Name: _____

Immigrant Experiences: Doukenie Papandreos

Doukenie Papandreos emigrated from Greece in 1919 at age fifteen.

I was born in...northern Greece. The Turks... chased all the Greeks out.... The Turks are not very progressive. They didn't rebuild...fix...or clean the town.... And many times they used to try to steal girls, rape the girls.... So always we lived in fear....

We used to carry wood to school in the wintertime to warm our rooms, but we had to learn... to have knowledge so that we would get out from slavery.... Always, our dream was that someday, maybe, the Greeks will recapture our towns, which were taken from us.

My father helped his mother raise four children.... She used to weave Turkish carpets. When my father grew up, he wanted to go away.... He started a vineyard and sold the wine to Constantinople....

But when the first World War started...I was eleven years old. We didn't have anything to eat. The Turks...used to sell us bread...[and] mix sand in it, just to kill us. They closed the schools. So my father, who was very intelligent and self-made, [taught] us at home for a few years.... I used to think at night, "Someday I will go to America and become somebody...."

My uncle was a heavy gambler...playing poker with a man who...sold boat tickets to America. My uncle said, "We'll play one round for my niece." And he won. He said, "We'll play another for the expenses." And he won.... I was so excited. My mother was happy for me...my father...said, "Never a child of mine will go away from my arms.... Fifteen years old? Never!" For three days I begged him..."Dad, trust me.... Give me a chance."

Meanwhile, I heard that a classmate of mine was going to America. Without saying anything to my father or mother I went to my friend's house, and I said to my friend's mother..."Can you take me with you? I got my tickets too." She agreed. My father agreed. "All right," he said, "as long as you're with a family."

I took one small, old valise.... That's all.... [We] slept in one room with four bunk beds, but moved to first class.... I used to go to the deck and play mandolin.

After thirteen days, we finally came here and I was so happy that I was now in America. I saw the statue of Liberty, and I said to myself, "Lady, you're beautiful. You opened your arms, and you get all the foreigners here...." Always, while I was here, that statue was in my mind.

I saw tears at Ellis Island. I saw tears with happiness, I also saw tears with pain. Many people had to wait, and they were living in agony. Next to me was an Italian woman with three children...one of the children got sick.... All of a sudden a doctor and two nurses took the child away. The mother couldn't speak English.... They were saying that the child had to go to the hospital.... The mother was crying and I was crying with her.... The guards... used to go, "Come on, come on." Like lambs to slaughter, we used to go upstairs to the rooms to sleep.... I couldn't enjoy nothing. I was afraid they were going to send me back.... I promised everybody that someday I'm going to come back as a doctor.

Finally, the third day, my uncle came to take me.... [He] didn't have a lot of money. We came by subway to his house in...Queens. Two rooms, no shower, no bathtub. All the houses looked the same.

Peter Coan, *Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words,* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), 280-285.

Immigrant Experiences: George Banovert

George Banovert emigrated from Czechoslovakia to New York in 1922 at age six.

My mother, my sister, and I came with one trunk. In this trunk, besides everyday clothing... was an overstuffed feather quilt and pillows.... I vaguely remember that we were driven by horse and carriage to the train station in Trencin... where my mother used to go to peddle wares or buy things—farm produce, chickens, ducks, geese, whatever....

I remember walking...to the boat...we had a room in the lower part of the vessel; enough room for my mother and sister and I to sleep. It was very hot and very noisy.... Any time we were down there it was just thump, thump, thump. It was very uncomfortable. My mother, of course—along with everybody else—got seasick.... And so as a six-year-old who wasn't seasick, I had the run of the main deck. I had a ball on the vessel, as far as I can recall. I would run around on the deck and try to keep from falling overboard. I would climb the mast. I must have really driven the deckhands crazy....

Of course, we weren't permitted to go up to the other decks. They were reserved for first-class and second-class passengers. And so we were fed down in the hold. I remember eating this one kind of soup I had never tasted before and not liking it. It was like broth with small granular things floating in it. The soups we had at home were real nice, thick hearty things you could chew on. [Laughs.]

We arrived August 2, I believe. I think the trip lasted ten days. I recall as we started to approach the shore, we saw birds and things floating in the water. I wasn't aware of the Statue of Liberty. I don't know if anybody pointed it out. If they did, it didn't leave an impression, let's put it that way.

The rest is just a blur. I, we, everybody had their baggage collected, waiting to get off and onto the ferryboat to Ellis Island. Just one constant blur of activity. I do remember after we left Ellis Island... my father was waiting there. We were all joyful. My sister spotted him first. She pointed him out to me because I did not remember him. I just remember that he greeted us, and there was hugging and kissing. And we went on a train, and then a bus, and he took us to this house where he had been living with this Slovak family in Newark.

Our first winter in this country was miserable. My father had found a cold-water flat with a wood stove, not too far from the place where he had been rooming. I can still remember my mother and father in the snow, cutting wood...I can remember running around picking up scraps of wood and bringing them home for kindling for the fire.

We tried to be self-sufficient. At that time there was no aid or public assistance. Even if it was offered, I don't think my father would have taken it. He was poor, but he still had his pride. And it was cold. That winter I caught the measles. I had just started kindergarten and had to miss school for about a month....

The other [challenge] was bigotry. It was an inhospitable neighborhood.... There was a grumpy lady living next door who would not associate with us. The Germans ignored us. But I think the people who were the most bigoted to us were the Irish. They seemed to go out of their way to make life miserable for us. To them, we were the dumb Polacks. They had only two terms for any foreigner. You were either a dumb Polack or you were a dumb Hunky, meaning Hungarian. And there was no other distinction.

After I became older and read a lot about the history of Ireland, it always amazed me how the Irish, who were persecuted over the years, would not be more understanding or compassionate or considerate....

Peter Coan, *Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words*, (New York: Facts on File, 1997), 293-294.