**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I’m here today in Abington, Massachusetts at the home of Mr. Arthur Vasel. Mr. Vasel came from Greece in 1922 when he was probably just about ready to turn 12 years old, as far as we can figure it.

**Arthur:** I thought I was a little older, but that should be more correct.

**Janet:** Mrs. Vasel is here with us and Mr. Vasel’s daughter, Anita, is also here with us. Let’s start at the beginning Mr. Vasel, can you remember your birth date?

**Arthur:** August 28th 1910.

**Janet:** Where in Greece were you born?

**Arthur:** Where what?

**Janet:** Where were you born in Greece?

**Arthur:** The villages have changed names, there was Turks that go in there and then they left in 1910, 1912, somewhere near there.

**Janet:** You were really too young to know what was going on?

**Arthur:** That’s right. The villages have changed names, the Greeks put it in a different name when they took over. I can’t tell you the name.

**Janet:** It was a Turkish name, then it became a Greek name?

**Arthur:** I don’t know whether it was Turkish or Macedonian, that was partly Greek, partly Bulgaria. There be Slavic or Russian.

**Janet:** I’m not sure.

**Arthur:** I’m not sure either.

**Janet:** Why don’t you tell me whatever you remember about the town where you were living?

**Arthur:** There was that and then -My mind’s gone blank.

**Janet:** Why don’t we start out with your mother’s name? What was your mother’s name?

**Arthur:** My mother’s name was Alexandra Pope.

**Janet:** Pope was her maiden name?

**Arthur:** Yes. P-O-P-E

**Janet:** P-O-P?

**Arthur:** P-O-P-E.

**Janet:** Your father’s name?

**Arthur:** His name was Peter Vasel, my middle initial is Arthur P. [inaudible 00:03:27].

**Janet:** Brothers and sisters?

**Arthur:** None. I’m a spoiled brat.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents that you remember?

**Arthur:** Yes, on my father’s side, grandfather very well. I learned some of the trade in woodworking. He was a cabinet maker, bricklayer and you name it, stone cutting.

He also took over a slum where there was abandoned. He made the, what is it you call that, that lets the water down to run the wheel? A piece of pipe or pieces of pipe, probably, like barrels one is put on the other. He did all that.

He made the stones, cut grain, wheat, and corn, and the structures. He [inaudible 00:05:06] a flour mill completely so I can remember that. He had one young fellow help with the labor.

**Janet:** What kinds of things did you do with your grandfather?

**Arthur:** He used to make little barrels for water. Water was transported in little barrel kegs, I don’t know whether you’ve seen them or not.

**Janet:** Where did you get the water from?

**Arthur:** Springs.

**Janet:** Did your grandfather ever tell you stories or anything?

**Arthur:** I couldn’t remember any of that.

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

**Arthur:** He was good.

**Janet:** Was your grandmother alive at that time?

**Arthur:** Yes for a while. She died probably eight years [inaudible 00:06:34].

**Janet:** We were talking about your grandfather having two horses?

**Arthur:** Yes. During World War 1 everybody that had horses, the government took them over to use them in the service. It was a mare that they took. I forgot whether she was killed or what happened, no they took them home. We had a fall [inaudible 00:07:49] her and he turned out to be a real good stallion. Finally my grandfather sold him, and from the on what happened? I can’t seem to remember.

**Janet:** That’s okay. Where did your grandfather live?

**Arthur:** The same village that I lived with my father, but I can’t tell you the name.

**Janet:** What was it like? What did …?

**Arthur:** The village when the Greeks come in and wanted to take over, they gave the people notice of [inaudible 00:08:53] but the ones that [inaudible 00:08:57] bow to their laws or else.

The ones that didn’t they burnt the village, all the houses to the [inaudible 00:09:11]. Grandfather stayed, and I wouldn’t say more than a dozen, no more than 20 at the most that live there and stayed.

**Janet:** Your grandfather was the one of the ones who stayed?

**Arthur:** Yes. The school was left without being burnt and the church.

**Janet:** Did you have aunts and uncles who lived around that village too?

**Arthur:** Yes in the next village, my mother came. There was two uncles and grandmother and aunt. I think that’s on my mother’s side but on my father’s side, I can’t remember the relations at all but there were a couple of sisters.

**Janet:** What do you remember about your mother’s family, aunt and uncles?

**Arthur:** One uncle came over here the same time my father came. From the village, I think there was at least five or six, maybe seven, that came here. They had to escape out of the country to get here.

**Janet:** Why was that?

**Arthur:** The Greeks wanted them conscripted in their army.

**Janet:** They had to …

**Arthur:** Escape out. There’s something I’m going to say, are you a Greek?

**Janet:** No.

**Arthur:** They condemned the Turks [inaudible 00:11:56]. What the Greeks were far behind and my uncles, they came here, his wife’s father took him out in the courtyard and shot because he so [inaudible 00:12:22] for the Bulgarians.

**Janet:** Did you see things like that when you were a little boy?

**Arthur:** No, I couldn’t help it but hear it. I did see some awful things on the way to [inaudible 00:12:47].

**Janet:** Let’s talk a little bit more about why you were still there. When your father left with the other six or seven men, what year was that?

**Arthur:** That must have been, I was two years old or about.

**Janet:** They were being conscripted into the army?

**Arthur:** Not over there but he would have been if they stayed.

**Janet:** You didn’t remember your father when you came … ?

**Arthur:** Yes I do, not then.

**Janet:** I mean you didn’t remember him when you came to the United States, you probably didn’t remember him from before.

**Arthur:** No.

**Janet:** What did your mother do when your father was gone to the United States? How did she get along?

**Arthur:** Over there you mean?

**Janet:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Arthur:** What little money he sent. He enlisted in the service and after the war was over he got his citizen papers and sent for us

**Janet:** He came to the United States, your father, and then he went into the United States Army?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** He tried to avoid the army but he got into another army.

**Arthur:** It was different.

**Janet:** What was the difference? What do you think was … ?

**Arthur:** [Inaudible 00:14:24] something that you were willing to do, not forced to do.

**Janet:** Why don’t we go onto when your father sent for you and your mother to come, how did you feel about it? How did you feel about coming?

**Arthur:** At that age I didn’t, what could I think? It was great to go to America.

**Janet:** Did your father write to you when he was here?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything he wrote that he said about this country or?

**Arthur:** No.

**Janet:** Do you remember leaving?

**Arthur:** Over there? Yes.

**Janet:** Tell me what that was like when you were leaving your village.

**Arthur:** My grandfather sold our property. There was a mix-up, he sent for me to, mother and I, there was a discrepancy as to me being born in Turkish [inaudible 00:16:10], they had no records. I’m not sure, six months or what it was, we had to wait. Finally we did get on the boat.

**Janet:** Did you have to wait in your village or you had to wait at the sea port where you were leaving from?

**Arthur:** We were on the way to the Greek sea port near Athens is Piraeus. We had to wait there about 20 days in a hotel.

**Janet:** Was that the first time you had been out of your village?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was it like for you in Piraeus?

**Arthur:** It’s a new thing, exciting I guess.

**Janet:** It was just you and your mother?

**Arthur:** Yes. I had another uncle over there, he went as far as Piraeus till we got on the boat and that was that. We got on that. In the same cabin that was a woman with her little girls, probably the same age as I was. Now I’m not sure what was their mother who was often sea sick. I don’t remember being sea sick at all.

**Janet:** What do you remember about the voyage?

**Arthur:** It was quite exciting to move and see whales bobbing up, or there could have been sharks, [inaudible 00:18:33].

**Janet:** What was the food like on the boat?

**Arthur:** Awful, it was Italian ship and it was mostly macaroni and water and that’s about it. It was probably a third class ticket, my father couldn’t afford more money for it.

**Janet:** Is there anything else that you can think of, as far as anything on the voyage?

**Arthur:** No.

**Janet:** Do you remember when the ship came?

**Arthur:** First we stopped in Naples and there we got and then we stopped [inaudible 00:19:38].

**Janet:** They took on cargo in Naples? Did the ship take on cargo in Naples?

**Arthur:** I’m not sure. They must have either fueled up or something because it’s an Italian ship. Then we came to New York, and I remember going to Ellis Island, it was huge, the big hall, it looked big to me anyway.

**Janet:** Yeah it is big.

**Arthur:** [Inaudible 00:20:18] colors of cloth of the whole world, people from everywhere. The immigrants they went, it was great.

**Janet:** What was your experience there at Ellis Island?

**Arthur:** We just happened to be there.

**Janet:** Were you examined? Do you remember that part?

**Arthur:** [Inaudible 00:20:58] I had to know and we were given a tag, mine was for [inaudible 00:21:07]. They pinned a tag on us and they shipped us on a train and I arrived at Rock Village, Middleborough. That’s where [inaudible 00:21:24].

**Janet:** When you were at Ellis Island were you separated from your mother at all?

**Arthur:** No.

**Janet:** What kind of a woman was your mother? How would you describe her?

**Arthur:** She was very good.

**Janet:** Did she discipline you a lot or was she easygoing or?

**Arthur:** Easygoing, being the only child I suppose.

**Janet:** Do you remember the train trip?

**Arthur:** Yes, but not too much.

**Janet:** Did you meet anybody, either on the ship, Ellis Island or on the train? Did you meet anybody that you were able to talk with and … ?

**Arthur:** Yes, there was other natives from over there. I could speak two languages then, I went to school for about a year. Then there was a woman with a little girl, they spoke Greek, they would [inaudible 00:23:01] forth. I could speak a little Turkish and the Macedonian language.

**Janet:** Is that what you spoke with your mother, the Macedonian language?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** When you get to Middleborough, do you remember getting off the train and everything?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** What about your father, where did you meet up with him?

**Arthur:** He was supposed to meet us at Ellis Island and I guess he got the wrong directions or our time. We had left for Middleborough before he found us. That was the mix up.

When we got to Middleborough, my uncle Pete that came over there, he took [inaudible 00:24:13]. My father had bought a farm in Middleborough and we were there 10, 12 years.

**Janet:** What was your father doing for work when he was?

**Arthur:** Rail road, laboring.

**Janet:** Before he came to this country?

**Arthur:** Over there you mean?

**Janet:** Yeah.

**Arthur:** That I couldn’t tell you. He must have been about 20 I guess. There wasn’t too much work so I suppose help my grandfather in brick laying or whatever grandfather was doing.

**Janet:** Your father was working on the rail road when he came here?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** Then he bought a farm?

**Arthur:** He bought a farm before he sent for us.

**Janet:** Did your Uncle Pete live with you, your mother and father?

**Arthur:** After my mother and I had got there, Pete decided to send for his wife and daughter. They came and lived in the farm for about three years. She didn’t like it out in the country and they left for the town.

**Janet:** What kind of a farm was it? What was your father farming? What was he farming?

**Arthur:** Nothing special, raised vegetables and that’s all, nothing money making.

**Janet:** What was it like for you to be around your father for the first time really?

**Arthur:** He probably asked me to [inaudible 00:26:55] how he was. I was 12 years old and in fact, when you meet with a stranger, loving and affection and come together [inaudible 00:27:27].

**Janet:** Was your mother happy that she had come to this country?

**Arthur:** I suppose so, there’s no way I could tell.

**Janet:** What about your uncle Pete, what was he like? Did you do things with him as well?

**Arthur:** He was pretty well educated, he could read and write three different languages. His family was more better off than grandfather. We didn’t have the school, the village that my uncle Pete and the other brother, it was much far to the town and they had a school there. That’s where I went to stay with grandmother. She was a nice person.

**Janet:** What do you remember about her?

**Arthur:** I think she so warm. Anybody else [inaudible 00:28:59].

**Janet:** I’m sorry say that again, you think she?

**Arthur:** She thought more of me.

**Janet:** Was she encouraging to you?

**Arthur:** I suppose, but she was very good.

**Janet:** How did she show you that she thought so much of you? What did you do?

**Arthur:** I can’t remember anything on that side.

**Janet:** When you first came to this country and you were living on the farm, did you go to school?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was that like for you?

**Arthur:** I made up my mind that I was going to learn how to speak and learn all I could. I thought, to hell with the old country, so much bloodshed or whatever you want to call it. That was that.

**Janet:** Were there other children in your class in school who didn’t know English either?

**Arthur:** All of them.

**Janet:** They didn’t know it?

**Arthur:** Over here?

**Janet:** Yeah.

**Arthur:** Sure, all of them, how would they know? There was very low percentage that came from over here.

**Janet:** In your class there were other children who had come from the old country too?

**Arthur:** Not in the same bunch that I came. I was the only one in the village.

**Janet:** What were your teachers like over here?

**Arthur:** Not very good.

**Janet:** How come?

**Arthur:** They believed the stick across the knuckles, you would think people educated would have more common sense than to punish young kids.

**Janet:** Did the teacher help you to learn English?

**Arthur:** Over here yes, I had two good teachers they were very good.

**Janet:** Where the teachers hit your knuckles was?

**Arthur:** Over there. The teachers were good.

**Janet:** What helped you to learn English, do you know what it was that helped you to learn?

**Arthur:** It was a hard language to learn, very hard. Many words, they sound the same they’re spelled different. I had a hard time to tell the difference between he and she. I couldn’t [inaudible 00:33:08] decide my mind which was which, I remember that.

I was in the fifth grade, this is in school and the principal of the school, I happened to be in his room. Some question was asked and he asked me and I don’t know all of a sudden, instead of “Yes sir.” I said “Yes ma’am.” I can remember that as long as I’ll live. It isn’t funny.

**Janet:** No it isn’t, it was embarrassing I guess for you.

**Arthur:** I don’t know at the time I didn’t realize it, it wasn’t quite so bad.

**Janet:** How long did you stay in school then?

**Arthur:** I stayed three, I don’t know I think it was four years, three.

**Janet:** Then why did you leave?

**Arthur:** [Inaudible 00:34:47] I guess. I was so much bigger than the kids, you can imagine, 13 or 14, with kid’s first graders. I didn’t mind it, I was determined to learn. I can understand kids have such opportunity to stupid to think.

**Janet:** By the time you left school were you able to speak English pretty well?

**Arthur:** Yes, I went out laboring on roads.

**Janet:** What was your first job?

**Arthur:** Picking shovel, what else could you do? Those were hard times.

**Janet:** After you worked on the road, how long did you stay working on the road?

**Arthur:** Off and on, it’s seasonal, in the winter time you loafed and worked during the hot weather.

**Janet:** When you were loafing, what would you do with your time?

**Arthur:** There was something that never worried me, I could go in the woods, roam around, fixed up a boat and then I’d sell a boat or two of them or three of them. I always made myself entertaining on my own.

**Janet:** This was what you had learned from your grandfather?

**Arthur:** Probably. [Inaudible 00:37:17] build a boat.

**Janet:** After you stopped working on the road, what did you do after that?

**Arthur:** I finally got work inside, I worked two or three different jobs. I decided I’d learn as much as I could and I’d ask for a raise and [inaudible 00:38:02]. I’d have a job already lined up and I’d give my notice of two weeks and I’d go in the next car.

One shop hired me at least three times. I had left and after staying away probably a month and I would always come back and give me a little extra.

**Janet:** What kind of shops were they?

**Arthur:** These were woodworking shops, silverware cases for internationals. After I worked at the shop, six or eight months, I was able to run the floor.

**Janet:** You mean to run everything on the floor?

**Arthur:** Yeah, that is pertaining to certain operations.

**Janet:** Did you stay working in different shops?

**Arthur:** Yeah. I had worked so long and raises come along, I’d find out from the other help he was getting more money and right off to bed I’d go before and [inaudible 00:39:49] I got more money or equal or else I’d have to go. That work goes all along.

**Janet:** You must have been a good worker if you got the raises.

**Arthur:** I think most individuals if they are willing to work, and don’t mind getting ahead. It’s all up to them.

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

**Arthur:** When I first came here, in school.

**Janet:** You were in the same class?

**Arthur:** Yeah, [inaudible 00:40:48]?

**Mrs. Vasel:** Yeah within 48 hours wasn’t it?

**Janet:** Your met your wife within 48 hours?

**Arthur:** No.

**Janet:** Tell me, what did you like about her when you first met your wife?

**Arthur:** I just fell in love with her.

**Janet:** You did?

**Arthur:** Yeah, freckle face.

**Janet:** Freckle face.

**Arthur:** I used to call her that.

**Janet:** Do you remember things you would do together before you were married, do you remember places you went?

**Arthur:** She wasn’t very willing to play sports or whatever you want to call it. I used to like sailing and she didn’t like that at all.

**Anita:** Did she tip over once?

**Arthur:** Yes.

**Janet:** You want to tell about that time?

**Arthur:** Her brother and I were in this sail boat I had. She was sitting forward near the mast and she had her back against the bull. She kept leaning on the bull so I kept pulling on the rope. Next thing I know, we went.

I’d like to think the lake was shallow. Her brother and I got out and raised the boat up. I don’t know how scared she got but she surely got scared.

**Janet:** When did you go into making carpentry work? Did you do that for actual work here?

**Arthur:** Yeah, not carpenter mostly cabinet making. One shop I worked we would sent furniture to Russia, the American Embassy over there. All I know I had her, if it wasn’t and [inaudible 00:44:11] in the shop, I was pretty close.

They came to me for answers than they did to one of the foreman. [Inaudible 00:44:35] would help that can be helpful but if you want to be a [inaudible 00:44:44], it doesn’t pay.

**Janet:** Did you work in the shop until the time you retired?

**Arthur:** Yes and no. I moved to New Hampshire, that’s the house there, that’s a granite stone house. [Inaudible 00:45:21] fixing something awful, I spent 10 months fixing it. All of a sudden the man that sold us, he saw what I was doing, he says, “How would you like to do some work on my house?” I said, “Okay.”

I went to work over there. Then he worked with another man, they were well-to-do, at least his wife was well-to-do. She was the daughter of the President of DuPont.

I was worked them, they started building new houses and I’d finish them off. I enjoyed it and they liked me. They were two Irish men and you couldn’t meet anybody better.

**Janet:** You worked for them on their houses?

**Arthur:** I worked for them probably 10 years. I’d go and do my work and I’d never show up, it’s just what I wanted done and that was that.

**Anita:** Did they make you a partner in the company?

**Arthur:** Yes in a way.

**Janet:** You were a partner before you retired in this company?

**Arthur:** You could call it that. Then we decided to split up and each one went their way and that was that.

**Janet:** Tell me, do you think the fact that you came here as a boy, around 12 years old and lived most of your life in this country, do you think the fact that you immigrated here made a difference in the person that you are? The fact that you came from someplace else and started over again, more or less?

**Arthur:** I don’t know, I never thought of that.

**Janet:** Do you think the fact that you were an immigrant, do you think that changed the way you saw things in any way?

**Arthur:** No, the way I looked at it, it’s the greatest country in the whole world. People should realize it, but stupid idiots don’t realize that.

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

**Arthur:** I don’t know.

**Janet:** Maybe I should say what do you feel most grateful for?

**Arthur:** That I’m here.

**Janet:** Did you take a lot of pride in your work?

**Arthur:** Yeah. I had some of my work go to New York, some to Philadelphia.

**Janet:** Can you think of any ideas or attitudes that you tried to get across to your children?

**Arthur:** No, the girls wouldn’t be interested in woodwork, except that one.

**Janet:** You were a hunter?

**Arthur:** Yeah, I hunted, that was my recreation. I had in the last …

**Janet:** Unplug that.

**Arthur:** [Inaudible 00:50:42] 15 years I had some of the best bred dogs, best trained anyway.

**Janet:** You raised hunting English setters?

**Arthur:** Yeah I had four different kinds of breeds. I like them the best. They’re so short, they would not fight.

**Anita:** The Springers were nice too.

**Arthur:** Yeah. Springers are good for young people, you get old it’s too much to keep up with them.

**Janet:** It sounds like you were very fit?

**Arthur:** Yeah, almost two years now, I was able to walk well, walk three or four hours anyway.

**Janet:** Why don’t you say the names of your children for the tape? The names of your children?

**Arthur:** Anita, Elizabeth, Patricia and Emma, Mary.

**Janet:** You had all girls?

**Arthur:** Yes, but they were good kids.

**Janet:** Do you have grandchildren as well?

**Arthur:** Yeah she has a boy and a girl. Pat has four all together, three and one adopted. Emma is still single. What’s that you got Anita?

**Anita:** He said how they remodeled houses, this is one.

**Janet:** Oh my goodness.

**Anita:** They bought this Victorian house when I was in, it had about 18 rooms and this big barn and 80 acres of land. When we moved to that place in Middleborough I didn’t know a person around, but it was the best place ever. It had woods, fields, pastures, swamps, brooks and rivers.

It was in sad repair when they got it. He had to do a lot of work, I remember he had to tie ladders to get up on the slate roof to work near it.

**Janet:** It’s beautiful. This was something you did? You repaired houses and lived in them and then sold them and went into another one?

**Arthur:** Yeah. If there was work somewhere else, I was always looking for a shop like during the winters. I found a place. I also learned more about cabinet making, because they’re not two shops they were alike.

They are but the men are all together different, some are really knowledgeable and some they don’t know nothing. To do things like my great grandfather did, they don’t progress at all. It was a family of three brothers and [inaudible 00:55:09]. The oldest one, were they all one of those guys that are not paying any attention, the oldest one.

They all [inaudible 00:55:30] youngest one I believe take over the shop. Boy they were English men, oh boy. I said to work, nobody works with an Englishman.

**Janet:** Why is that?

**Arthur:** Some really are selfish. I found Jews are better than they are and people complain about Jews. You give a Jew his money’s worth and labor he takes care, but with the English. There was another company I worked for, that was during the war, I worked for them for four years, taking care of what they had until I helped to …

**Janet:** Were there any events that happened in this country during your lifetime that particularly affected you? Any particular presidents or any labor union activities or anything like that?

**Arthur:** No, I belonged to the union two, three times. I found them very [inaudible 00:57:12], in other words, if it’s a small shop and still are given the same wages as what other shops. They don’t bother to enforce law and I didn’t approve that at all.

First chance I got I would always get out of it and work on a open shop, [inaudible 00:57:53] without paying due. It’s very good [inaudible 00:58:04] will give you their money in a woodshop you can produce.

**Janet:** Did you have any heroes in your lifetime, people you looked up to? Whether you actually knew them or they were just people that you heard or read about?

**Arthur:** No.

**Anita:** Musicians?

**Arthur:** Musicians yeah. [Inaudible 00:58:47] this is why I have that turned on.

**Janet:** You’ve enjoyed a lot of music in your life?

**Arthur:** I know classical. I don’t care for rock or whatever you want to call it.

**Janet:** Anything else that we haven’t talked about that you’ve enjoyed a lot? We’re getting close to the end of the tape, is there anything you can think of that you’d like to say before we close?

**Arthur:** I don’t know. I can’t think of what to say that much.

**Janet:** I want to say that it’s been a pleasure talking to you because you’ve told some very interesting things. I want to thank you.

**Arthur:** I want to thank you too.

**Janet:** You’re welcome. This is Janet Levine and I’m here with Mr. Arthur Vasel and we’re in Abington Massachusetts. It’s December 5th 1994, and you would be 84 at the time today? You’re 84 years old?

**Arthur:** Yeah.

**Janet:** I’ll be signing off now. Thank you.