

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville Oral History Project on Lincoln Place

Interviewer: Amanda Frauenfelder

Interviewees: Isabella Vartan and Helen Abbott

Place: [REDACTED]

Date: October 10, 2001

[Tape 1, Side A Tape counter at 00:0]

AMANDA: October 10, 2001 Interview with Isabella and Helen who were originally from Granite City, Illinois. History 447 with Dr. Valk at SIUE. I the interviewer, my name is Amanda Frauenfelder. Isabella and Helen what is your background?

ISABELLA: Our background, our heritage, our parents are both Armenians. Ankeen and Avadis Parsaghian

AMANDA: Can you spell those?

ISABELLA: Okay, Ankeen is ANKEEN, Avedis is AVEDIS, Parsaghian is PARASAGHIAN.

AMANDA: And were they the ones who emigrated from Armenia?

ISABELLA: Yes, yes. My father came to America I don't recall the year, but my mother and sister came in 1920.

AMANDA: So your father came before your mother and your sister?

ISABELLA: Yes. He came over here and WWI started, so he wasn't able to bring my mother over until the war ended.

AMANDA: Did he come here before or after the war started?

ISABELLA: He came here before the war started and he settled in Granite City and he ran a restaurant, he was a very good cook, and then he sent for my mother and sister. And my uncle brought them over and they got here in December of 1920.

AMANDA: Okay and there was you and Helen and you have a third sister as well.

ISABELLA: The sister who was born over there and we had an older brother, he was born first in 1921, I was 1923, and Helen in 1926.

AMANDA: You're the youngest?

HELEN: Hmmm, I'm the baby.

[Amanda and Helen laugh.]

AMANDA: All right and your family settled in this area, did they come straight to St. Louis or did they stop in New York?

ISABELLA: They stopped at Ellis Island and my uncle and aunt were with them and it seemed that my aunt developed hives. I guess she got nervous or something and they wouldn't let them come to Granite City so my father went to NY and brought them back. My mother and sister got here of course, but my uncle and aunt were held in Ellis Island until my father went after them and brought them back.

AMANDA: They came straight to Granite City...

ISABELLA: Granite City...

AMANDA: And when he first came over did he come straight to Granite City?

ISABELLA: No, I believe he went to, at that that time they were building the railroads and I think he did a little work on the railroads, wasn't that Montana? I think it was Montana, Helen, yeah I remember that. Yeah they worked on the railroads a little bit until he came back and settled here in Granite City and he opened up a restaurant, he was a very good cook, and he had a lot of customers. The teachers from Washington school I remember he spoke of, they would go from Washington school to Lincoln Place for their lunch, I don't know if it was supper or lunch, but he did the cooking for them.

HELEN: Because there were no other restaurants.

ISABELLA: There were no restaurants.

HELEN: No places for the teachers to eat.

AMANDA: Oh really, wow. Which village was your family from, do you recall?

ISABELLA: Yes, oh yes, they were from Moush.

AMANDA: How do you spell that?

ISABELLA: MOUSH

AMANDA: MOUSH.

ISABELLA: Moush, Armenia.

AMANDA: Is that where most of your ancestors were from, that village?

ISABELLA: Yes, all of them.

AMANDA: Okay. And why did your father chose to leave?

ISABELLA: Well, they knew of America and he wanted a better place for his family. He, they were married, and he left for America. Then, my sister was born there [Armenia], but then the war came, WWI started and he could not get back there. So my sister was ten, eleven years old by the time they got over here she hadn't seen him, he hadn't seen her. So my mother used to tell us a story. We got to the depot, the train depot in Granite City, its still there, and my sister was telling me this a couple of years ago. She was waiting for her father to pick her up so if there was a man coming toward them she would say "is that my father?" and my mother would say "No, your father is good looking."

AMANDA: [Laughter]

ISABELLA: Yes, he was very nice looking. He looks just like Charlie [her son]. My father in the meantime went to NY so they missed each other. He is over there waiting for them and they are

over here waiting for him. So they had quite a mix up until my father got back. They lived in Lincoln Place, he had a place for them on Maple Street.

AMANDA: Maple Street? Okay. On Monday we did a walking tour through Lincoln Place. Vee, our tour guide, emphasized the importance of the Community Center...

HELEN: Oh, yes.

AMANDA: And I wanted to know what role it had in your lives?

ISABELLA: Oh, it had a very important role for all of us. We went to Sunday school there. That's where got our religious training. We went to bible school there..

HELEN: Vacation bible school.

ISABELLA: Vacation bible school is the whole month of June. Then we went there for sewing classes. They taught us how to hem stitch handkerchiefs, do embroidery work, then later on we learned to sew a dress. We made clothes there and at the end of the summer, the last week of August, Oh we learned how to dance there too, we had dancing lessons. Alice Sobioeski was our teacher. So the last week of August all of our handiwork, our sewing pieces, were all on display and then they would have a program in the gym. We would have the different dance classes, the different age groups would perform. It was a big evening that culminated into this one evening with our sewing, our embroidery work, whatever we made and the boys had like a woodcutting thing in the basement. Under the gym there was a basement there were they did woodwork. There was something for the girls and the boys. All summer we were busy June, July, August. The whole month of June was bible school.

AMANDA: You mentioned the dance classes, who did you say your dance instructor was?

ISABELLA: Louise Shambro, I don't know if she's still living or not, I haven't seen her in a long time. Did you remember her?

HELEN: no.

ISABELLA: I do. She was our teacher, she was mine she was a nice lady. These were just older women that lived in the community, older girls and they would take over a class and Alice Shambro, I don't know if she's alive or not, but she was the one who taught us the sewing and she was in charge of everything there.

AMANDA: How did you spell Louise's last name?

ISABELLA: Shambro, SHAMBRO.

AMANDA: And Alice's?

ISABELLA: Sobioeski, I think, Sobioeski.

AMANDA: At the community center were there different ethnicities.

HELEN: We were all together. Armenians, Bulgarians,

ISABELLA: Greeks,

HELEN: Greeks, we had a Greek family next door. We were just together all the time. Friday night was girls' night at the Clubhouse. We would go in and play basketball and play in the gym.

AMANDA: You said you played basketball or you would just get together...

HELEN: Yes.

AMANDA: You mentioned earlier right before the interview started that you felt that you got more of a diverse background and you were able to socialize with different people by living in Lincoln Place. Do you feel that it made you more accepting of other cultures? Do you feel you learned more from them?

ISABELLA: Yes we did, didn't we Helen?

HELEN: Yes, sure.

ISABELLA: The Armenians had a nice Armenian community there. We had Armenian school and we had the Armenian relief society. We had the men's

HELEN: Men's coffeehouse. (Laughing)

ISABELLA: And the men's ARF Club, we had an Armenian coffeehouse. We went to Armenian school. In fact, we had to go to Armenian school, let me put it that way. (Laughing) Now we can read and write Armenian.

HELEN: Oh, we ought to show her something in Armenian.

ISABELLA: Is there anything there? Yes, we can read and write in Armenian. When we were in grade school before we got to high school, we went to Armenian school four nights a week after supper.

AMANDA: Where was the Armenian school held at?

ISABELLA: Well, we had the Armenian club down there, a building right across from the Community Center. We were on one side. There was a men's club there on one side,

HELEN: Coffeehouse,

ISABELLA: Coffeehouse, Armenian coffeehouse (laughing). So we were on the...

HELEN: You don't have any Turkish coffee cups do you [to Isabella]?

ISABELLA: Up there in the cabinet.

HELEN: Too bad we don't have some Turkish coffee to make.

ISABELLA: I have. I have pulverized coffee there. I think at the time we were in school I always felt that.

HELEN: [back in room with coffee cup] If someone came to our house all our mother had to do was raise her eyebrows like that.

ISABELLA: It was a signal.

HELEN: Get off your buns and make some Turkish coffee. See this is what you make it in. This is the javza.

AMANDA: How do you spell that?

ISABELLA: JAVZA

AMANDA: [looking at cup] That is very ornate, very beautiful.

ISABELLA: Yea, Charlie brought that from Greece.

HELEN: Really? [Excited] See the Greeks drink the Turkish coffee too.

ISABELLA: The ones up there are from Japan, I think. Growing up I felt I'm Armenian, you know.

HELEN: Too bad we don't have Turkish coffee here.

ISABELLA: WE DO

HELEN: Do you want to try a little?

AMANDA: Sure, I would love to.

ISABELLA: I'll get up in a minute, you just do the talking and I will make the coffee [to Helen].

AMANDA: How lovely, thank you. So you were saying growing up as an Armenian.

ISABELLA: I think at the time, I don't know, we had foreign parents, but we all did. Growing up with Hungarians, Bulgarians, Greeks. We had nice Hungarian neighbors and Greek neighbors. I think we were very fortunate the way we grew up.

HELEN: Yes, and some Mexicans.

ISABELLA: If we had an Armenian affair, the other nationalities would come. When they had the Mexican festivals we would go. They had the Hungarian dances at the Hungarian hall. They would come in their Hungarian costumes and we would all go. We were like, I would compare it to like a large family, and everyone respected their neighbors. And everyone KNEW their neighbors.

Around here, you could ask me who lives two doors away and I don't know. I've lived with them for a long time now and I don't even know their names. But, when we were growing up there we used to play a game and we would take like a street and we would take the houses and give the last name, we knew who they were, all the way down to Walnut Street and Olive Street.

HELEN: And Olive Street

ISABELLA: We knew who they were, we knew each other. Now nobody cares. I don't know who lives two doors down. I think it's an old couple.

AMANDA: And you were mentioning you went to the Armenian school at night?

ISABELLA: Yes, after supper.

AMANDA: After supper? So, you went to a regular school during the day?

ISABELLA: That's right.

AMANDA: Did that start in kindergarten or 1st grade?

ISABELLA: Well it was beginners class, we had beginner's class, and then, we would learn the alphabet and reading and writing and it went on for a few years. I can't remember how many years we went though.

HELEN: We should show her the Armenian bible. Do you have one she could look at?

ISABELLA: Yes, I have one in my cedar chest. I have an Armenian bible.

HELEN: So she could just see the writing.

ISABELLA: Where is the Outreach [an Armenian paper]? Find the outreach there. It has some Armenian there. [Helen found it]. Yes, that has some Armenian in it.

HELEN: See, now this Armenian there honey.

AMANDA: Oh wow that is beautiful.

ISABELLA: Thirty-six letters in the alphabet.

AMANDA: Oh, there is thirty-six letters in its alphabet? [Surprised]

ISABELLA: Yes.

AMANDA: That is a lot to learn.

HELEN: See when you were young like we were, its easier to learn. Now if someone is fifty-five and has start to learn Armenian it is a big big difference.

AMANDA: That would be hard. You learned both English and Armenian growing up? Did you feel your parents disciplined or...?

ISABELLA: They wanted us to go. When I started school I knew no English.

AMANDA: When you started school here you knew no English?

ISABELLA: Yes, I went to Washington school, I did not know any English, but you learn.

AMANDA: Thank you, so then you went to Central and then Washington school?

ISABELLA: They tore the school down a couple years ago. But that's where we went, Washington school.

AMANDA: Washington. And the other groups, the Hungarians...

ISABELLA: We all went together.

AMANDA: Did they have their own night classes as well?

ISABELLA: I don't think they did. I am not aware of any other nationality that had a class or a school, but we did. We learned to read and write Armenian. We learned songs. We learned the dancing. We were in a ...

HELEN: See this is the Armenian print. See, when you are young it is easier to learn things like that.

ISABELLA: They even had us costumed and we performed at the International Festival in St. Louis. Our teacher had us over there. Do you remember that Helen? I do.

AMANDA: There was an International Festival.

ISABELLA: In St. Louis.

AMANDA: And you performed dancing?

ISABELLA: Dancing and singing. We sang and we danced.

AMANDA: And how old were you when you attended your first one?

ISABELLA: Oh, about ten, twelve years old, or younger, I don't remember, but I remember doing that. In fact, they had something on TV about the International Festival and I thought I remember that place because we went there.

AMANDA: And, where did they hold Armenian Church service at?

ISABELLA: We didn't have Armenian Church, back then. So we went to the end of our block, which was the Baptist mission. So we would go to Sunday school either at the community center there or the Baptist mission, I think that is where we got our final, religious training. We didn't have the Armenian Church until 1954.

AMANDA: In Granite City?

ISABELLA: In Granite City, on Maple Street. That opened in December 1954.

AMANDA: There is one in Swansea, by my old neighborhood.

ISABELLA: Yes. I don't know too much about that one, I think it came after ours. They have a big Armenian settlement in East St. Louis and Belleville, by Swansea, now, or whatever its called.

AMANDA: All right. So you felt a sense of community living in Lincoln Place?

ISABELLA: Oh yes, very much so. Our friends were all... I had a very dear friend that was Macedonian and another one was Hungarian....Mary, and all the Armenian girls.

HELEN: One of my very dear friends was Mexican. Mexican girl we loved her. Rosy Salzar.

ISABELLA: Yea sure. [enthusiastically]

HELEN: We were like one family [sincerely]. We didn't care if they were Greek, we had Greek neighbors, we didn't care what nationality they were, it was the person that counted.

AMANDA: How long did you live in Lincoln Place? What year did you move out?

ISABELLA: I lived there until I got married and I still lived there.

AMANDA: What year were you married?

ISABELLA: 1948.

AMANDA: You continued to live there afterwards?

ISABELLA: For about five years, yes.

AMANDA: Helen, how long did you stay in Lincoln Place?

ISABELLA: Until you got married. You had been married, what, twenty-five, twenty-six years?

HELEN:(laughing) I forgot what year I got married.

ISABELLA: Subtract 2001 from 25 or 26. When did you get married? 1976 you got married. June the 6th.

AMANDA: I'm not sure when you were born, can I ask?

ISABELLA: Sure.

AMANDA: Your birthdays?

ISABELLA: 1923.

AMANDA: What date?

ISABELLA: July 16th.

AMANDA: Oh, mine is the 19th.

ISABELLA: Oh yeah?

AMANDA: Yes and Helen when is your birthday?

HELEN: August 16, 1926. Right? [Isabella nods]

AMANDA: Both of your husbands were Armenian?

HELEN: No, my husband was American.

AMANDA: Oh.

ISABELLA: Mine was Armenian.

AMANDA: Were either of them in the service?

ISABELLA: Yes, Chaz was in the service; WWII.

AMANDA: CHA...

ISABELLA: Charles.

AMANDA: What was your husband's name [Helen]?

HELEN: Donald.

AMANDA: Donald.

HELEN: He was in the service too. Not a lifetime thing, but when it was his time to go, he went.

ISABELLA: We had a brother in the Marine Corp. A nephew in the navy. Another nephew in the Marine Corp.

AMANDA: What were your fondest memories living in Lincoln Place?

ISABELLA: The thing that I remember most was my mother telling us fairy tales. We would sit out on our back porch in the summer time and we would, if a star fell we would say "Oh there is a star falling." We would sit out on the porch and my mother would have watermelon or fruit. We would listen to her tell Armenian fairy tales. We were talking about this the other day, we didn't think to write any of them out. Of course, we can't remember them now. She would tell us stories, fairy tales, and then she would tell us the way she and my sister escaped the Turks.

HELEN: The Turks.

AMANDA: May I ask how they escaped?

ISABELLA: Oh, it was bad. It was bad. Running away at night. Hiding in the fields, wheat fields. One time she said the Turkish horsemen came and if you're hiding and the horses jumped over and didn't hurt you, touch your bodies at all, it was a miracle. And they would hide during the day and travel at night so they wouldn't be caught.

AMANDA: Is that when you father was here?

ISABELLA: My father was here and the massacre started over there. She, my mother, was separated from her family. She just took my sister. They were all scattered. They never did get together, never found out where the others were. It was sad because my mother would always talk about her sisters. She named me after her youngest sister, she lost.

AMANDA: Your father went over and rescued them from this?

ISABELLA: No, see, he was over here in America.

AMANDA: But was he able to get her in time?

ISABELLA: They had a way of, I don't know where the list was, like who is still alive, but somehow he found out she was still there. My mother and sister were there, so he had his younger brother here, so he sent him to Armenia to bring them back and he did.

AMANDA: Were they able to bring any of the other relatives over?

ISABELLA: No, that's all that he could find. No, they were separated. They never did find out what happened to the other relatives. Sad, isn't it? I think it is because it was a big family and she had three other sisters. What was her name, Haram?

HELEN: I don't remember.

ISABELLA: Zabel and Zondohe?¹ Yes. There were four girls in my mother's family and my father he brought his younger brother here and the others were massacred. We never had grandparents.

¹ Those are Armenian names. The Armenian alphabet has 36 letters, compared to the English alphabet, which has 26. It is hard to write Armenian names in English.

You know, I used to envy the kids from west Granite or wherever they were from. They would talk about going to their grandmother's house on the weekends or they would vacation there. We never knew our grandparents.

AMANDA: So, do you value your time with your grandchildren now?

ISABELLA: I don't have any grandchildren now, but I have three kids, two sons and a daughter and a son-in-law. My sister had three sons, our older sister, who is in a nursing home here. And they have children and we cater to them, you know, as much as we can, as much as we see them.

HELEN: I don't have any children.

AMANDA: Okay. I am trying to think. Did you know other members of Lincoln Place that were genocide survivors?

ISABELLA: Oh, yes. They all were. They all were. Our parents' friends.

HELEN: That age, you know.

ISABELLA: That generation, yes they went through the same thing...[names five families]². This story kind of applied to everyone else, you know. Some Armenians ended up here in Granite City, some in Boston, St. Louis, East St. Louis, Belleville, but the largest settlement of Armenians are in NY and Boston. And now in California because California weather was more equivalent to what they came from.

AMANDA: Oh, it was warmer there [Armenia]?

ISABELLA: It was warmer there, yes, and farmers...the picture, you know the raisins we get in the little boxes?

AMANDA: California raisins?

ISABELLA: The little girl in the picture, she is Armenian. She's an Armenian girl.

AMANDA: The Sunmaid Raisins?

ISABELLA: Sunmaid Raisins, right. That's a little Armenian girl and you know who told us? We use to go to East St. Louis to Bee's to get our hair done and she was from California and she knew that girl.

[Tape 1, Side B, tape counter at 00:0]

AMANDA: Side 2, of the 10-10-2001 interview with Helen and Isabella. Isabella, you were discussing California.

ISABELLA: Oh, I was talking about the picture of the girl on the box of the raisins, that's a little Armenian girl and our hairdresser that we used to go to said she knew her. She said just remember that that picture is of a little Armenian girl.

AMANDA: Oh, that's nice and Helen did you have any other memories that you wanted to share of Lincoln Place?

HELEN: About Lincoln Place?

AMANDA: I am sure there are so many.

ISABELLA: The mission, talk about the mission.

AMANDA: The mission?

HELEN: The mission. There was a mission in our block; Helen Lambert was the missionary there. That was good because it was just two houses away from where we lived.

AMANDA: Oh

HELEN: And every Sunday we got to go to Sunday school. It was great.

AMANDA: And were the Baptists preaching to similar to your beliefs from your other church?

HELEN: Well this was a Baptist mission that I went to. Miss Lambert was kind.

ISABELLA: We didn't have an Armenian Church, we all went to the Baptist mission.

AMANDA: Okay and she was a kind woman?

² Couldn't understand the names. Tape counter at 48.1

HELEN: Oh, beautiful woman, she was the sweetest, kindest perfect missionary, I think. She helped with clothing and things to some of the people. Oh, if people needed food, she took food. If they needed clothing, she took clothing. She helped with many things. I just adored her.

ISABELLA: She was a nice lady.

AMANDA: Was she there for a long time?

HELEN: Oh yes. See this was a Hungarian Baptist church..

ISABELLA: Mrs. Fabian.

HELEN: She came along and used the building. She did wonderful work and reached many people.

AMANDA: She reached many people. Okay and earlier before the tape started you mentioned Miss Prather.

HELEN: Miss Prather.

AMANDA: Miss Prather.

HELEN: She was in charge of the center. The Commonwealth sponsored the clubhouse.

ISABELLA: Yes, the big factory in Granite City, Commonwealth, General Steel, Castings Corporation, sponsored, they sponsored this huge playground with swings and seesaws and all the whole gamut of things to play with. Every Sunday Miss Prather had Sunday school for the kids.

HELEN: We all went.

ISABELLA: Methodist.

HELEN: She was a Methodist lady.

ISABELLA: Miss Gibson and Miss Miller would come from the Methodist Church every Sunday and teach us Sunday school. Miss Gibson was mine, I just loved her.

HELEN: They both taught the piano.

AMANDA: Did they teach you to play the piano?

HELEN: No, no, no.

ISABELLA: They played the piano for the service so we could sing

HELEN: So we could sing the hymns.

AMANDA: And did you have kindergarten as well with Miss Prather?

HELEN: Of course, there was kindergarten, all the age groups. You know there were teachers for all the groups and there was always a good kindergarten. I remember Miss Prather; if we didn't come to Sunday school she didn't want us to come play either. (Laughing)

ISABELLA: She wouldn't let you on the playground.

AMANDA: You were excluded from the playground if you didn't show up on Sunday.

ISABELLA: I wish I could find a picture of Miss Prather.

HELEN: She was a marvelous woman.

ISABELLA: She played a big role in all our lives.

HELEN: Just a marvelous woman.

[Isabella goes to look for picture]

AMANDA: And the thing about your sewing, did you get to wear them?

HELEN: Oh, we got to take them home. Dressy scarves, and sometimes we would make a dress.

They would help us sew a dress, but we got to take everything we made home. The boys would do wood working, you know and they got to take that home. Oh yeah. It was neat. It was a good place to grow up. There were so many factories in the town, I think about seven or eight big factories. And the kids, they had to do something for the kids, so they had these playgrounds for us, you know. We made crafts and played and did vacation bible school. We grew up there.

[Isabella comes back to room with some pictures]

AMANDA: And the factories, you said they had to do something for the kids. You meant that they wanted to or they needed to?

HELEN: The factories did a lot.

ISABELLA: The what?

HELEN: The factories did a lot, didn't they, no?

ISABELLA: Just the Commonwealth, the steel company.

AMANDA: The members of Lincoln Place, were they employees there?

ISABELLA: They built the clubhouse. They built the community center. With all the different nationalities there and all the men working in the factories.

AMANDA: Oh, the men built it?

ISABELLA: They built the Community Center and that is where they taught our parents English. Folks went to school there and then they taught them citizenship, how to answer the questions to get the citizenship papers.

AMANDA: Oh, at the Community Center.

ISABELLA: The Community Center, yes. They would come home with their books and we would have to quiz them so they would learn, that is where they learned to get their citizenship papers. I am looking for a picture of Miss Prather in this cookbook, I know it's here somewhere. This would answer your questions. There is Miss Prather in front of the Community Center.

AMANDA: Is she the shorter one with the white hat on?

ISABELLA: She's the one with the white hat on.

AMANDA: Oh, she was a petite woman.

ISABELLA: Yes, little bitty one, but mighty though. Mighty.

AMANDA: Yes.

ISABELLA: Ruled with an iron hand, you didn't come to Sunday school, bible school, you couldn't play.

AMANDA: You didn't mess with her. It's a great picture. Flattering.

ISABELLA: There is a nice picture here of all of the ladies from Lincoln Place. This is my older sister right here.

AMANDA: In front of the flag?

ISABELLA: Yes. That's our oldest sister. There is all of the Armenians, Macedonians, Greeks, you name it, we had it.

AMANDA: Was this taken at the Community Center?

ISABELLA: Yes.

AMANDA: Oh, wow, what a great ethnic cookbook.

HELEN: I wish I had a copy.

AMANDA: Beautiful [looking at pictures]

ISABELLA: I think I just have one. That's my sister there. These are all Armenian ladies, Macedonians, Mrs. Kirchoff, Mrs. Andria, Bogosian, Evanoff, Marge, Sophie's here.

HELEN: Our one neighbor was Hungarian, the other one south of us was Greek. What else did we have in Lincoln Place?

ISABELLA: Hungarian, Bulgarian, Spanish, Spanish was large..

HELEN: Mexican. Many ethnic groups. See there were big factories and you had to work to make a living and these people would come to Granite City to get a job. It was nice.

ISABELLA: [showing a group picture]. See Commonwealth Steel, the American Director of Americanization classes at the Community House, Mrs. Howard, Mr. Howard, President of

Commonwealth Steel, Commonwealth factory built that little place there and this is all of them in the picture.

AMANDA: And was the factory that your father worked at, was it close to your house or did he have to walk quite a ways?

ISABELLA: It was within walking distance, but it wasn't close. In Lincoln Place, it must have taken twenty minutes to walk there.

HELEN: No big deal, he got a ride eventually, don't you think?

ISABELLA: No, they had to walk. Rain or shine, they walked.

AMANDA: How far was your school from your house?

ISABELLA: We were in Lincoln Place and the school was in West Granite so it took about fifteen minutes to walk there. Rain or shine. I remember one day it was so cold and Evan went down on Popular Street and [illegible] came out and Ian put my hand in his pocket...

HELEN: Evan was our brother.

ISABELLA: And [illegible] hand in his other pocket and held our hands until we got to Washington School. It was SO COLD. I will never forget that! Never! I froze!

AMANDA: How do spell that, EVAN, Evan?

HELEN: Yes, you got it right, that was our brother.

AMANDA: The one who was in the Marines?

HELEN: Yes, he was in the Marines, yes.

AMANDA: Wow, and your mother, she stayed at home with the family?

ISABELLA: Oh yes. This is a good picture, do you recognize any of them Helen, besides our sister?

HELEN: Sophie, Mrs. Kirchoff, Rose's mother, and Mrs. [illegible]

ISABELLA: Right. Oh that's a good little book, I'll tell you. It has all kinds of recipes, it has the kuftas³ recipe in it.

HELEN: No kidding.

ISABELLA: The kuftas are meatballs with a good special kind of

HELEN: Stuffing

ISABELLA: Filling inside. Armenians eat well, honey.

AMANDA: I've been to some festivals and I've had baklava

HELEN: OH, isn't that delicious?

AMANDA: Yes. There was an Armenian Church by my house and they had a festival every year, so I got to try different foods. Very tasty. I love butter, so.

ISABELLA: I do, too! (laughs)

AMANDA: They use it well. It was nice.

[All three looking at pictures]

ISABELLA: We are going to have to make some kuftas sometime.

HELEN: Yes, that would nice. How could I get a copy of this [to Isabella about the cookbook]?

ISABELLA: Oh, they don't make those anymore, its too bad.

AMANDA: They have it where you can copy one at Kinkos, they have different printers, copiers, that will copy color, so if you wanted to go there you could copy it. Lovely photos [inserted in the cookbook]. It was nice of them to put this together.

ISABELLA:...was young then...

HELEN: I would love to have a copy of that book. Do you have any idea where I could get one?

ISABELLA: They were selling them at the bank. I paid forty bucks for that.

HELEN: Forty?

³ Need spelling. Some of the words, such as that one, that they say are in Armenian and its alphabet is different.

ISABELLA: Forty.

AMANDA: Well, I think it is like ten cents a page at Kinkos, you can put it like this, or maybe eight cents. If there are 150 pages, like \$7.50 it would cost you to make a copy of it.

HELEN: Yes, that's nice. This is the first time I've seen this one.

ISABELLA: Look how young Nevart looks. She's our older sister, she's in the nursing home right now.

AMANDA: How do you spell her name?

ISABELLA: Her name is Nevart,

AMANDA: NEVA...

ISABELLA: NEVART.

AMANDA: That means the rose?

ISABELLA: Yes. That was her name. Rose.

HELEN: This is a picture of the lady that was in charge of the Community Center where we grew up.

AMANDA: Miss Prather.

HELEN: She was quite a lady.

AMANDA: She lived from 1869 to 1936. She was born in Carlyle and came to Granite City to teach at Washington School. The Commonwealth Steel under the lease of...[reading out of that Lincoln Place cookbook].

HELEN: Sophie, Miss Prather.

ISABELLA: Yes, Sophie Prather.

AMANDA: She was known as the Little Mother of Lincoln Place?

ISABELLA: Yes, that's what they called her. This is Nevart. This is the three of us. That's my

sister Rose [Nevart] and this is Helen with my Rose and my mother. [Looking at older family photos]. This picture must have been taken right after they got here.

HELEN: I wish we could make a copy of that. Mail it to me.

ISABELLA: This is Rose in Washington DC where they had all of the survivors.

HELEN: See the Turks massacred the Armenians.

ISABELLA: All of the survivors got one of those, I think it is around here somewhere.

AMANDA: This metal around her neck. Was there a large gathering?

ISABELLA: In Washington DC, oh yes, they came from, a couple from France, a couple from Mexico, and all of the US.

AMANDA: What year was that [that banquet in DC]?

ISABELLA: 19..

HELEN: This is 1912 here. [looking at older pictures]

ISABELLA: In Washington DC, in the 1970s sometime. Did you come to that Helen? No.

HELEN: No.

AMANDA: That's a flattering picture.

ISABELLA: This is when they got here, my mother and my sister.

AMANDA: Is that Evan there?

ISABELLA: That is Evan

AMANDA: In the lower corner.

ISABELLA: Yes.

AMANDA: Is that you on the horse?

ISABELLA: Yes.

AMANDA: Did you used to ride horses?

ISABELLA: No. Really I have never been around too many horses.

AMANDA: Oh.

ISABELLA: I like this picture of my sisters and I [different picture].

AMANDA: That's a nice photo.

ISABELLA: I like this one.

[We are looking at family photos]

HELEN: I really wish I had that cookbook.

AMANDA: She is going to have to take you to Kinkos.

ISABELLA: (Laughing) Yes. This was a relative of my mother's, right? [another picture]

HELEN: I guess.

ISABELLA: In the army that they sent to Siberia.

AMANDA: Siberia?

ISABELLA: See, he was in the Armenian army.

AMANDA: Is this your family here when you were all young? [another picture]

ISABELLA: Yes, yes. On Niedringhaus, yes. This is Nevart, Evan, Bob, Ruben, Sarzant,⁴ Soroff,⁵

Helen, that's me, and that's my sister's leg...

[All three laugh]

ISABELLA: Isn't that cute?

AMANDA: Yes, that is cute.

ISABELLA: We go see her everyday [Nevart] she is at the nursing home.

⁴ Need spelling.

⁵ Need spelling.

AMANDA: Oh, do you?

ISABELLA: She is ninety-three now.

AMANDA: Oh, she's ninety-three now?

ISABELLA: My sister was well until her son died. Her seventy-two year old son died and she just. It overwhelmed her. She didn't think that, she always felt that she should have died before him. It just kind of took her down, her health. I go see her everyday.

AMANDA: Do you think sometime, not today, I could go with you to see her?

ISABELLA: Just to see her?

AMANDA: Or, she could talk and you could translate.

ISABELLA: Okay. Oh, she has stories to tell.

AMANDA: Does she?

ISABELLA: Yes, oh yes. She is very alert for ninety-three. I hope I am as alert at ninety-three.

Oh, there comes my son. Uh oh. Charlie.

AMANDA: Hi.

CHARLIE: Oh, is this for SIUE?

ISABELLA: Yes.

[Isabella's son, Charlie, begins to bring in paper bags of groceries, which caused some noise and was a little disrupting]

AMANDA: Yes, its okay though.

HELEN: Where did you go Charlie?

CHARLIE: So how did you find out about all these people?

AMANDA: It is for our Oral History class. We are doing a project all on Lincoln Place.

CHARLIE: Oh, where is your native home?

AMANDA: Belleville, by Belleville.

CHARLIE: I graduated from SIU, but I won't tell you what year.

ISABELLA: Let me tell you about him. He was five years old and we had moved out here. One day, all of a sudden I couldn't find him. Kenneth was asleep. He [Charlie] was missing. I called the neighbors, nobody knew. I called down to Karen's. At about that time I was going to call the police. Nelly called, my sister-in-law, that runs a grocery store down there [in Lincoln Place], or did, and she said "where's Charlie?" real smart, just like that. I said "Oh, God. I'm going to cry. I can't find him. I called everybody." She says "he's here and playing on Chestnut Street." He walked all the way down, five years old, he walked because he knew the way, you know, I guess nobody paid any attention to him until Mary saw him cross the tracks. She said they pulled up and watched him and he kept on walking, they didn't want to bother him, you know, but they followed him and he went to the grocery store. Five years old.

[Noises]

ISABELLA: Charlie, do remember the time you walked to Lincoln Place?

CHARLIE: I deny it, I plead the Fifth Amendment.

ISABELLA: Charlie, you were only five.

HELEN: Only five.

ISABELLA: We had just moved out here.

AMANDA: (laughing at story). Well, thanks you guys for the interview. I guess I'll let you go so you can see your sister and unload groceries. [It was a little after 1:00, which is the time they usually leave to go to the nursing home to see their older sister Nevart].

ISABELLA: Yes. I got to put the groceries away. Well, it was nice having you.

AMANDA: Yes, thank you for sharing your stories and your pictures.

HELEN: You know I am sorry we didn't make some Turkish coffee for her. When you go to an Armenian...

ISABELLA: But I don't have any.

HELEN: You don't have Turkish coffee.

ISABELLA: You'll have to come back.

HELEN: It has to be the real fine, fine ground. She'll show you and after you drink it, its just water and ground up coffee, and a little sugar. And then after you drink your coffee, you turn it over onto the plate and somebody has to tell you your fortune [demonstrates for me].

AMANDA: Oh really.

HELEN: Yes, and my sister is the one that can tell your fortunes.

ISABELLA: It would just come out, she could read them. How did she learn that?

HELEN: I don't know. When you turn it over, you drink the coffee [first], then three, four minutes later the coffee is like streaks up the sides and then she tells you your fortune from those streaks of coffee that are left.

AMANDA: That is interesting.

HELEN: Too bad you didn't get to try some. Too bad we didn't make some Turkish coffee for her. You don't have any.

ISABELLA: We don't have any.

HELEN: It has to be the fine ground coffee.

ISABELLA: Pulverized coffee. When we had the grocery store we had a special machine for that. Pulverize the coffee.

HELEN: They have in some of the Greek homes...

ISABELLA: You would think some of these old timers buy something like that already ground, boy they would come in to the store and say Old...coffee, or whatever their favorite coffee was and we had a big machine and we would pulverize the coffee, for Turkish coffee, Armenian coffee.

[Ended Tape 1, Side B at 37:9 on tape counter]

Interviewing Isabella and Nevart at nursing home on November 15, 2001, at 1 p.m.