian five times to see my family. I used to say to my boy, I spend a lot of money to go there [inaudible 00:22:48] to be nice for me. “No, I’m glad you see the family momma.” I don’t find father and mother, just my brother and sisters and family.

**Janet:** What was your husband’s name?

**Phyllis:** Theodor.

**Janet:** Your children?

**Phyllis:** Paul and Loretta, both married. My daughter marry Albanian, my son marry American girl, wonderful girl and I marry from [Baltimore 00:23:18].

Start working in the shop, couple of years in a factory, shoe factory, I work few years there. I changed my name because when the office call me to go there and the boss from the desk call me, “[Inaudible 00:23:40] they want you in the office.”

I work and still working, called again, I still working, I don’t understand they call my name. When he come near me, “Don’t you hear me? They want you downstairs.” My name is not [Inaudible 00:23:58], my name is [Inaudible 00:23:59] Phylli, pronounce it this way. Still the same thing he pronounce it all the same, since then I change the name from [Inaudible 00:24:07] Phylli to Phyllis.

**Janet:** What customs did you keep from Albania?

**Phyllis:** Keep everything, tradition, Christmas, New Years, Easter, all the time, you keep tradition. Name this, all the time. Custom is custom.

**Janet:** I’m not sure if this was on tape before, but about the Baklava?

**Phyllis:** Yes, New Years day we have to make baklava to put coins there. New Years day we put it on the table and everybody take one piece, nobody know where the coin is. When they take the piece in the dish and they open, “I got it. I’m the lucky one this year.” Everybody get, be happy, everybody.

Easter time, they kill the lamb. They cook it, they make big bread with the eggs for how many people in the house. A lot of things, we celebrate that for three days Easter. Going places and churches here and there, we have a nice time. [Inaudible 00:25:37] those days.

**Janet:** In Worcester when you got here, were you part of a whole Albanian community?

**Phyllis:** Yes, especially when with family, my brother-in-law, my sister in law. I have the two sisters from my husband, two brothers and sister-in-law, very happy.

**Janet:** Why did they come to Worcester? Do you know why they settled in Worcester?

**Phyllis:** Worcester, the beginning I don’t know. My father used to say, “Worcester is the best place, they have a lot of Albanian there.” He said. “Not to be worried, you are going to see a lot of Albanian there.” I have my cousins here, I have two uncles and an aunt in Boston.

I was happy after. I have my kids, but before I was crying all the time. I don’t know why, I missed my family, I was young, I missed holidays. There was a lot at the beginning, after years.

**Janet:** How about your husband, what did he do when he was here in Worcester for work?

**Phyllis:** He worked [inaudible 00:26:43] for many years.

**Janet:** The what?

**Phyllis:** The [inaudible 00:26:46].

**Female:** [Inaudible 00:26:54].

**Phyllis:** No, [inaudible 00:26:51]

**Female:** [Foreign language 00:26:52].

**Phyllis:** No after, for 20 years working there. After that he worked for [inaudible 00:27:03] in the war time start [inaudible 00:27:04], they’re making gums there. He retire there.

He was not supposed to retire, the factory move to Pittsburg and my son said to my husband, he said, “Papa you work many years, you’re working hard. You are not going no more there, because I don’t want you to get anything.” He was 63 when my son stopped him, he don’t work since then. Everything okay.

**Janet:** What do you feel most proud of that you’ve done?

**Phyllis:** I’m proud for my children, I raised my children. No language and I don’t have anything, like my children say all the time, “Mother, I’m proud, you don’t know the language when you send me to school, I learn I don’t have any trouble, now I got nice job and everything. I’m in the air force, teaching and everything.”

He said, “I’m happy because you brought me good, you and my father.” I’m proud for my kids, for my daughter and my son, they are nice children, nice grandchildren and nice grand grandchildren.

**Janet:** Really?

**Phyllis:** Yeah.

**Janet:** How did it work out? In the beginning you weren’t that thrilled with your husband, the marriage thing.

**Phyllis:** Happy because we have children, two kids. He didn’t want me to work, that’s all. I wanted to be man in the house to work and support him, I said, “You’re working second shift, I work first shift.”

I start worked nine to two, he work three to 11. We have the time for the kids not to leave them alone with somebody else. It was good after, very good.

**Janet:** How do you feel about your life now?

**Phyllis:** Very happy, thanks God I’m very happy because I am in this country.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with the fact of being born in Albania and then living most of your life here?

**Phyllis:** I was so young to know too much for Albania from here. Most of the time in my life is here and I don’t feel that way for Albania. I feel for the family I have there, I miss the family. I went there six times there. I’m happy.

**Janet:** You’ve been back six times since 1936?

**Phyllis:** Six times. This time now not before, no. 18 years here that many years, not before no, I don’t go before. Because I look for a visa nobody give it to me, I look and I try and I try to see my mother and father, both die I don’t see my father and mother anymore.

**Female:** [Inaudible 00:30:27] did not …

**Phyllis:** They don’t let you.

**Female:** To come to Albania, [inaudible 00:30:33].

**Janet:** Is there anything else that you’d like to say before we go?

**Phyllis:** Just ask me anything, I can tell you, ask me.

**Janet:** What is your interpretation about why the Albanian community stays so close-knit?

**Phyllis:** One thing, when they get out from Albanian to come to United States they don’t have nobody. If they have people speak Albanian, they have to be close because otherwise it’s very hard, you have to find somebody to be like your family.

That’s way I was feeling before. Even now, if I see somebody Albanian from different town I know for so many years, I feel like it’s my family. That kind of feeling you have.

**Janet:** You were saying earlier that you think it gets passed on?

**Phyllis:** Yes, it’s passed on. You get in your mind, every time with family or the children we talk all the time for my family. Some day we like to visit Albania before they don’t want to go, now they said, “Yes we’re going to go to see Albanian,.”

My son is busy teaching in the Air Force so he don’t have time, the kids in school. My daughter came because she have factory working for her husband so there was no time to go.

**Janet:** Do you think being an immigrant, coming to a new country like you did, do you think that made a big difference in the kind of person you became?

**Phyllis:** I feel like I’m born here, because I don’t stay too long and I pick some language. I go and take papers, American citizen papers. I feel to be American here.

When I went to take papers, American citizen, they gave me book to learn the book. They don’t ask me those questions they give it to me, the judge, he said to me, “How you like your husband to be our president?”

I said, “My husband can’t be president because he’s Albanian born.” They give me the paper right away, they don’t ask me anymore questions. I read those papers for days and days to ask those questions. I don’t have that question. When he asked me that I said to myself, you got it now, you know now your children is [inaudible 00:33:23] your husband.

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

**Phyllis:** Yes, long time that’s why he bring me here.

**Female:** You can’t bring your wife and not be citizen.

**Phyllis:** He was citizen year after he came here. He was 13 years old when he came here.

**Janet:** He was a citizen when you came?

**Phyllis:** Yes. After I take the [inaudible 00:33:46] to go to a judge, change.

**Janet:** How did your husband feel about being here?

**Phyllis:** He feel very happy. He like it here very much. He used to work here, send money to family. He don’t drink, he don’t gamble, he was not here and there, family man with the [inaudible 00:34:20], very happy.

**Janet:** I guess that’s all I can think of, unless there is something else you want to …

**Phyllis:** Thank you very much, I appreciate it.

**Janet:** Thank you very much.

**Phyllis:** I appreciate it.

**Janet:** This is Janet Levine I’ve been talking with Phyllis Vani. It’s August 10th 1993 and I’m signing off.

**Phyllis:** Wonderful.