Narrator: Richard and Susan Depigian
Interviewer: Jennifer Haselhorst
Date and Place: Interviewed on 11-17-01, at the Depigian residence in Belleville, Illinois.

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

Jennifer Haselhorst: Richard, can you tell me when you were born.

Richard Depigian: 1926 May 7th in Granite City. I believe it was St. Elizabeth Hospital. At the age of 5, I was exposed to the community center where I went to Kindergarten.

Haselhorst: And that would be Lincoln Place?

R. Depigian: Lincoln Place, I had several instructors or teachers. The main one was Mrs. Prather. But under her were several others, Alice Sublicity and Louise Makaratoff, I believe. I think I have that correct. Those two I remember very distinctly. They were very good, very good teachers. And we had all kinds of activities, kindergarten. Then from kindergarten of course I assume several years passed, then we began to go to Sunday school. Sunday school was held at the community center also. At that particular time I do not believe we had an Armenian Church. If we had, I don't remember.

S. Depigian: I can say that the Armenian Church I can tell you whom was the first marry in it. It was build around the 19, after we were married, 1950's sometime. Like Bosien was the first one married in the church.

R. Depigian: That may be true, however

S. Depigian: They may have had a

R. Depigian: The church existed but in happened to be the Macedonian / Bulgarian Church. And the Armenians bought it. At what point in time I do not remember. But I know we went to Sunday school, and I was not exposed to church until later on.

S. Depigian: Was it an Armenian Sunday school?

S. Depigian: Or guess just a Sunday school?

R. Depigian: No. It was just a Sunday school. Just a Sunday school. But everything centered around the community center. All of the activates as I remember, basketball, I did some wood craft, these were in the later years, and boxing. And we kept out of trouble by having the community house. If we had not had that, we would have been in rough shape.

Haselhorst: Now I know Mrs. Prather was the one that founded the community house. And she, from talking to some other residence of Lincoln Place, I had found that she would make them work outside for shoes. And stuff like that. Did she have that sort of impact in your life?

R. Depigian. Well she had great impact because she was the director of the community center. But I had, I did not have too much exposure to her but we knew that she was the main say because any activity that was performed that was by her direction, through her direction. So she had great influence and kept the community together. Whether it was Armenians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Mexicans you name it, we had, we had the whole kitten caboodle. In those early days, that is all I remember of the community center. If mom wanted me I was at the community center, regardless of what time of day or night. But we managed to get in at 8:30, 9 o'clock in the evenings all the time so they knew exactly where we were all the time. So they had no problems with the kids growing up. We attended Washington school from first grade on to sixth grade. Sixth grade we went to Central Junior High [through] 7th and 8th grade. And then from there to Granite City High School, Community High School.

Haselhorst: Now was that when it was split, the high school?

R. Depigian: No we did not have the North and South. It was just Granite City Community High School. And I attended high school from 1940-1944. 1944 I was drafted to the service where I spent two years in the service.

Haselhorst: Now what branch of the service were you?

R. Depigian: Infantry. I served for one year and then reenlisted after one year of service into the regular army and was shipped over seas. But during my time in the service, after my basic training, I became an instructor, or cadre, to teach other people. So I was relatively outstanding in whatever I did.

S. Depigian: [Laughing] He was, I wasn't but he was.

R. Depigian: And shipped overseas to spend a year in Vienna. And from the infantry, I was transferred into to the military police. Became first sergeant of the company. And I was a staff sergeant out of basic training and shipped overseas and became first sergeant and put into the military police battalion. During occupation, this was 1946; we were patrolling the international zone with the British, French, and the Russians. So we had, that was our tour of duty.

Haselhorst: And how old do you think you were at this?

R. Depigian: I was, let's see I would have been 20 years old when all this took place. Then came back home and mother and dad had moved from Lincoln Place to St. Louis, and I was not aware of this at the time. So when I got out of the service at the Port of Imparkation in New York, I came home to Lincoln Place and found out that my mom and dad had moved to St. Louis. This is where I meet Sue; She lived a couple blocks away from me. And my sister

Haselhorst: In St. Louis?

R. Depigian: Became good friends with Susie when we moved, my parents moved into St. Louis.

S. Depigian: See you have to understand almost the clannishness of Armenians. In fact probably a lot of ethnic groups, because an Armenian family moving into the German area that I lived just would have been like if you went to the middle of Egypt and found another American and low and behold from Belleville of something no less and you just naturally migrate to those people. So even though they were relative strangers, my dad invited them over for dinner. You know that would just be the thing to do. I could give you thousands of incidents of Armenian clannishness. But I think going back to Lincoln Place the things I noticed when I visited during the summer because I did not live there, was the cohesiveness of the group. And I think you even see that today when you see a lot of Spanish together, you see Armenians. It was their strength and their power I mean it gave them. Because the parents, and I heard this from Rich and I know my parents, the parents came from a very oppressed and they were young when they came. So they were afraid of the authority figure, and they would, you know stick more together. They would tell you do not talk back, you know do not say anything. There just very few that came out of Lincoln Place that I think you would ever find any kind of criminal activity, or any kind of, you just do not find it. When you see and Armenian name that has done something illegal, that almost shocks you. Because you think where did they come from, I mean these people were just raised differently. That is what I noticed. And I am reminded of Hillary Clinton's book <u>It Takes a Village,</u> because all of these parents raised the kids. I mean if I walked down the street and I was doing something wrong, some

Armenian would yell out the window and tell me I had to behave and maybe report me to my godmother you know whom I would be visiting. And so they would all did that, it did not matter whos' kid it was

Haselhorst: Down in Lincoln Place?

S. Depigian: In Lincoln Place, yes I am talking strictly Lincoln Place now.

R. Depigian: I remember a lot of things as I was growing up. Every parental direction, more from my mom as opposed to my dad.

S. Depigian: Oh defiantly.

R. Depigian: My dad, he was a sweet, sweet guy.

S. Depigian: Yes.

R. Depigian: And my dad it was always, you really have to stand up and fight.

S. Depigian: And never be afraid.

R. Depigian: And never be afraid. Well I do not know what I was going to be afraid of to begin with, I did not know. But I could understand what they had gone through because having had their parents killed over there. And trying to relate to us, there was always that fear that they preached to me anyway.

Haselhorst: Now when you say killed over there, you are talking about the massacre of the Turkish genocide?

R. Depigian: The genocide, yes. So whenever my dad spoke to me, innocently he never lifted a hand. I never got a striking in all my life. Neither from my mother nor my dad. I did get a slap in the face from my mom one time because she found a cigarette butt in my pants pocket. But anyway that was the only time. But as I was growing up, these are the things that I was told: you got to stand up, and never fear anything, and always wondered

why. In my later years I begin to realize what had happened and why they were telling you what they were telling you. And so growing up in Lincoln Place, I felt that I had to be the very best, and I always felt this way in anything that I would do. And I guess it was because I had to be you know? As I was growing up that was instilled in me, whatever you do you better do the best you can, you know. So that is basically…

Is there anything else?

S. Depigian: Well I was going to get back to some of my things of, well as I said before, you will not find anybody, or you will find very few people of our generation who have grandparents. Who ever had grandparents, who had memories of grandparents? And I was think of, I was thinking of Richard's mother. She came here in 1908. And most of these people came without papers, as far as I know. By that I mean no birth records, nothing. So when Paris [Richard Depigian's mother] ad to apply for social security when she was 65, we had no way of proving that she had

Haselhorst: Who is Paris, his [Richard] mother?

S. Depigian: His mother, yes I am sorry. Yes.

Haselhorst: Beautiful name

S. Depigian: Yes I know I love it. I would have named, if I had a girl, I would have named her Paris except that my mother would have been angry. But Paris, they wanted, we could not establish her birth date at all. So you could not get social security for her and they asked all sort of records, or whatever kind of information they could get. But when they came, they would just make up figures. I mean when they asked her how old she was depending on what you needed for. She might have said twenty if she was sixteen or something like that. I mean, because, you know what is required and that was

the date they gave. And the way we remembered, or the way she established her birth date, I thought this was so interesting, she remember the boat out of the clear blue 3 or 4 months after we applied for social security as just could not make any headway she remembered the name of the boat she came in on. So I call them, I called the social security administration and they said they would do what they could. Well they went back and checked, and I do not remember what they call it, but it was the list of passengers and they were able to check back in 1920 from when she came in. And they had on their Paris Casperian, 12 years old, so they accepted that as the birth date 1908 had to be the year she was born. And so they asked you know "What shall we use for the month?" Well they used the month that had already passed so they said give us a date that you can remember. She said "well I can remember my son's birthday, Richard, so she gave them May the 7th. So that is how Paris' birthday was established. I always thought that was always kind of a neat story. So I shared it with you.

R. Depigian: She lived to be 91.

S. Depigian: She just died two years ago. She was a very strong lady, legally blind all her life. And finally became permanently blind due to what I feel was a botched operation. But she was so independent, because even though she was legally blind, we just came to except that. She went places on her own; she had to go pay her bills at Famous Barr. She got on the bus and she went. She was not dependent on anybody. Very strong willed and determined not to be dependent on anybody. I though that was a really neat characteristic. And his dad was an extremely, and she was very strong willed so I did not always get along with her because I am strong willed. But we did get along you know for the most part. And Pop you know was an absolute jewel just the sweetest,

gentlest man I ever meet. He never said a bad word about anybody. Wouldn't wait on people you know you said something about mothers back then doing the racing, I think most mothers back then did the racing and that was just the way it was, the fathers didn't do things. And if you were here that night, but pop never would get up and get the coffee pot and pour over here. It just wasn't his role, he wasn't arrogant about it, he just didn't.

R. Depigian: But none of you.

S. Depigian: But my dad was a crook, so but they just didn't and they didn't cook, you didn't know if they knew how to cook. But one day I was here in this house chasing kids and he called me and he said "Susie" and he you know in Armenian and I came and I said what you want pop? And he says I fixed you breakfast and he had, he had fried two eggs and made toast and made coffee, and he said he you have been working all morning and you haven't eaten yet so I said Pop you cooked this? And he just kind of chuckled you know and when I told Paris later, I think 'til the day she died she never believed that pop had ever cooked anything. I mean he was really, really quite a guy.

R. Depigian: Anyway.

S. Depigian: Yah, I don't know if those are helpful to you or not. Its very interesting stories. I think all of these old timers, you hear interesting stories. We sat at a wedding one day with a bunch of people who were raised in Lincoln Place, and they just talked from one story to another, and I would give a thousand dollars, I think probably more for a tape recording of that evening and to see these men who were all successful and prosperous who were raised in relative poverty although they didn't know it. Sit back and say I wouldn't trade my childhood for a million years and it was all about Lincoln Place that community. I always felt like an outsider even though I visited in the summer. But it

was just their collectiveness that they had, that even as an Armenian I felt like an outsider because it was just their private club and you know not the community center, just their community.

R. Depigian: We were the kids from across the tracks from our side of the tracks actually.

Haselhorst: By Nesco.

S. Depigian: Yes that's all first generation you know.

R. Depigian: Yes literally across the tracks and uh what was I going to say.

S. Depigian: Well while you think of it, I'm talk about Chris's bakery, my memory of Chris's bakery.

R. Depigian: No, I've got some notes, but we had a lot of good athletes that came out of Lincoln Place, the whole school

S. Depigian: That need to excel again I think.

Haselhorst: I just talked to Ruben Mendoza.

R. Depigian: Ok. So soccer.

S. Depigian: And they all needed to excel and a lot of first generation people.

Haselhorst: George Gages.

R. Depigian: George lived just a couple of doors down from me, so knew him real well. And he was on the 1940…

Haselhorst: Basketball state champion.

R. Depigian: Yes I followed these guys. I played with uh, didn't play with Phillip, Andy Phillip lived across the alley from me. From Lincoln Place. As I was growing up, I played basketball in the community center with Andy, with McGokan, Parhesian, Mark

Harian, the whole kitten caboodle you know. John lives four or five houses, he lived on the block that I did.

S. Depigian: A great storyteller is the lawyer, Cochegan, have you talked to him?

Haselhorst: I haven't, but there are people in the class that have.

S. Depigian: He's a great storyteller, he really is, he would have a lot of neat memories.

R. Depigian: I have a lot of memories stored, but you know its just trying to recall some of those things. I remember mom used to send me to Chris's bakery with the Sunday dinner to be baked in the big oven.

Haselhorst: In the brick oven?

R. Depigian: Yes, and uh I had a relative that supplied the ties, railroad ties that they used, the creosol ties, they used to use these ties for the oven.

S. Depigian: Makes you wonder why everybody comes out of there with cancer.

R. Depigian: I provided a tire for the ovens.

S. Depigian: You know uh, Chris when you would go down there and you would arm the bread and you would make this big pita bread, and nothing ever tasted like Chris's bread. Not before or after, it was big, it was a big platform, a platter and he would take his toothpick out of his mouth and poked his holes into the bread and put the toothpick back in his mouth, and bake this bread and then when they brought it up it just, he wrapped it up in newspapers and that's how he carried your bread home, wrapped up in newspapers.

R. Depigian: I thought that was kind of interesting.

S. Depigian: I think of it now, it seemed pretty normal to me back then, but it strikes you as pretty strange back then. And of course during the holidays, you took you turkeys down there to be baked at Christmas, right? And the pastries, the big pastries.

R. Depigian: Well, I don't know about the turkeys, I don't think we could afford turkeys at the time.

S. Depigian: I heard turkeys, but maybe I'm wrong. Scratch turkeys, but definitely pastries.

R. Depigian: A lot of bakery goods.

Haselhorst: Now I know that through talking to people from Lincoln Place, I heard that Chris would do these sorts of favors in return for food from-

S. Depigian: Maybe some of the wives, I don't know.

Haselhorst: Yes, because I know that he was a bachelor.

R. Depigian: That's very possible.

S. Depigian: He wasn't really a bachelor actually, he had a wife and a child somewhere that he was trying to get out, didn't he? Or were they killed?

R. Depigian: No, no. He had some relatives, the Atones I believe, and he would go over there for his dinners and what not. And as you described it, some ladies would also bring meals to him, so he was a very nice man.

Haselhorst: Now was he an Armenian as well?

R. Depigian: No, no he wasn't, I think he was either Macedonian, or Bulgarian.

S. Depigian: They had a little clubhouse there where they did dances. I bet you heard that from…

R. Depigian: My dad had a coffee house, and I, as I was growing up, a coffee house with two businesses downstairs. The coffee house, and there was a tavern in the same building and above there was a series of apartments and one suite of rooms. My dad owned this for a long period of time. Eventually the place burned down, but as I was

growing up, I did all of the painting of the rooms. My brother and myself did the painting of the rooms when I was maybe fifteen years old, something like that. And my mother used to change the sheets for the bachelors that lived up there. And most of the people that lived up there were Armenians. The tavern was run by an Armenian who was murdered and uh, this is kind of interesting, my dad found the body. And there was a story in Detective Magazine. That was many years ago, I don't remember the years. An Armenian guy murdered this Armenian owner of the tavern for jewelry and money and he was sent to prison.

S. Depigian: In your Papa's coffee house all the men would gather. Was it Turkish coffee that he made?

R. Depigian: No, he made…

S. Depigian: He didn't know how to make Turkish coffee evidently.

R. Depigian: But anyway the old timers used to come to the coffee house and my dad would make coffee for them, he had a little two-burner stove in the back. We had an old cash register as I remember. And cigars he sold, candies he would sell, and they played cards.

S. Depigian: They played Tavloo, which is Backgammon.

R. Depgian: They played Backgammon. The days were spent most of the Armenian guys who say worked at the steel mills, any time off that they would have they'd go to the Armenian shop, coffee shop, and spend most of their days.

S. Depigian: And it had an outside yard, a garden.

R. Depigian: There was an outside garden where they'd sit and drink their coffee and I would serve them and make Turkish coffee for them. As I remember it, it was a nickel a cup.

S. Depigian: Did your dad get a cut of the cards as they played?

R. Depigian: Yes

S. Depigian: They would gamble a nickel a hand or something.

R. Depigian: Some ridiculous figure as I remember. I remember counting the change and of course at the end of the day. And this was maybe 1930, before 1935 and I would sit and count the change with my dad, this was during the Depression years and the take would be like eight or nine dollars for the day. This is how our family got along during the Depression. In addition to Pop working in the steel mill, and that again is about most of the Armenians worked at the steel mills.

Haselhorst: Now I know in talking about the coffee shop, with the research that I've done about Lincoln Place, I mean it just seems like the taverns or coffee shops were just the main hangouts there.

S. Depigian: But they weren't like they are now, or maybe they are, I don't know. But they were, they were another community gathering place for the adults as opposed to the kids congregated to the community house, but the parents, they'd be at the coffee houses or the taverns. There again we always there was always contact. A lot of them didn't speak English real well and that was their way of I don't know getting by.

Haselhorst: Another thing that I know that kind of separated or even brought together people of Lincoln Place was food.

S. Depigian: Oh yes.

Haselhorst: Do you remember anything about the different foods and-?

S. Depigian: They would have picnics. And they would cook. My dad was a great cook and he was pretty active in some of the stuff over there.

R. Depigian: That was the other side.

S. Depigian: That was the bad side. I know I don't remember.

Haselhorst: Across the railroad tracks?

S. Depigian: No just they had their clubs, they had their cliques, the churches and the church division I couldn't even begin to understand. You'll have to talk to somebody else and I don't really think they'll understand either. But my dad would cook at some of the picnics and my dad was just the designated chef. He would make shish kabob and they would make pilaf and salads and a lot of the picnics either went on in the back of the clubhouse, but the big ones they went on in Chain of Rocks Park in St. Louis. Dump the kids off at the pool because there was an amusement park up there then come back and there would just be tubs of pilaf.

R. Depigian: There were several parks. I don't know whether you know where Fiddler's, there's Fiddler's park right off of, is that 13?

S. Depigian: Is it 15 or 13, I guess its 13.

R. Depigian: There used to be picnics held over here, there used to be picnics at Eagle Park.

S. Depigian: And Horseshoe Lake.

R. Depigian: And Horseshoe Lake, and Pontoon Beach. Most of the picnics were held in Pontoon Beach and there were designated cooks, parents of the-

Haselhorst: Now was this just Armenians?

R. Depigian: Armenians primarily.

S. Depigian: If you had a non-Armenian friend you would bring them, but-

R. Depigian: I do remember other than Armenians, the Mexican festivals that they had were kind of interesting and this was all total Mexican and it was a lot of fun in you know Spanish music and Mexican music. And whatever else goes on with the festivities they used to have a jailhouse built. People would steal the women, put them in the jailhouse and you had to pay so much money to get them out of there. And that was an interesting thing that happened. There were Hungarians that had Hungarian dances at the Hungarian hall. We also used the Hungarian hall for the Armenian dances. There was a place called Chepetschi, there was another hall in Lincoln Place. They never really used the community center for the dances. The only area we had would be the gym and it wasn't suitable for that type of thing. But most of the dances were held at the Hungarian hall I believe.

S. Depigian: Getting back to food that I remember I want to get to the grape leaves. Some of the people, they eventually started growing the grape leaves, but they would look for them in the wild. And one of the places they would find them was at Sunset Cemetery, so and they taught us that best time to pick them was the last week of May, the first week of June. That's when they're smaller and more tender. So they would go there, it happened to be the Memorial Day weekend would be the ideal time to go. And these old gals would be up there and the priests would be there sitting under a tree waiting for people to come so he could tag them for a few bucks to bless the graves. As soon as those graves were blessed, those gals were down there with their shopping bags because they didn't want somebody else to get the best grape leaves. Even my mother

would real quick give me bag and send me down there to pick grape leaves before the other gals came, and this was sort of the thing they did. They'd all be down there, I can't imagine what the non-Armenian community thought when they'd come on Memorial Day and see all these ladies down there by the creek picking leaves.

R. Depigian: And all of this rubs off on the kids.

S. Depigian: Yah I pick them anytime we go somewhere, on the golf course.

R. Depigian: The last time we went to Sunset Hills we did that.

Tape 1, Side B

S. Depigian: Eventually though, quite a few of them would start growing, they would dig up the actual vine, and plant them in their yards. So quite a few of them, … I think has grape leaves growing in her yard. I would find them around here and it's only the wild grape leaf that you don't go to a grapevine and use those grape leaves. This is a wild grape leaf and it doesn't bear fruit. And you can tell whether you've got good grape leaf, or rather an actual grape leaf is because they turn an olive color when you put them in hot water, where a regular leaf will just stay you know the vivid color that it is.

R. Depigian: And when you cook the meal, they turn black.

S. Depigian: They really turn almost black, they really are good. We can make them with the Sarma, which you ate probably as the cold you can also make it hot with the hamburger.

R. Depigian: We make it hot, cold and my wife incidentally is a very good cook, and I'm a very good cook also.

S. Depigian: Just in case others have been telling you different.

R. Depigian: But as far as foods other than Armenian, I don't think I've been exposed to too many other foods in Lincoln Place. I've never experienced eating goulash for example. We had Hungarians there and they'd talk about poporkosh, things of that sort. I've never experienced that anywhere, not even at Lincoln Place. But there were diverse groups there that I'm sure could cook very well. What other things?

S. Depigian: The things that I think are unique about Armenians and I don't know what it has to do with

R. Depigian: There were organizations down there that I think still exist. The Lincoln Athletic Club was started by the older groups of athletes and that existed until very recently I do believe. I never did join that group.

Haselhorst: Now when did you move back? You said earlier your parents had moved to St. Louis. Did you ever at that point move back into Lincoln Place?

R. Depigian: No. No. From 1946 on, 1946 they moved here.

S. Depigian: With the money you sent them from the Army. I don't know, I think that's kind of neat. You would send them money every month and they used that money as a down payment on a house in St. Louis.

R. Depigian: That was in '46. Either '45 or '46, I don't remember exactly when they moved to St. Louis.

S. Depigian: That would be pretty close.

R. Depigian: I never did go back; I didn't go back to Lincoln Place to live. We lived with my mom and dad for about eight years in St. Louis. In 1959 we moved here.

Haselhorst: To this house?

R. Depigian: To this house. We married in 1951.

S. Depigian: I always thought it was kind of a mistake I thought that maybe we should have gone back, if not to Lincoln Place, at least Granite City. It was just a feeling I had. I thought the kids; I think that anybody who wasn't raised by a foreigner has missed something. Like being raised by a foreigner in this country where you have your foot in both camps where you have an appreciation of the old world and the music and the customs and the foods and an appreciation for what you have in this country. And the next generation loses that. Our kids, even though they were lucky enough to have their grandmother for so long, they still have not had that thing of being raised by foreigners in this country. Because it was special, it was really special, and I would have liked for my kids to have felt that, to be more Armenian than they are, although they are very good. I mean they go to the dances, but they miss something by not being raised by our parents if that makes sense.

Haselhorst: That does make sense because what I was just going to ask you what was the Armenian background and how that has been transposed?

S. Depigian: We were raised on what the old country was like and so often in this country we see foreigners who come and we think, they would really like to be back home. I would think most of them would rather be back home. But for reasons either oppression or poverty or what have you they come here, but my parents always longed to go back. With them it was the massacres in the old country.

R. Depigian: Yes because they would always say the cantaloupes were like this the grapes were like this.

S. Depigian: In the old country, the grapes were like this. In the old country you know they wanted to go back.

Haselhorst: That was there home.

S. Depigian: That was there home and you would want to go back if for some reason you had to leave this country and maybe somebody else would resent you for invading there country or going into their country and taking some job you know there are a lot of bigoted people out there. You would still rather come back if you could and would as soon as you could. At least, you would. Maybe your kids wouldn't if they were raised there. That would be their home. I know our parents would have rather have gone back.

R. Depigian: I know there was a time as I was growing up that we weren't allowed to speak anything but Armenian in the house. As a result I learned to speak Armenian and I can speak it today, I can read and write it to a degree, not as fluently as I would like, but nevertheless.

S. Depigian: I'm going to go back to the parents. Many of them had pictures of Armenia of their villages. In fact one of them was very famous. Oniks, they smuggled it out, but they had these pictures on the wall and my father would show that picture and point and say this is your land right here, this is your farm, which they had to leave. Many of them Amish told me very things that they couldn't carry out. You know silverware, jewelry, whatever, you know there again because they were separated from their families. Your mother had sisters, my mother; hey this is kind of neat. My mother was separated, now of course this is not Lincoln Place, so maybe I'll pass on that. But they totally lost contact with siblings that might still be alive today. And my mother was written; well I'll tell you anyway. A letter by somebody in Philadelphia for years, and

I'm talking about the 1960's for years mom never knew what happened to her brothers and sister or her mother and she got separated from them and went from one orphanage to another and my father married her in France and a lot of these marriages, the men were maybe about fifteen years older than the brides because this was all that was left and they wanted to keep their race alive and their heritage alive and they would marry basically what we would call children today.

Haselhorst: To keep it Armenian.

S. Depigian: Yes. They were very clannish and it's a fun kind of clannish and some people love us and some people well uh…either way its fun, but mom never knew what happened to her sister and she got a letter from someone in Philadelphia, who had read, and there were always people putting adds in the Armenian papers looking for relatives and someone wrote to her from Philadelphia and said this sounds like it could be you, its someone trying to find you, so mom sent a letter and sure enough it was her sister. And I can't even say this without almost crying, a few days before my mother died, she got a letter and found out everything that had happened to her family and she brought it to my office and read it to me and her sister is still alive and we have a large group of cousins over there and her brother was a general in the army, the Russian army and her mother lived up until just a few years before mom got this letter. And she read this to me and she carried this with her. I guess you know, no it wasn't a few days. She brought it to my office and she always had it on her I guess it was like three months or so and she was going to go that summer and then she died, but it was neat that got the letter.

Haselhorst: Have you ever been over there?

S. Depigian: My sister went twice, but I have never been there. They came here; one of the brothers came here and was in California.

R. Depigian: And her sister has met the relatives, stayed with the relatives.

S. Depigian: Yes my sister's gone there and stayed with them.

R. Depigian: It's kind of an interesting story.

Haselhorst: That's amazing.

S. Depigian: Yes it is. There are some today that still don't know what happened and mom never would have found this out, except for there are a big group of Armenians living in Philadelphia, so whoever put this ad in through the Red Cross or what have you was just trying to find my mom, wondering what happened to her, kind of neat huh?

Haselhorst: That's amazing, it's crazy.

S. Depigian: That's more Armenian than Granite City, but it just tells you something about maybe the people, if you get pictures like this and the clannishness that I always thought was neat is what was the name, Mardikian was a very famous name. Well we were in California several years ago over the Golden Gate bridge that's out there and there was a group of people taking pictures with the Gate behind them, and our friends that were with us came over and said that one woman has got wonderful cologne on, I wonder what is. I said, well I'll go ask her, so I walked over and they were talking in Armenian and it was the first ambassador to this country, the first one from Armenia, and they were there escorting him around, doing the tour thing. So I stood there and listened to them talk and started talking to them in my broken Armenian which was practically non-existent. But just to tell you how clannish we are, as soon as they found out I was Armenian, they grabbed me over there and I'm standing there with there pictures and

hugging their ambassador and that's the way they do. Well these friends of ours, we had gone out there because he wanted to meet George Mardikian who was pretty famous a few years back, and this was in the seventies though, this was a different trip, and he wanted George to come here and speak, our friend is a supervisor of schools or something up in Bloomington and he wanted George Mardikian and come and you know speak to this group. We couldn't meet him out there because he was at Richard Nixon's birthday party, so he wrote him a letter and he thought, well if he threw in an Armenian name, he could entice Mr. Mardikian to come and talk. So he said, my friends the Depigians and I were in California, Mr. Blah, blah, blah can you come and speak at our school or at our convention, and he wrote back and said he would. Well, I told our friend Fred, boy I'd love to hear Mr. Mardikian speak and he said well, its private for our school, but he said I'll tell you what, I'll tell my boss that the only way I could Mr. Mardikian to come is if our friends the Depigians were there. And I said ok, that's great. So we went up to Bloomington when Mr. Mardikian was due up there, and we were at Fred's house and we were going to go pick up Mr. Mardikian and introduce ourselves and all that stuff when low and behold Fred's boss comes over and wants to go to the airport with us. Well by now Fred is sweating bullets because he's thinking "Oh my god you know Mardikian doesn't even know you. Well we got to the airport and Richard and I very dark, this is corn cob country, everybody up there is blond with corn silk hair and there we are standing there, and I said oh don't worry about a thing Fred Mr. Mardikian got off that plane and he took one look around, he's a very tall man, by the way, he took on look around and saw these two dark people and he remembered the letter, thinking oh, this must be the Depigians, so he walked over, shook Richard's hand, hugged me, kissed

me talking and rambling off in Armenian the whole time wondering what town our parents were from in the old country and all this stuff. And as we walked out, Fred is behind me saying, I thought you didn't know him. I said, Fred, it's an Armenian thing.

Haselhorst: Now is that the way it was in Lincoln Place?

S. Depigian: Yes, they were very clannish; if you went anywhere, well like I said my father invited them over for dinner. To this day I think for the most part they are very clannish, and it's that kind of clannishness. It isn't that they shut out other people, it's that they embrace each other. I mean we're like a dieing race, so when you run into another Armenian, that's special.

Haselhorst: Now would this be the same as with the Mexicans and the Macedonians?

R. Depigian: I would guess, I would say so, maybe not like us.

S. Depigian: Not like us, I don't know.

R. Depigian: Maybe not like us, but they have some of that I'm sure.

S. Depigian: There is some, yah but I've never seen it anything like we are.

R. Depigian: Particularly in Lincoln Place

S. Depigian: Coming out of that little community, yah.

R. Depigian: In Lincoln Place you would have that kind of clannishness, yes.

Haselhorst: Now I know that there's an Armenian church. Now it's not in the community, isn't

S. Depigian: Its not anymore, it was in Lincoln Place and they built a new one out on Pontoon Beach, or Pontoon Road.

R. Depigian: Pontoon Road in Granite.

Haselhorst: OK, maybe that's, because I thought I had heard the reason why it is outside, the only reason many Armenians had traveled out of Lincoln Place…

S. Depigian: I think they grew away from it, I think they just grew away. The church was small and old, a lot of the Armenians had moved away and I think they just felt the need for a larger church.

R. Depigian: Well first of all the church in Lincoln Place was just too small and so they decided as people were moving out of Lincoln Place and getting bigger homes, better homes as the Armenians prospered they moved out into the urban areas and mainly they stayed in Granite.

S. Depigian: I don't think they want to live in Lincoln, Lincoln Place has changed. It isn't what it was.

Haselhorst: See that's what I thought was one of the main reasons was because of the changes that have happened.

S. Depigian: I think so because a lot of the Armenians left, I wouldn't think there was a handful of them left in there. And as they left, you know, different kinds of people moved in and a lot of Armenians, even though its their background and they love it don't necessarily want, it's a poorer community frankly and you know, they've grown out of it.

R. Depigian: I think the younger people that moved away primarily; the old timers would have stayed. By the old timers I mean…

S. Depigian: You mean us?

R. Depigian: No my dad and…

S. Depigian: Yes, but they died.

R. Depigian: But they would've stayed you know but the young people moved out.

S. Depigian: Well yes, a lot of them just stayed until they died or moved into nursing homes. And our generation, we were talking about the young people.

R. Depigian: Well the idea when the young people moved out, they wanted to get something started. A church and what not.

S. Depigian: You wanted to get something started. What you thought was better. You could never give our kids, the young generation, what our generation had. The community changed. It's like East St. Louis, would you go back there, would you live there? No, but it was a wonderful place years ago.

Haselhorst: My great grandparents were from there.

S. Depigian: Sure, and it was great, it was safe, you could walk the streets. And there were pretty homes and it was more spread out because it was bigger, Lincoln Place was closed in, highway 3 wasn't there, the railroad tracks were. So that was a closed in community, but you know they didn't want to stay there I hope the older generation moved away, at least into Granite.

R. Depigian: The older generation retired from the generation.

S. Depigian: Oh, I'm calling us the older generation you're talking about real, the first generation.

R. Depigian: I'm not talking about me as the older generation.

S. Depigian: We're the younger generation.

Haselhorst: I know you guys said that you had a dance to go to tonight, now is that in Lincoln Place?

S. Depigian: No, that's at the new church hall, which is out on Pontoon.

R. Depigian: There's a multi-purpose room out there as well as the church and most of the functions are handled at the multi-purpose building.

Haselhorst: Now the Armenians that go there, are they're some of them that are from Lincoln Place, like the majority of them?

S. Depigian: You aught go get some information from them tonight take your little thing.

Haselhorst: Yes.

R. Depigian: I'd say the main stays that lived in Lincoln Place that moved out…

S. Depigian: They'll be back.

R. Depigian: They'll be there.

S. Depigian: And a lot of their kids because a lot of them, even though they moved away…

R. Depigian: In fact it's the kids that are giving the dance, it's the youth group.

S. Depigian: They raised their kids Armenian, not like we were raised but they raised them Armenian, they raised them in the church. In fact I used to see Marlene who was not Armenian, I always thought they should build a monument to the spouses the people who married this generation.

Haselhorst: Meaning your generation.

S. Depigian: Yes, meaning our generation who raised their kids Armenian and they were not Armenian. Many of the non-Armenians that a lot of them married turned into Armenians. They cooked the foods, they do the customs, they raised their kids in the church and they raised them like their parents were raised, and they teach in the Armenian schools and they're not Armenians. Many of our generation married non-

Armenians, but they still raise their children Armenian. And the spouses, for the most part the woman spouses, the wives just embrace the Armenian culture, many of them and you would go to church on Sunday and here would be this blond, beautiful, blue-eyed gal who was not Armenian, weeding those little kids from the Sunday school because when the kids went to Sunday school, they had to come upstairs after their little Sunday school classes and sit in the front and here would be Marlene, bless her, she's a beautiful woman, leaning over and scolding somebody, or pointing when they misbehaved in the church because they would be up front where you could see them, this little row of Armenian kids, some of them blonds. But all of them being raised Armenian. And I think that there has always been that here in this country you are going to lose your heritage. Back then you had to marry a nice Armenian boy. The parents did not like the idea of you even dating a non-Armenian. This was really not acceptable, it really wasn't, you know in a lot of households. It was more a fear of losing their identity. Our parents did not want their children to lose, to assimilate, to just lose, to have this race die out we don't have a country, or we didn't have.

R. Depigian: I went with a girl for four years all the way through high school, with the intentions of marrying her, but man my mom was so opposed to it.

Haselhorst: What was she?

R. Depigian: She was Irish…

S. Depigian: If they could stop it they would, and his mom was strong-willed.

R. Depigian: In a way, it was a good thing I went into the service I guess. That was mom's salvation.

S. Depigian: And some of them married non-Armenians anyway and I'm sure they got, well Larry, I shouldn't mention names, scratch the name Larry.

R. Depigian: My mom was really a gung-ho Armenian and she was pretty hardheaded.

S. Depigian: Well a lot of them were Richard, I could name off a lot of them. They just didn't want there kids marrying non-Armenians and if they did, I mean they resisted right down the isle I mean these parents did not want this marriage to happen. But then the next day, this was our new bride now, this was our horse, we better accept her. We better turn her into an Armenian. And in many cases they did. Just with the food and the customs, does that make sense?

Haselhorst: Yes it does.

S. Depigian: That's what I remember about it. But that was Lincoln Place.

R. Depigian: Too bad this kind of an interview couldn't be done a lot earlier, because you really have to jog your memory of things that have happened over the past years and all of a sudden I remember things.

S. Depigian: I remember ketchup bottles. My godmother who lived in Lincoln Place raised her own tomatoes and I guess the only thing she new to do with all those tomatoes was to make catsup. And she had these catsup bottles that she had sterilized all lined up I can't imagine how sterile they were, but they were lined up they had the little gardens back there and they were lined up along the thing and the pathway in her little garden, and then she had this big bat that she would cook up this catsup, the most god awful thing that you would taste in your life. The worst catsup, but she made her own catsup. We sat on the little swings on the porches in Lincoln Place.

R. Depigian: But they were good times.

S. Depigian: They were neat and tidy little homes. They weren't big and elaborate. I don't recall being in anybody's house who was dirty, sweeping off the porches and the sidewalks.

R. Depigian: Scrubbing, I remember my mom, Jesus.

S. Depigian: It's almost like a contest. And my godmother was an invalid and she was a beautiful woman when she was young but she was in an automobile accident and her first husband was killed and she was crippled and this woman between his mother who was legally blind and this woman who was an invalid, these were strong woman. I mean they did their work and she cleaned her house Paris cleaned her house, she couldn't see. They were great cooks; I never could figure that one out. Just with a handful of this and a handful of salt, you ask for a recipe, there's now way. Five pounds of flour more or less, a dozen eggs; more or less you know those were the recipes. They would bake… and just stack it all up in stacks they cooked lamb and a way of preserving it and I'm talking whole lamb, leg of lamb, everything and fry it up in these big kettles and then you leave them in the kettles and as it cooled off.

R. Depigian: It had the stone crocks…

S. Depigian: But they didn't cook them in the crocks.

R. Depigian: No they didn't. They poured them into the crocks.

S. Depigian: They'd pour them into the big crocks and keep it cool.

R. Depigian: And the crock would solidify

S. Depigian: Preserving the meat. Because the air didn't get to it, and then put it in a cool place so when you wanted some of that meat, you'd just take a big old sharp knife

and just dig for it and it would be lamb preserved in this white fat, which, I believe it, was delicious.

Haselhorst: Oh, I'm sure it was.

S. Depigian: You would fry eggs in it or make spaghetti with it or you'd just eat it fat and all, just dig it out and eat it. So that was not necessarily Lincoln Place, but that was definitely Armenian in Lincoln Place.

R. Depigian: That was old-timer that's how they stored their meat.

S. Depigian: But I wonder if that's how they preserved meat before refrigeration, do you think?

Haselhorst: Salted it.

S. Depigian: I knew salting, but I never saw anybody else do this.

Haselhorst: Not like that, it could be.

S. Depigian: When you think about it, it just stayed in the cellar and it just stayed in this big old crock, huge crock and it was good. Every now and then I'll fry up some lamb and I'll set it aside and that turns really white and I think, oh gosh I could really make something with that. They were great cooks. I can't think of anything, what else do we know? Well that's ok; this was all Armenian and Lincoln Place.

Haselhorst: Is there anything else you guys want to add to this?

R. Depigian: I do want to add one thing. The community house was really the main stay of that whole community. As I was growing up because it would take people from with the community who excelled in let's say woodworking and theywould put them in positions of constructing and I do not know who gave the money to the community house in order to pay these people.

S. Depigian: Where did that money come from? Do you know?

R. Depigian: I think the steel mill had a lot to do with the…

S. Depigian: Who paid Ms. Prather, was she a schoolteacher? Does anybody know?

R. Depigian: I don't know. No she was not a schoolteacher.

S. Depigian: Somebody researched Ms. Prather

Haselhorst: There is, and I can definitely find that out for you and let you know

S. Depigian: I would like to know

R. Depigian: Anyway they would get instructors to teach the kids the basic rule, working and I remember certain individuals that I really responded to because they knew what they were doing and I got a lot knowledge as a little kid working with… this was at the community house in the basement.

S. Depigian: I think that think that thing really saved a lot of the children growing up in that era.

R. Depigian: We had showers; there were showers there. And we were able to utilize the showers and sometimes we didn't have showers at home you know. So we utilized everything we had at the community center and we really thanked those people who ran that place. We couldn't afford the Y, the YMCA downtown as I was again growing at twelve or fifteen years old we couldn't afford to go the YMCA because they required a fee for a membership.

Haselhorst: It seems the more and more people being interviewed, how evolved everybody was within that clubhouse. Like you said, such a substantial part of each person's lives. Especially your generation. Its seems the taverns or coffee shops were the older generations.

S. Depigian: I think you are right.

R. Depigian: If my parents and the older generation hadn't done what they did and of course we didn't realize at the time what they were attempting to do, but they were teaching us everything that they possibly could, the Armenian language which was of course very important, community involvement, that was very important, and as you grew up and progressed, you began to realize what the attempt was. They were trying to hold these people together.

S. Depigian: They really had little classrooms too, didn't they, where the children, they might have been held in a clubhouse here or there…

R. Depigian: The Armenian school was held at the community center.

S. Depigian: Was it? Where they had maybe one senior Armenian who it was his job to teach the children.

R. Depigian: They would have maybe two or three…well my mother was a teacher there;... Donna Sunflower was a teacher, …what was her last name?

S. Depigian: Its like Baron, Sumpat? I don't know. Annie knows more useless stuff than anybody I know. I'll have to ask her. I can't remember his last name, but he taught. The kids had to behave, except my brother when he went. He would never behave, but he would just knuckle them on the top of their head if they didn't respond properly with the right answer and he got away with it.

R. Depigian: He was something else, but anyway, these people were responsible for really keeping us in line, even though we hated Armenian school, we went, because our parents made us go. I'm so happy that back then…

Haselhorst: Before this runs out, I just want to say thank you for the interview and it was very interesting.

S. Depigian: I hope it helps.

R. Depigian: I hope it helps.