

# **INTERVIEW WITH NAZARETH DONJOIAN**

**Conducted by William D. Wasson**

**November 3, 2001**

**Narrator:** Nazareth Donjoian

**Interviewer:** William D. Wasson

**Date and Place:** November 3, 2001, at Mr. Donjoian's house at 2 [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Begin Tape 1, side A.**

**Wasson:** Nov. 3rd, it is 1:45pm, this is David Wasson conducting the interview, and if you'd go ahead and state your full name please.

**Donjoian:** My full name is Nazareth Donjoian. And a lot of times they call me Naz.

**Wasson:** OK, do you mind if I call you Naz?

**Donjoian:** No. Go ahead.

**Wasson:** Can you tell me Naz, when you were born, and where?

**Donjoian:** I was born Nov. 11, 1924, down in Lincoln Place. And, with my Mom and Dad were Armenians. And far as I know I thought I was delivered by Dr. Benny, but I really I think what it was, was what is it that a woman's---

**Wasson:** A midwife.

**Donjoian:** Midwife and then Dr. Benny had the last say so---

**Wasson:** He signed the paperwork.

**Donjoian:** Right. He signed the papers on it.

**Wasson:** Were you born at home?

**Donjoian:** Evidently I was born in a home, yeah, at the house.

**Wasson:** Was that normal at the time?

**Donjoian:** Yes, that was normal at the time because most of them like my sister, my older sister and another sister. I think the only one delivered by Dr. Benny was my younger sister. And normally you had a midwife deliver the babies.

**Wasson:** How many brothers and sisters do you have?

**Donjoian:** I've got three sisters, one older and two younger and then my older sister's name is Satanick and my sister, I was second and then the third born was my sister Violet and then the fourth one was my sister Audrey. And we were all born in Lincoln Place and my Dad at the time was--had a building, he had-- a where Sammy's Tavern is now there used to--he used to have a frame building there, before that, and that burnt down. And we, we lived on Chestnut street, I've forgot the address on Chestnut street, but the building was burning down and the he was sleeping and they came over and knocked on the door and said "Kasper, Kasper, your building's on fire!" And he says, "let it burn" he says, "I'll build another one." (Laughter) And, and that's, that's what it was so they had burnt the building. And we had a dog back then. I don't know if I should even tell you this, but we had a dog, it's name was Tony and the dog thought we were inside the building and he would run in and out the building to get to us you know. And he got burnt bad so my Dad had to have him destroyed, but that's the story that I remember is we had a dog and he would be running in and out. But, I still tell that to my kids and all that stuff and they always want me to tell them the story, "Dad, tell us about Tony," you know.

**Wasson:** What year was that?

**Donjoian:** Oh, that had to be--oh I wasn't very old so I guess that might have been around 1930 maybe, somewhere around in there.

**Wasson:** Can you tell me something about your parents, where they were born and stuff like that.

**Donjoian:** My mom was born in Erzrum, E-R-Z-R-U-M, I believe is the way you spell it. In ah, Turkey now, but it was Armenia. And the Turkish people have taken it over. My dad was born in Moosh, that was in Armenia also. And he had gone to Bulgaria and, and where his dad was and his dad was a cook, a chef; and my dad was a cook, and a chef also. That was their trade really. And he came to this country around 1903, and, he worked on a railroad to make money in the northern, northern railroad; I don't know, I always try, I always say Great Northern but I don't think that's the proper name for it but it was in north; in North Dakota, South Dakota, in that area, Minnesota. Back then he was only getting 10 cents an hour but, but he saved his money and I think he'd also spent some time in Bettendorf, Iowa and from what I understand also he, he had worked, he had a place in New Jersey but I don't know too much about that. And he, I don't know what year he came to Lincoln Place, but, but we were born in Lincoln Place and my sister was born there, she's older than I so he had, had to be in Lincoln Place in the 1920s; 1918, 1920 somewhere like that.

**Wasson:** OK.



**Donjoian:** My mom had lost all her relatives during the Turkish massacre is what it was; I mean they might not, people might not say it was a massacre, but it was. She had lost all her relatives so she was the only one. I could tell you had my dad brought them over, brought her over, if you're interested in that or not.

**Wasson:** Yes, 'cause that was, somebody had brought that up in class about the Turkish and Armenian genocide and so forth and yes, so if you could elaborate on that.

**Donjoian:** Yeah, see my Dad was here and he had first cousin, my, his name was Tom Donjoian or we called him, his Armenian name was Tojos. And my dad he sent him some money to come over here and, Tojos had a girl that he, he was going to marry so my dad told him to bring another woman for him from Armenia. So my dad sent him money for that and they, they came over, they came to, I don't know what part of the States, I don't think they went to Ellis Island, I think they might have come directly through because they had the money to come through and, he had lost, and then he had lost some money while he was in New York, he said somebody had took it from him you know so he'd wired my dad back and asked my dad for some more money and my dad sent him some more money and then he came, he came to Granite City. My dad seen my mom, he wasn't too happy. He didn't want to marry her. He says (Laughter) 'cause' she actually my mom was married previously and lost all, she had four kids before us and she lost them over there and I don't think it was any massacre or anything I think they just died naturally for some reason or other. And, but my dad wasn't too happy with my mom, so a lot of the other bachelor Armenians that were there in Lincoln Place they said, "Well Kasper, if don't him, we'll take her, if you don't want her, we'll take her." So, so he changed his mind (Laughter). He thought if somebody else wanted her, he better keep her.

**Wasson:** What did you did your mother do? Did she ever have a job outside the home, or was she strictly a homemaker?

**Donjoian:** No, she was, she was, she helped my dad cook when he had the building. He had where Sammy's Tavern is now, that used to be my father's building. And we used to have rooms upstairs, we had, he had a restaurant and ah he would cook and my mom used to help, help him with the cooking. And she would take care of the rooms upstairs. And also take care of us. So basically she, her job mainly was staying home and helping my father and taking care of us.

**Wasson:** What was the name of the business that your father had?

**Donjoian:** Well, it was Kasper's, Kasper's Restaurant and Coffee House. He didn't have his name of the window or anything, but that's what it was, Kasper's. And then he also had pool tables in there where people came in and played pool, and played cards, and then he served, he served they drink Turkish coffee mostly and, and people that, bachelors that

weren't around there they would, when they worked would come to the restaurant and eat and my dad was, used to keep books on them, they didn't, some of them before they didn't have any jobs and he would just keep track of what they ate and kept books on them, kept a ledger on them so that whenever they were able to pay him back they would be able to pay him back.

**Wasson:** Did you live on the premises or did you have a separate house?

**Donjoian:** For, for a short time there we lived, we had a separate house. And then we moved from there into the building upstairs where my dad had some rooms upstairs so we lived on the premises, in the building for quite a few years. And I think my, my uncle Tojos he lived where we were living, he lived in that house for a while, on Chestnut street. And then from there he moved, he moved further down to I think it was, I guess that's Walnut street out there somewhere closer towards the depot one street over, Spruce or Walnut I can't remember the name of the street.

**Wasson:** Do you know if this house is still there?

**Donjoian:** The house is still there, right. His house is still there, both houses is still are still there. His house is still there, somebody else owns it now, they sold it a few years back when my cousin George, Donjoian, he was going blind and stuff and he had diabetes and he was going blind, and as long as he was living there he kept the house but he was also a teacher though in California, he taught school in California, he was a certified teacher in California. He had, as a matter of fact, he had moved there quite a few years ago teaching then when he got to the point where he couldn't teach anymore because of his eyes and stuff, and diabetes, why he came back here to Lincoln Place and the house was still theirs, so he went and opened up the house and stayed in there for quite a few years until he passed away.

**Wasson:** You mentioned your father's business, Kasper's, is that building still standing?

**Donjoian:** That's, today that's Sammy's Tavern has got that, is where it's at. He had lost the building, during, during the Depression there. Or right after the Depression, really. He lost the building around 1936 or '37, somewhere in there, when people were starting to work back up.

**Wasson:** And when you're talking about the, the men who stayed there, and, and he would keep books on them, was that during the Depression?

**Donjoian:** Yes, yes that was during the Depression where they didn't have any jobs. These, these were immigrants also that came to this country. And they weren't married, they were single. 'Cause back then only the single people went out to eat, the married couples stayed home and their wives cooked, they, it's not like it is today where people go



out and eat all the time, married couples will go out with their children and eat, back then it was just single, bachelors that would, mostly bachelors, that came and ate, and slept upstairs.

**Wasson:** OK. What do remember about the Depression? Anything that sticks out in you mind?

**Donjoian:** Well to me, I never felt anything about the Depression. I mean, as far as I'm concerned I always had food, my dad always had food there. Of course, he was buying food on the cuff too from Misteff's Market back then. And he would buy groceries from there and he would have to push a book as they call it and give him a credit. And Misteff's naturally kept a ledger on him as to what he owed him and everything else and when the time came, when my dad, after he'd lost the building actually, but, 'cause when I came back from the service, Misteff's wanted my dad to pay him back his money that he owed him, you know. So, it ended up that I had pay to pay off the bill that my dad had for the grocery store, for the food that he would buy to cook and give, give to the immigrants who never paid him back, half of them would say "I'll give you half," and some would say "I won't give you anything."

**Wasson:** So if, if he, he lost the business in about '36?

**Donjoian:** In '36, right.

**Wasson:** And so, when you came back from the war, which was when?

**Donjoian:** Oh, see, we had moved, we have moved back then. And back then that was 921 Pacific Ave, that Pacific Ave before Niedringhaus. Before they changed it to Neidringhaus, it's Neidringhaus today. And ah, so we moved, moved to what was then 944 Pacific Ave, or Neidringhaus. And there was a big frame building there, which my dad was renting and using the part of it as a restaurant and doing business there before I went I went in the service. And then when I went in the service and I came back, that's where I came to, 944 Neidringhaus.

**Wasson:** So that was about ten years after he'd lost the business is when the bills got paid off?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, see it was after I'd come back, it was, I'd say it was maybe longer than ten years, because it was 1945, when did I get discharged? I guess it was around 1945, yeah, when I got discharged. So it would have to be somewhere around there before Misteff's got his money.

**Wasson:** About ten years for him, ten or eleven years for him to get his money.



**Donjoian:** Yeah

**Wasson:** Did they charge interest back then?

**Donjoian:** Not that I'm aware, no they, there was no interest ever charged back then. I'm sure Misteff's didn't charge interest either.

**Wasson:** Where did you go to school?

**Donjoian:** I went to school grade school, I went to Washington School. Which was down West Granite. And I went there through the sixth grade and then from there I went to Central School which, which was downtown here on, near the Library in that area there and where the Senior, well I call it the Senior Center, but it's downtown; that used to be Central School there before they built that place. And that's where I went to school for my seventh and eighth, yeah seventh and eighth, grades. And, and then I went to Granite City High School downtown here nine, ten, eleven and twelfth.

**Wasson:** What year did you graduate?

**Donjoian:** I graduated in 1943.

**Wasson:** 1943.

**Donjoian:** June of 1943.

**Wasson:** What's your most vivid memory of your childhood?

**Donjoian:** Well, all I remember we used to, we used to go to the levee a lot of times and ah during the winter there used to be a hill like there and we'd get our sleds and slide down the hills and also go into the Community Center which all of us kids used to always go there all the time and Miss Prather then was in charge of the Community Center and she would have all the kids based on their age as to what time they would have to leave go home so that they wouldn't be staying out late. And the younger kids would always have to go home earlier and about nine o'clock the older ones had to leave cause they used to close the Community Club up at nine o'clock. We used to call it the Community Club, Community House.

**Wasson:** What religion were you then or did your..

**Donjoian:** Well, back then, all right, really I was Armenian religion but I never, we didn't a church down there so most of us would go to Sunday School at the Community Center. Every Sunday we'd go to the Community Center to go to Sunday School. That was as

close as we came, as far as myself goes. There's others who had, they went to Catholic schools, I mean Catholic churches, and other churches, but I ah don't ever recall ever going to a church until, I mean I've been to churches but I mean I don't recall joining, belonging to the church until we had the church down Lincoln Place, St. Gregory's Armenian Community Center, I mean St. Gregory's Armenian Church, Apostolic Church. That's where I started going to church at. And that was after we had our kids, after I got married and had my kids is when I really started going to church. Prior to that I didn't. But during my youth we was always in Sunday School. Because.....

**Wasson:** At the Community Center?

**Donjoian:** At the Community Center. Until, until we went in the service. That's about the last time I remember.

**Wasson:** What, how did you celebrate the holidays, you know Christmas, New Years?

**Donjoian:** We would, we would celebrate the holidays, I would, I would always recite the, we, we used to live upstairs oh I remember mostly when in the building at 921 Pacific Avenue, and we would come downstairs and we would greet our father and mother with ah "Christ Has Risen" and on Christmas you know, we would say "Christo Stenav Univ Stav" (unsure how to spell in English. The Armenian language has 36 letters) and, and we'd kiss his hand all the time whenever we'd say that. And my mother and he would always give us something whenever we did that. And, but Christmas, Easter we'd have Easter eggs and Christmas we celebrated, but it was mostly just amongst ourselves that we would celebrate it. Except by what, well back then I had a cousin who was working at time I remember mostly was after whenever the Commonwealth Steel plant starting opening up and he had, Commonwealth used to give all the workers a box of candy all the time, you know, they'd bring that home for Christmas. But Easter we'd celebrate with eggs and stuff. Go around breaking eggs, you know, if you broke someone's egg, you got to keep that egg. That's, you challenge them with eggs and they would all try to do all kinds of things to make the shells hard before Easter so that you could win.

**Wasson:** So they couldn't break you egg?

**Donjoian:** Yeah.

**Wasson:** Um, was Christmas celebrated as it's done now on the 25th and New Years or was there different dates?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, most of the times that I remember was, when I was little was the 25th. That when we celebrate, but today its celebrated, I mean our church we have them both, we celebrate on the 25th and then we celebrate also on, it's on the 6th of January, when



we celebrate Christmas. So we actually celebrate, we actually go by the old Gregorian calendar and at church. So actually we have the, the what you call it, the, the luck to celebrate both days.

**Wasson:** Right, yeah, fortunate enough to celebrate it twice.

**Donjoian:** Yeah, we're fortunate enough to celebrate it both days. So we, at our church mostly, most of the time it's the 25th but then we also have it on the 6th of January.

**Wasson:** Based on the Gregorian Calendar?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, Because that's the old Christmas Day, said that whenever they changed the calendar well they changed the dates.

**Wasson:** So, after you were married and so forth, is when you started attending church and then so you carried that on and the traditions.

**Donjoian:** Up to day, up to now. I go, I try to make it every Sunday. Very seldom do I miss.

**Wasson:** Did you have an outside job when you were growing up? Did you help your father at the business?

**Donjoian:** No, no. When I was growing up, we used to pick spuds, potatoes on the farms. I mean we used to get maybe a dollar a day. During the summer time we'd work there and get a dollar or so a day and we'd only work there a few weeks one place and then you'd move on the another place but you didn't work, we didn't work too long on that. And, I'd save my money but that money was mine, I didn't have to give it to my dad there was nothing. But I would buy my sister a present. As a matter of fact, I worked two weeks and went out and bought her a bracelet, which cost, I think, ten dollars, or something like that, and it was my two weeks pay. You know, picking potatoes. Back then you really had, you really worked hard to pick potatoes cause we were kids then you know. But also, during high school I worked for the AYA, what was it, the, was the American, we, we they gave us the opportunity to work for 3 dollars as month. You worked at different things like you'd work in a toolroom, I used to be in a pattern shop so we used to work, I used to get a job in the toolroom there checking out tools for the guys who used to come to night school there taking up pattern making and then I'd also I'd help with the coach on track in gym and stuff and get paid three dollars a month. And I think I got six dollars a month then. I didn't have what you'd call a steady job cause I was 17 but I did go, I did get a job my last half year of high school, at the depot. I got a job there in '43, the Granite City Army Depot. And I worked there for about three months before I went in the service. And that was the steady job I had. The money, the money



we always got, my sisters, myself; whenever we got any money we always gave it to our father. No question asked, he didn't tell us we had to give it to him or anything like that, but we always gave it to him. And if we needed any money he'd give us five, ten dollars, or whatever we wanted, you know. But the money always went to him.

**Wasson:** When you, when you worked picking spuds, what was the work day, how long was it, sun up to sun down?

**Donjoian:** Well, we'd start off early in the morning. I think we had to be there, start at seven or six, somewhere around there. We'd ride our bikes over to where the Chain of Rocks Bridge is, in that area and we'd ride our bikes there, then it'd be about seven o'clock before we'd get off with work, about ten, twelve hours. And then the farmer used to feed us you know, he would have a break about ten o'clock and bring out sandwiches and stuff like that. His wife would make him to bring out sandwiches. At noon, we'd go into the farmer's house and he had a meal out of this world. In there, we would eat and then afterwards we'd go back out in the field about ah three, three o'clock something like that. And then give us another break and bring out stuff and then about seven we went home.

**Wasson:** Now was this only boys worked at that?

**Donjoian:** Only boys, yeah. Just guys, they would dig up the potatoes and go around picking up the potatoes and put them in a pile.

**Wasson:** When you got the job at the, at the depot, of course, you just walked, walked to work there. Did you, did your parents ever have an automobile?

**Wasson:** No, my parents never owned a car, or nothing like that. I had a bike. I used to ride my bicycle back when I lived in Lincoln Place, at 944. I'd ride my bike back and forth to high school. And sometimes I'd would just, back then I just used to like to run. And I'd run all the way up there and all the way back. And then I whenever I was going to high school as soon as I got home I'd go to the depot and work from I think it was from four to twelve, at night. And then I'd get up in the morning and go back to school, in the morning.

**Wasson:** What did you do at the depot?

**Donjoian:** I was, back then I was a carpenter's helper. I would basically, what it amounted to is you'd go out in the lumber yard and stack lumber on a, on a trailers or trucks that would be sent to the carpenter's shop and where basically what they, not carpenter's shop, but actually was a shop where they made boxes and so forth; crates, and all those other things. And they would have to have the lumber there and we would have

to stack the lumber on trailers and would have to unload it when we got there. And they would use it, the carpenters would cut up the wood for whatever they needed it for.

**Wasson:** To build boxes for shipping stuff?

**Donjoian:** Right.

**Wasson:** Um, now if your parents didn't have car, was it economic or did, was the community able provide everything that you needed and there really wasn't much need for a car?

**Donjoian:** There, there was no need for a car for us. We're kids we really didn't need a car. Once in a while somebody who would have a car, that is, when we were little, once in a while somebody who had a car would pick us up and maybe take us to Wilson Park or a couple of other areas around here, you know, that would have something maybe going on Sundays. But after I got out of the service I didn't have a car either. A couple of buddies of mine, one guy he bid on a car from the depot. Ruben, Ruben Parsagion, he bid on a car from the depot and got it, it was a Ford, it was an olive drab painted Ford, and we used to ride with him. He used to take us different places a lot of times. And there was another guy, his name, we called him "Dupo", his name was Abraham Totoesian, he used to take us out also. We'd get together we go to what we call Blubby's, which was a singles' place, Simon's Place, it's still there today and we would go over that and sit around and gather around there and then one of the guys with the car come by why we'd all get together and go someplace. We'd go to East St. Louis or we, or we, mainly around back then East St. Louis had bands and stuff going, big bands and stuff going.

**Wasson:** When they talked about it was an ethnic community and sometimes it wasn't well received in Granite City. When you went to high school, you said it was down near the library.

**Donjoian:** No, that was, the high school was here. This was, I don't know what you call it today, middle school or what, but it was Central School is what it was. That was after you passed the sixth grade you went to another school for the seventh and eighth grade. Near the library.

**Wasson:** Then, so was high school in Lincoln Place as well or was it in Granite City then?

**Donjoian:** No, high school was in Granite City.

**Wasson:** How did you get to high school?



**Donjoian:** I used to ride bike like I says, yes. Um-hum. And then when we was going to Washington School we'd always walk and we'd have to go through West Granite. And a lot of times they'd call us "honkies" you know and no, yeah they'd call us "honkies" and we would call them "Hoosiers" because they were from a different part and we had to call them something. And ah there used to be quite a few ah fights with one another, you know, chasing one another back home and that stuff. But after I got out of the service whenever we went somewhere like East St. Louis and if any of the guys from Lincoln Place got in trouble while we'd always holler out "West Granite" or "Lincoln Place" and these guys we used to have fights with used they'd come out and help us, you know. That's one thing we did, we stuck together when we was out somewhere else.

**Wasson:** So they became your buddies?

**Donjoian:** At an older age, right. At a younger age we were always chased after.

**Wasson:** So I mean there was harassment and so forth because of your ethnic background

**Donjoian:** Right, yeah, yeah, right. I mean but it wasn't near that bad. I never had any problems, during my whole time. But I know that I had friends who always somebody was always picking on them or they would stand up and fight back, they wouldn't take off, they would fight back.

**Wasson:** When you were in class, was it pretty, was it kept under control by the teachers?

**Donjoian:** Oh yeah, yes. The teachers had very good control of the class. As a matter of fact my first year when I went to grade school, my first year in grade school. I would go to school and I would just get sick. I couldn't, I couldn't stay in class because I'd get sick. I don't know if I was homesick or what. And the teacher would tell me "Naz, go outside and get some air" you know and I'd go outside and go on home. (Laughter) I wouldn't, I wouldn't stay. My uncle, ah his name was Hagop Donjoian, a lot of times I had to be carried to school because I didn't want to go to school. I guess I was too homesick or wasn't ready for it, so my first year I failed. Back then they failed you, they didn't mess around with, you know like pass you just because they wanted to go on and advance. So I was one year behind throughout school. That was the only time I failed.

**Wasson:** Did they have a kindergarten and then a first grade or you just started in first grade?

**Donjoian:** No, you just started in first grade, right. We didn't have no kindergarten.

**Wasson:** So you started about six years old then ?



**Donjoian:** Six years old, right.

**Wasson:** You mentioned that you went in the military. Were you drafted or did you join?

**Donjoian:** I was drafted, yes. I was drafted. My, my father was trying keep me from getting into the draft because, he had, he had my two sisters, my mom, dad and he wasn't doing to good there, he wanted me to stay out of the draft. He was trying to get me to stay out, but I didn't stay out, I went in service. But then I had allotments sent home. You know, back then, what was you getting', I was getting' maybe \$20 or something like that a month, back then, and I had an allotment for my mom, dad, two sisters; because he wasn't, even though he had a restaurant he wasn't making any money then, during that period. He was up in age, he was getting' up in age.

**Wasson:** So he had health problems?

**Donjoian:** Right, but that allotment is what he, I would sent back all the years I was in service, he had, they had gotten an allotment.

**Wasson:** How old were you when you went in the service?

**Donjoian:** Eighteen.

**Wasson:** Eighteen. And when did you go in?

**Donjoian:** Oh, we went in June of '43.

**Wasson:** And what did, what did you do when you were in the military?

**Donjoian:** Well, I went to airplane engine mechanic school. I was in the, I was, as a matter of fact when I got drafted, we were on a train leaving, I forgot what the place in Michigan that where we were at, and we were leaving that area there and a guy; an officer or somebody stood up and all you guys are going in the Air Force, well it was the Air Corps then, it wasn't the Air Force. He says, "All you people are going in the Air Corps." I didn't, I didn't enlist in the Air Corps or anything like that, I was drafted into the Army and it was a matter of where they wanted to send me, you know we have taken the aptitude tests and different things like that and they asked me what I wanted to be and I told them I wanted to be a mechanic, so they sent me to Gulfport , MS. That's where I had my basic training. Went to their airplane and engine mechanic school there. And then after basic training while I went to, we went to school there. And, I forgot how many months we were there. And then from there I went to Smyrna, TN, that used to be an Air Force base back then, now its, they got Japanese auto makers there.

**Wasson:** Oh, right, yeah.

**Donjoian:** And then from there, from there, I went to Seattle, Washington, Boeing B-29 school. And we were the last class gin' through there, and ours was at the time, from B-29 school to Ft. Myers Florida, that was our itinerary. Then we went from, was supposed to go from there to the South Pacific, but we never did get that far. The war in Japan had ended. And I went to Maxwell Field, and had my discharge there.

**Wasson:** At Maxwell Field?

**Donjoian:** Yeah.

**Wasson:** When did you get out?

**Donjoian:** Ah, fo- I was in there thirty-two months, so, I guess that was 'bout forty-five.

**Wasson:** Thirty-two months?

**Donjoian:** Yeah. Is what I was in, thirty-two months. So. . .

**Wasson:** Now, when you went in the military, was that the first time you'd left Lincoln Place? You know on any trip or. . .

**Donjoian:** Basically that was the first time, yeah. There were, while I was - when we were smaller, we had a band too. An Armenian band, you know. We used to, there was about ten or twelve of us in the band, and we made a trip to Detroit. That was about the first time, the farthest I ever got away was about when we were about ten years old, twelve years old, something like that. Went to Detroit.

**Wasson:** What instrument did you play?

**Donjoian:** I played the clarinet.

**Wasson:** In the school band? Or was-

**Donjoian:** Yeah, I went to the school band, after I, this wasn't in a school band, this was an Armenian band. And we used to play for different functions, you know, like the had some kind of doing going' on. We'd play and we were all young kids then, and so, well whenever I started high school, first started high school, during the summer, I went to band and played and got, I was able to get first chair as far as clarinet cause I was way ahead of all the other guys. Who'd never done anything, but, I went to, I took vocational shop instead pattern making, so I had to quit the band. I couldn't play in the band no more, because, we didn't have time for that, back then.

**Wasson:** Um, were any of your parents musically inclined?

**Donjoian:** My mother's father supposedly was a very good violinist, and she always wanted us to play violin. We used to, she bought us a violin, in grade there, and we tried to play it a few times and stuff. But we never took it up, never did really get that interested in it. But I still got the violin.

**Wasson:** Did the school furnish the instrument or did your parents have to pay for the clarinet.

**Donjoian:** At the time we was in the Armenian band, the people who, who got the band together paid for the instruments. And gave it to us kids. They actually gave it to us, we had them, I had it for a long time. When I come back from the service I had the keys all repadded and everything, I lent it to my sister, for her girl to play it. I never got it back. (Laughter)

**Wasson:** (Laughter) Did you ever take lessons?

**Donjoian:** Never took any lessons.

**Wasson:** Just picked it up on your own?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, we had, we had an Armenian person, who, who was the leader of the band and he would have you play this stuff but he was basically the one. But I never had any what you'd call real lessons.

**Wasson:** Um, when you were growing up do you remember any of the other ethnic groups? Any of their traditions and so forth?

**Donjoian:** Yes, I remember the Hungarians, I remember the Bulgarians, Macedonians, and ah, they were pretty close to what we were involved in as far as food and dances. It was pretty close to ours, maybe not the Hungarians, but the Bulgarians, the Macedonians, the Greeks. Well we only really had one Greek family down there, then we had Italians, and we all got along good with one another. As a matter of fact, I remember one time, coming home from school for one reason or other, this one Hungarian man grabbed me by the ear and twisted my ear. For what reason I don't know, I must've done something I had never knew what it was. But I never went home and told my mom or anybody, cause if you did they figured you did something wrong and you'd get another spanking. Haha. So we, but we always got along one another, we always greeted each other, every time I'd walk down the street, no matter what nationality they were I'd always say "Hi, how ya doin'."

**Wasson:** So there was no animosity among the ethnic groups or anything like that?



**Donjoian:** No, not that I was aware of, if there was, it had to be among the old ones. I don't remember any animosity, we'd, we had Mexicans there too. Got along with everybody.

**Wasson:** And everybody in Lincoln Place stuck together when you went to the other part of Granite City?

**Donjoian:** Oh yeah, yeah we always, Lincoln place. Like I said, as, which I was surprised, after I'd got out of the service, there was a couple friends of mine who were East St. Louis, and, we got into a little fight, something' like that, and they'd holler, 'Lincoln Place', West Granite came in too, everybody was one, helping each other. There was, I never, as a matter of fact a lot of the guys that we might of had fought against, as we got older, became friends. We weren't enemies.

**Wasson:** Yeah, do you keep in touch with childhood friends?

**Donjoian:** Oh yeah, yeah, I still keep in touch with them, and, as a matter of fact, Joe Abodigian, he was raised, his mom had died early and he was raised in an orphanage, and every time he and his brother would come home, well all of us guys were always out there, just happy to see them all the time, you know. Really happy for one another, and they used to come to my dad's restaurant and they would eat and my dad always catered to them, you know, whatever he could. Sam ended up being a police man, and Joe had a cleaning, cleaning shop, cleaners there, down in Lincoln Place.

**Wasson:** When you went in the Air Force, what were your reactions when you moved from so many different places, you saw a lot of the United States, how were you received, did you have any problems with you ethnic background or

**Donjoian:** No, no I never had any problems with my ethnic background. As a matter of fact, I was received as any other person, only thing is, I had a so-called buddy, that always borrowed money off me. I never spent that much even with twenty bucks, you know, and so I'd always give 'him, he'd always want five, ten dollars, I'd always give him ten. So, so one time he, I had it and he asked for it, I thought, well I'm not going give it to him this time, so I didn't want to give it to him this time, and then he start calling me names, different things, but other than that, I never had any problems. Just like some people used to say, "Man, you got a big nose," I'd say "No, where I come from everybody's got a nose like this, you guys are different." You know, haha. But, you had to laugh, or else you would really hurt yourself if you got mad at them. You weren't hurting them, you were hurting yourself. So I never had no problems, I always got along good with them.

**Wasson:** And what was your reaction to the, to the United States as a whole, I mean, if you only lived in Lincoln Place and then suddenly you're seeing all the new and different places in the United States. . . .

**Donjoian:** Well, when I first went in, I, you know then had colored, separate, you know. And down south where I was stationed most of the time, was down south, and you'd see a lot of areas that were colored only and stuff like that. That was the first time I ever ran across it. Anything like that. I never even thought about any of that stuff when we were younger, growing up. Never dawned on me about the racial differences, you know, as far as that, the black and the white. But as far as what I seen I liked all the country, I enjoyed Gulfport, I enjoyed all that very much. I enjoyed Tennessee. I enjoyed Seattle. I enjoyed all the, all the areas where I went to. It was, it was really something.

**Wasson:** Did you, have much association with black people when you were growing up?

**Donjoian:** No, no, never had any, any association, the only times, whenever I'd go down to Brooklyn we'd ride our bikes, we'd go down to Brooklyn, and we'd see some, but we never had any problems. Nobody ever said anything to us, back then. I don't think there was tension that there is today.

**Wasson:** Were there any in your school, in high school, or -

**Donjoian:** Never had any in high school. In Lincoln Place, as a matter of fact there wasn't too many of color, if any, that lived in Granite City, at the time. Granite City was known to be an area that colored would not venture in to. The only time they'd venture into it was when they're working you know, in the factories and stuff, but I never, never. .

**Wasson:** Never had any problems. What brought you back to Granite City? After the -

**Donjoian:** What brought me back?

**Wasson:** Yeah. After World War Two.

**Donjoian:** Well, my dad was still here, in Granite. And I came back to Granite City, and to me I had no desire to go anywhere else or settle anywhere else. I was, what twenty-one when I got out. And, I never had any desire to go anywhere else, as far as to live somewhere else. California even, well my sisters in California, my cousins are in California, my nieces are in California. Now I've got family there. Nephews, and I've got a cousin that in Memphis, Tennessee. Ad there was no desire on my part to move out, I've got all my friends here.

**Wasson:** It was just home?

**Donjoian:** It was just home, yeah.

**Wasson:** There was no consideration of-



**Donjoian:** No consideration at all. My wife, when I married my wife, she was from St. Louis, and then she moved over here, and stayed here in Granite, she was, I wouldn't say she was real happy living in Granite, but she enjoyed it. She made a lot of friends here.

**Wasson::** Did you live in Lincoln Place?

**Donjoian:** No, no, whenever I got married I got an apartment on Benton Street back then. And the church next door wanted to buy the building, the apartment, so I sold it to them. And then this area here was just starting up here. And a guy I used to work with, he was contractor out here, so I came over here and talked with him and the money I got for payment on the apartment, well I it put down on this home and the one next door. Which my sister was living in then. While I was in Stockton, California, on a job there, I had suffered a heart attack. I had what they call a myocardial infarction, which is very severe heart attack. I was there, we was there, well I was there on TDY for months.

**Begin Tape 1, side B.**

The first week I was there, I - My sister didn't have any money to buy the home here, so I put money down on both of them. And then bought both houses and start paying the mortgage off on them.

**Wasson:** What year was that that you moved in here?

**Donjoian:** I'm trying to think, what year that was, well lets see, that'd be about thirty-five, close to thirty-five years ago.

**Wasson:** And which sister was that?

**Donjoian:** My sister Violet. And she passed away about ten years ago. And I let my niece have the house, she had a daughter. And she was married and I let her have the house, my wife and I both signed the house over to her. And so she got, the house is in her name now.

**Wasson:** Did any of your other sisters live in the area?

**Donjoian:** My sister Sotnik lived in the area until, I don't know how many years ago she left. Her son, or, daughter went to California, so, she, their daughter, her son then flew to California to get a job over there instead of staying over here. So, he wouldn't go as long as my sister was living here. So my sister decided she would sell the house, and then move to California. Both of them went to California.

**Wasson:** So she's the only sister that moved away?

**Donjoian:** No, my other, younger sister, Audrey is in Tiffon, Ohio. She married Cy Wienandy from the depot back there and he was a soldier, he was, he married, she married him. And they moved to Tiffon, Ohio where he's from.

**Wasson:** When you got out of the military, what, what did you come back and do? What kind of job did you have, or occupation?

**Donjoian:** When I got out of the military, I came back, I was off about two weeks, and my dad was always on me about going to work, you know. And, so, I went back to the depot two weeks after I got out of the service, I went back there to work. Because I had, rights. . . .

**Wasson:** Return rights for work?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, return rights. So I went back there, and I start working there. And then as a carpenter's helper. And I was, I signed up for fifty-two twenty, but I was only able to draw one week's pay out of that. And the guy says, "Well if you draw that one week, he says you'll lose out on fifty-two weeks if you happen to come back," you know. So I let it go and I never did get any of it, so, I figured just in case I got out of a job I could go back to fifty-two twenty. But, I wasn't able to. I went back as a carpenter's helper, my dad was still living then. And we on, at 944 Pacific Avenue, and when it was [unclear] outside from the [unclear] day I changed it. And I'd work there at the carpenter's shop. I went with the post engineer, no I went, first of all I went to box shop, and worked over there for a while. And then I went to post engineers, and worked with them for a few years, then from there, I went to work as a processor mechanic. Worked processing, you know preserve all the different equipment, heavy equipment. Cranes, and tractors and so forth. We preserved the engines, and everything else with it, bogged them all, sealed them. Then when they came up for shipment they'd pull them out of there and load them on rail cars and send them out. To the different areas where farming wanted to go. And then from there, I got RIF'd [Reduction in Force], no, I went into inspection. Preservation of packaging inspector. And then I went to, they started cutting down on us, so, cutting down on the people there. So I got RIF'd, and I got RIF'd into packaging specialist job, you know. And so I worked in there, worked in there for a number of years. I got RIF'd to GS-7, lost pay, but then I went up to a twelve. So, I really, it was better. Every job I got changed from, it ended up being better than the one I had before. Even though I didn't want to leave it, but they made me leave it. I was, Reduction in Force. So, I ended up on Goodfellow, the, where the old small arms plant is now, was rather. Now they got, I don't know how many different federal employees over there.

**Wasson:** So you're retired Civil Service then?

**Donjoian:** I retired civil service, yes, I had about forty-two years. All together.



**Wasson:** Than includes military time, too?

**Donjoian:** Right, includes military time. But, yes, I was actually in the civil service before the military, before I got drafted. So really, even anywhere else I would've went they would've still included military time. With pension.

**Wasson:** Now, the fifty-two twenty, was that like an unemployment?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, that was for fifty-two weeks you got twenty dollars a week, for fifty-two weeks. That's when you first came out of the service, after World War II, they had fifty-two twenty. You could draw, about a year's, you could stay out a year and draw twenty bucks a week. There was a lot of people who did that, you know they would, especially a lot of them I know that came from overseas, they came home, they would just sign up for fifty-two twenty and wouldn't even bother to find another job because they was satisfied with that.

**Wasson:** A year vacation.

**Donjoian:** Yes.

**Wasson:** What year did you retire?

**Donjoian:** I keep forgetting what year, but I was sixty-one, I would say it was about fifteen years ago. From the day.

**Wasson:** Did you take any other job when you retired or did you just retire?

**Donjoian:** No, because I went out on disability. When I, because I had suffered a heart attack when I was in Stockton, California. And, on a job there, I had suffered a heart attack. I had what they call a myocardial infarction, which is very severe heart attack. I was there, we were there, on TDY (Temporary Duty) for a month. And the first week I was there, I had a heart attack. So I was hospitalized for three, three more weeks, four weeks. In Stockton, then I came home. I was off about nine months, and, my wife would come over there also to California. They asked if I wanted her to come, I says no, I didn't want her to get worried and stuff like that. That was right after I had the heart attack. The doctor says, "You'd better get her over here."

**Wasson:** You were just in California on a job and then you got hospitalized there?

**Donjoian:** Right, right.

**Wasson:** What year was that?

**Donjoian:** (Laughter) That was about, that had to be about twenty five years ago. So, so back, it's about....

**Wasson:** Well, it doesn't matter, I can do the math on that. How'd you meet your wife?

**Donjoian:** Oh, on a blind date. I had a tavern down in Lincoln Place. It was called Joe and Oz Tap Room, and ...

**Wasson:** You owned it?

**Donjoian:** Huh?

**Wasson:** You owned it?

**Donjoian:** Yeah, with Oz and Niedringhaus. It was, and Joe and I had bought it and there was a girl there who used to come to the tavern, her name was Tillie Tojoesian and she was going to fix up my buddy Perry Manoogian with a blind date, you know, one of the girl's from work that she knew. And I said "Well, how about me?" (Laughter) So she fixed me up with my wife and, which wasn't my wife then, and we went out together and after that we went out all the time, after that blind date, we never once not go out together. And Perry just went with this one girl that one time and that was it. And he didn't go out with her, but her and I went out all those years and that's how I met her, on a blind date.

**Wasson:** And she was from St. Louis?

**Donjoian:** She was from St. Louis. She was a very nice woman. She was a very nice wife, very nice mother. And she was more worried about me when I had my heart attack then about herself. And she always afraid I was going to die. But she was a wonderful old girl.

**Wasson:** And you said she died....?

**Donjoian:** She died 1997, Sept 31st, 1997.

**Wasson:** How many children did you have?

**Donjoian:** We had two. Both of my children were adopted. My wife was raised in an orphanage, and we tried to have kids and she wasn't able to have any. So she says she wanted to adopt. She says "There's no way that I could not love them, a child, you know, that I adopt." She says, "Because I was raised in an orphanage myself, so I know what it's like." So we put in for adoption paper, I mean for adoption, and it was, well let's see, I wasn't, How old was I? I was getting close to forty, I think, so we adopted a boy from



Alton. It was the Alton agency over there, I forgot the name of it now, Children's Home and Aid Society in Alton. And they checked on us and everything else and got all good references you know, they said everybody they talked to spoke very highly of us, so we adopted and we got a boy. His name is John Paul Donjoian. And a very good boy. And then about, about a year and a half later, they called the house and wanted to know if we were interested in another baby. And we said yes, you know. And so they had a little baby girl for us. And we adopted her. Her name Patricia Ann Donjoian. And she's another beautiful girl. Both of them were beautiful, beautiful kids. They're both married now. My son works for Boeing, at the missile plant. He's got a home in Chesterfield. He's got two daughters. My daughter married Lance Boveree and he's working for Owens Glass and they have a boy, his name is Drake Lee Boveree. Beautiful, all three of my grandkids are beautiful.

**Wasson:** So you have, how many grandkids?

**Donjoian:** Three, three. Two daughters by my son. I should name her, give her name. Her name is Jennifer Brown. Her mother, her dad was a teacher at the high school. And he passed away at an early age. But they knew each other in high school, but never cared for each other in high school. It was afterwards that they started thinking about each other and got married. They've got two beautiful kinds, two beautiful daughters.

**Wasson:** Did your mother, I mean your wife, did she know her parents at all?

**Donjoian:** She knew, she knew the parents, but Drake was the first one born. My wife was in the hospital then and dying basically and my daughter got pregnant and she was telling my wife, she says "That she was pregnant" and my wife looked up at her and says she was so happy, she says "But I'll never be able to see them." She never did.

**Wasson:** Your wife, did she know her parents or ethnic background?

**Donjoian:** My wife's background you mean?

**Wasson:** Right, yes.

**Donjoian:** Yes, she was, she was a mixture. She always said she was a mixture, she had part Indian, part French, part Dutch and I don't know what else. But she always said she was a mixture. She was a mixture. She had about three, two, ..... two brothers. Her mom had died at an early age see. And her dad put them in an orphanage think it was a Lutheran orphanage in St. Louis. And she had been raised there. As a matter of fact she took me over one day to see the place where she was at. They've moved out into the county now. And she took me over there and very, very nice the way they treat the kids. I mean they were all good kids there. We went there one time for a party.

**Wasson:** So there was no ethnic problems or anything. I mean your wife, talked about having problems in other parts of Granite City but there was nothing as far as...

**Donjoian:** No, she, no. See, we got married in 1960. So she was, she had no problems with anything.. As a matter of fact she got along good with all the Armenians. She was a really a better Armenian than all the Armenians you know. Because she took an interest in the church and everything else. And she took an interest in all the activities that were going on. And she would do a lot of work for the church and stuff like that. She got along good with all of them. As a matter of fact, today there's a lot of the Armenian boys and girls intermarrying, you know, not marrying one or the other. Very few you'll find that does, but they still do, but there's a lot of them that aren't. We have a lot of people in our church, one or the other spouse is not Armenian, you know. And they do more work than a lot of the Armenians that are there. So our priest gives a sermon in both English and Armenian. Both, both ways, so that the older people that he gives it to, so they know what he's saying. And the non Armenians he gives it so that they can understand what they're saying, he gives in English. He has his sermons both ways.

**Wasson:** I mean, do some of the older Armenian wish their kids and so forth would marry fellow Armenians...

**Donjoian:** Yes, oh yes. That, that's a known fact. In fact, my dad used to always want me to marry Armenian, but then later on he said, "Just get married!" (Laughter) Because I was thirty five years old when I got married, see. And I always told my wife I wanted to get married before I got thirty six, I didn't want to be considered a bachelor you know. So, so we got married two days before my thirty sixth birthday.

**Wasson:** How about your kids, do they practice the Armenian traditions?

**Donjoian:** When they were little, both of them did. Now my son and his wife, they got married in Armenian church and the children were baptized in Armenian church and they come to the Armenian church quite a bit. My daughter, she married one who's not Armenian also, but he doesn't, isn't that active in churches, so my daughter doesn't come to our church, except on special occasions she will come. But her son goes to daycare at a, I don't know whether it's Lutheran church or Baptist church, I don't which one it is. So he goes there. And he's learning a lot of church activities there. I'm sure they teach him different religious things.

**Wasson:** So everybody is trying to keep the European Armenian heritage going?

**Donjoian:** Right. My son is, like I say, he was adopted, but he's more Armenian than a lot of Armenians. I mean, he really, whenever he's on his trips or anywhere else, wherever he goes, he says I'm Armenian. Well, you can tell an Armenian by their last name, it'll



always end in "ian" and some Russian Armenian have "yan". So you will have some Armenian with "yan", but most will have "ian".

**Wasson:** But you keep track of world events as they relate to Armenia?

**Donjoian:** Oh, yeah. Well, I try to keep track of what relates to Armenia, but there's not too much you can hear about it, except for the fact that there are right now in Uzbekistan and the Turkish and all the other governments. See Armenians are a Christian nation, one of the first Christian nations. Actually, the first nation to adopt Christianity..

**Wasson:** As a nation.

**Donjoian:** As a nation in 301 A.D. And they've always been right in the middle where the Muslims are and the other Arabic religious organizations are. So they've always been, what you call, threatened, disliked, whatever way you want to put it, all those years. So they have a hard time. Even the Russians took a lot of the Armenian land and gave it to the Azerbaijanians. That's why Nagorno Karabakh, which was part of Armenia, was given to the Azerbaijanians during Stalin's era. And now they're wanting to get back with Armenia but Azerbaijan wants to keep that area. So it's, it's a....and they've cut them off from all the oil and stuff like that. They're landlocked, you know, they're not able to get any help from anybody except the U.S. Government has given them some help also, but it's going to be a little bit trickier now with what's going on in our world today.

**Wasson:** All those borders have changed over time and ethnic groups and they're so mixed and common land.....

**Donjoian:** Right, and then in the United States and is on very friendly terms with Turkey now which was the ones who the Armenians were massacred by. But, still, to me, I have no hatred because I'm, I don't like it, but I know there were a lot of good Turks who have helped the Armenians during that time too. And protected them. So there's good and bad, and then another way I look at it, if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be here today.

**Wasson:** Well, that's true.

**Donjoian:** (Laughter) It's got its good points and it's got its bad points. But the good point is that my dad did come to this country and my mom, and we were born here, so that made it, that part I like. Otherwise I'd be over there today. Or I don't even know if I'd be there today. After I had my heart attack, I don't even know if they would have the facilities to be able to take care of you like they do here.

**Wasson:** Right, or even let you in the facilities.

**Donjoian:** (Laughter)

**Wasson:** And so when you talk about the Turks, looking at them basically as being a Muslim nation, ..... because they have their problems Muslim and Christian, and all the stuff from the Kurds.

**Donjoian:** Right, right. And all those countries, at one time or another, have fought each other. All those countries at one time or another were great. The Armenians were great in the early years, you know, and they eventually lost all their strength, whatever you want to call it and they backed off. But you have, I guess back then you had tribesmen too where each clan wanted to out do the other clan.

**Wasson:** Alexander the Great came from Macedonia.

**Donjoian:** Macedonia, right.

**Wasson:** Like you said, those were the, in the early centuries, those were the powerhouses of the world.

**Donjoian:** Right, right. Look at now, look at Macedonia today. It's, it's down, Macedonia was a great country at one time. We had a lot of Macedonians who lived in Lincoln Place too. Bulgarians and Macedonians are pretty close.

**Wasson:** Getting back to when you said you owned a business, was your dad still alive then? Were you in competition?

**Donjoian:** No, when I owned the business I was still working at the depot too. I never quit my job because I didn't want to take a chance on quitting and Gabby's, that used to be Gabby's Tavern at one time. And Gabby sold it and Joe and I bought it. And we had Gabby tending bar for us, for a long time. Him and his dad. And he was a very good bartender. We didn't make any money..(Laughter)...we, we had the tavern, we had, American Steel was closed down, let's see, it was 1950...somewhere about 1950. American Steel was closed down, Commonwealth wasn't opened or anything and we were lucky if we took in fifteen dollars a day a lot of times. That's no lie. And we still sponsored a bowling team, but we were used our own money back to sponsor, like I said, I had a job. Joe still had his cleaners, he had a cleaning shop in St. Louis. And he would come in the evening and work there whenever he could and then I would work there in the evenings after I got off work. And that's, that's the way we made it. We enjoyed it, we had a wonderful time, during that period when we had the tavern though.

**Wasson:** What changes have you seen in Lincoln Place, as far as, let's say maybe the population or.....

**Donjoian:** Well, Lincoln Place looks like mostly the immigrants are gone, or died, immigrants, and their offspring, most of them have left, left to go to better themselves, to



go to different areas, like I came here. Some of them went to different states in different areas to get a better job, to get more work and do better. A lot of them have done very good, but most of them of the people that I'm aware of, the immigrants that were, or the immigrants' offspring and so forth have left Lincoln Place. Lincoln Place isn't what it was, I don't consider it to be the same. I go down, when I go down there it's all together different. Just like you're in a lost neighborhood, you know. Even though it's your old neighborhood. Plus the fact that a lot of the buildings have burnt down, a lot of them have been torn down and there's not too much left, as far as the main street goes. The offshoots, like the streets Maple street and Spruce street and Chestnut street and all those others they're still there, but it's not the same.

**Wasson:** And is that a bad thing? Do you feel they lost their heritage? Or you talk about them moving out. I mean, is it, have you been able to, by the people moving have they taken the Armenian heritage and spread it throughout the United States, and that's good? Or is it bad that they've left Lincoln Place and kind of lost it?

**Donjoian:** It's good, it's good as far as the people who have left and did I, it's good. But as far as if they would have kept the place as they did on the hill. If they would have kept their ethnic buildings and businesses going there, they might have drawn, eventually, they might have drawn a lot of people over that way. Just like today everybody goes to the Hill, for restaurants and eats and ...

**Wasson:** You're talking about in St. Louis, the Italian area?

**Donjoian:** St. Louis, right, the Italian area where they kept their neighborhood up and everything. It's good that they have moved and did better, you know, as far as that part goes. It's bad that there never was, developed any further than it was, as far as the ethnic part of it. But I'm sure the people that are there now are just as happy as we were when we were there.

**Wasson:** And do they, when you keep the ethnicity and so forth, is it like, you keep..., you're an American but you keep your Armenian heritage or....?

**Donjoian:** Oh you know we always said, there was never such a thing as Armenian-Americans when I was growing up. It was always, "I'm an American, but Armenian blood. That's the way I always used to say it, "I'm an American." I never did say "I'm an Armenian-American", there was no such thing as an Armenian-American. I never heard of African-Americans, I never heard of Hungarian-Americans, or Italian-Americans or none of that stuff. When we were growing up there was no such thing. So, to me, the only reason why I'd say I'm Armenian-American was because that's the way they identify you today. By that, just like I've read many times, they should drop that part about African-American, Armenian-American or Italian-American or ah, Macedonian-American, we're all Americans. Let's, let's..

**Wasson:** Of all different heritage.

**Donjoian:** Right. We all have different heritage, but we're all Americans. And to segregate ourselves like that I don't think is good. I think that sometimes that causes a lot of problems.

**Wasson:** Do you feel that being Armenian has ever held you back in life?

**Donjoian:** No. No, I don't think it's ever held me back in life. I don't ever, I never,...something like that never came to my mind, at any time. I felt like I could do whatever I wanted to do. I could go wherever I wanted to go. And I could be whoever I wanted to be. And it's up to me, not for somebody else to do it for me. And if I don't do it, and if I'm happy, well, so be it.

**Wasson:** Have you achieved what you wanted to in life?

**Donjoian:** Have I achieved what I wanted? Well, I feel like I could have achieved a lot more than what I have, but I was a little laid back I think. But I'm happy for what I have and for what I've accomplished I'm happy. The only thing is, I wish my wife was here to enjoy it.

**Wasson:** That's true. What would you like people to know about Lincoln Place, as it was when you were growing up?

**Donjoian:** Well, we always called it "Little Europe." You know, because there was all different areas there. I would like them to remember it as (pause) people who grew up and mixed in the American family and were proud to be Americans. Proud, proud of our ethnic backgrounds, but we were also proud of the country that we came to. I think that is one of the best things that has happened to all us that were born there.

**Wasson:** Have you ever had the opportunity, or the desire, to go to Europe, to Armenia?

**Donjoian:** No. No, sometimes I think but I've forgotten so much of Armenian, as far as speaking it. When I was little that all I spoke in the house was Armenian and everything. But whenever we'd go out we always spoke English. But from the time I went in the service until the time I came back I forgot a lot of Armenian. My dad was still living, I'd speak Armenian to him then and everything. But I've forgotten a lot of how to speak in Armenian. And I'm afraid if I go to Armenia today I would be lost, really as far as trying to keep up with them because they speak a little bit different. It's just like, we used to go out, you know. The guys, a bunch of guys together and we went in a nightclub and we'd be talking. Some of us, some of the guys would speak Armenian to one another, you know. And there was a group of girls sitting a little bit away, because the table was round



like this, round, you know, where you sat together. And they said, "what language you guys speaking?" We'd say "we're speaking Italian." (Laughter from both) And they'd say "Italian! We speak Italian and we don't understand you guys!" We say "What part of Italy you from?" Of, they were from the upper part of Italy. Well, we were from Naples, you know, that's a different language, (Laughter). We speak a little different. But that's basically why I say I've forgotten how to Armenian a lot even though I could understand it more than I could speak it. As far as going over there I think I would be lost. I would like to go as far as seeing different places, but I never had a desire really to go. I never did say that, "I'm going to go see Armenia." Just like my wife used to always say, "There's so much to see in American. Why go somewhere else?" And she strictly did not believe in going over.

**Wasson:** Did you do a lot of traveling with your wife after you retired?

**Donjoian:** No, we didn't get to do too much traveling. We went a few places, but we didn't do too much traveling, no. She always wanted to go to Vegas and we never did get to go to Vegas.

**Wasson:** Is there anything that I haven't covered that you'd like to talk about or..?

**Donjoian:** All I can say is that (pause) I think life has treated me good. I don't have any problems with the world. And I just hope, and I pray all the time, that there'd be peace on earth and good will towards one another. And no more wars and no more disasters and hopefully that everybody can get along with one another. Of course that one of the words that King said when.... what was his name over there in California whenever he got beat by the police? Rodney King, he says "Why can't we get along with one another?" And I believe that, we should all be able to get along with one another.. But I don't know anything I could add to what I've done. There's a lot I'm sure that I've left out.

**Wasson:** Do you think Granite City is a (pause) I don't know how to put it. It is a good place to live now, there's no animosity?

**Donjoian:** Oh yeah, I think Granite City is a good, good place to live. I think a lot of people might disagree but I believe it's a good place to live. Very friendly people here, we all get along with one another. And basically you get to know the mayor, you get the alderman, you get to know all your city elected officials, you know. And we have doings that are community's, that our St. Gregory's Hall there you know, and I tend bar there a lot of times. Matter of fact, I'm going to tend bar there this evening. And you meet so many people from different areas. And they are all very friendly, especially your politicians here, I think, are very friendly.

**Wasson:** Do you think the people of Granite City recognize the heritage of Lincoln Place?

**Donjoian:** I think so, yes.

**Wasson:** Are they're proud of it now as being...

**Donjoian:** I'm Sure. And we're having a big ceremony this Sunday to honor Andy Phillips, who grew up in Granite City; was a great basketball star. He went to Illinois U, he was one of the whiz kids at Illinois. He played with the Boston Celtics, he played with, I think he played for a short while in St. Louis too. I don't know if he played with Chicago or not. But the only time this city has won a state championship is with all, basically the majority of kids from Lincoln Place. Different backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds. And there was Armenians, and Hungarians, and there was guys from downtown, a few guys from downtown too. But we had a pretty good ethnic team here. That's why when they won the state championship they said Little Europe. And they're having a big ceremony for him, putting up a sign in his honor this Sunday at Granite City gym.

**Wasson:** Do you think that event is what sort of gave Lincoln Place recognition within the city and it's acceptability?

**Donjoian:** I think it helped very much. I believe it was a good thing for the people of Lincoln Place. For the kids especially, because they used to play all the time. We used to go Community House and play all the time. Basketball, and stuff like that. And then, you know, they had those bridges braces across the gym and you had to shoot though the holes in order to get to the basket, if you wanted to shoot high. (Laughter)

**Wasson:** Do you think things would have been that much different if the team hadn't won in 1940, if the basketball hadn't one the championship?

**Donjoian:** I think it would it would have been a little bit different but I think it would still been very good. there's no question in my mind that the people would accept you for what you are. As long as, you know we didn't have anybody from Lincoln Place that was bad, I mean, spent a lot of time in jail. We had maybe one or two. But as far as a group, as far as that many people that was there, we did not have any criminals or anything like that come out of Lincoln Place. You had one or two that served jail time for what they did. I remember one when I was little, he'd killed a tavern owner and he spend all the rest of his life in jail. And this tavern owner used to take care of this guy that killed him.

**Donjoian:** So if there was something bad happened they certainly made note of the fact that the individual was from Lincoln Place?

**Wasson:** I don't think they ever put it in the paper. Well, they might have but I don't recall reading anything in the paper saying if anything happened that this is Lincoln Place, that it happened in Lincoln Place. They might say West Granite, which takes in the whole



area. Lincoln Place is part of West Granite. But I don't recall anything like that, no. But the only time, like I said, I do believe the state championship back then, when you look back... not then I didn't think it was, but when I look back I think it had a lot, a lot to do with accepting a lot of the kids from down there.

**Wasson:** Well, I can't think of any more questions. If you don't have anything else to add...

**Donjoian:** No. I didn't know if whether I wanted to go through with this or not, but I enjoyed talking with you, I think you're doing a very good job and it's something I thought I ought to do anyway because I said I would do it. And it's, like I said, there's so many things I'm sure that I've left out that I could get it all in there. And to me what you guys are doing I think is good. It'll help some people.

**Wasson:** I hope so. Well, I've certainly enjoyed talking to you and that will conclude the interview.