BRUCE M. STA VE: Interview with Adrianne Brown, by Bruce M. and Sondra Astor Stave, for the University of Connecticut Armenians in Connecticut Oral History Project, August 6th, 2013 at Ms. Brown’s home in Newington, Connecticut. Okay, we’re going to begin at the beginning, and if you could just tell us—you were born in the United States?

ADRIANNE BROWN: I was.

BS: But your parents were not, I gather?

AB: My parents were not, is correct.

BS: Okay. Could you tell us a little bit about your parents, both mother and father, and what brought them to America?

AB: Mom was a victim of the 1915 Holocaust, when the Turks killed the Armenians, and she was approximately three years old when this happened. As a result of that, she was as an orphan, taken in first by a Turkish family, then by an orphanage—an Armenian orphanage in Istanbul. Then an Armenian orphanage in Corfu, Greece, and then in an Armenian ladies boarding school, Ecole des Dames in Marseilles, France, later relocated to Le Raincy, a suburb of Paris. She came to this country in 1932, after marrying Dad in 1931, in Cuba, where there was kind of a brokerage, shall I say, system amongst Armenians that facilitated that kind of an arrangement.

BS: Okay. Now, did she tell you much about the genocide situation and the orphanages?
AB: Not too much. She was ill at some point; lost a lot of her hair. Had pleurisy. A lot of her care was given through the support of the Lord Mayor’s Fund from Great Britain, about which I know very little.

BS: That’s okay. And—
Now as far as you know—she was born in what year?

AB: She was born—we’re not sure, because she was orphaned, and papers are lost and people are lost. We think—we know the papers were written in 1908. Mom’s story says it was 1912.

BS: Okay. And in the period that she went through the orphanage situation, she was in various countries, or places, I gather?

AB: Yes.

BS: Do you know how she moved from one place to another, and why she did?

AB: She did. It was done by boat, from Turkey to Corfu, and again by boat from Corfu, Greece to Marseilles, which of course is a seaport town in France.

BS: Okay.

AB: Later in—later during her boarding, ladies boarding school years, the school was moved from Marseilles to Le Raincy, France, outside of Paris—maybe about ten miles or less.

BS: Okay, now, what about your father?

AB: My father’s spoke very little about himself. Mom cried a lot, and repeatedly told her horrible stories, to the degree where it infiltrated my being. But Dad’s story was absent, and I don’t know when, he came to this country by boat, I believe also from France. He may have gone from Turkey, to France, to the United States, established
citizenship in 1928, which was a key factor in the arranged marriage, in order to facilitate Mom’s permanent residency here when she married. I believe he was about sixteen, from what little Mom told me about what she knew about her husband. He was born in 1897, so that would have been around 1913. I’m not sure of all of this, though.

BS: Okay. You said that they met in Cuba?
AB: Yes. It was an arranged meeting.
BS: Now, who arranged it?
AB: That was between the ladies school in Le Raincy, France, and whoever their contacts in the United States were. And I do not know that.
BS: I see. So they had not met before then?
AB: Never.
BS: Okay. And now, why Cuba?
AB: Because as far as I can imagine—I have never been told—Cuba was an area where they could establish residency in order to come to the United States. Mm-hm.
BS: The United States, okay. And you say your dad did it first; he became a citizen?
AB: He did in 1928.
BS: Yes. So he became a citizen before they were married?
AB: Correct.
BS: Okay. And that allowed them to get married. Do you know when your mother became a citizen? When did she—?
AB: I have those papers in her scrapbook things, yes. She did go to night school, as did my father, to learn English and to become a United States citizen in 1939.

BS: Okay. And in a sense, they—where did they come when they first come to Connecticut?

AB: They came directly to Hartford, Connecticut in 1932, and lived with my dad’s brother, my Uncle George, who was the first to come to this country, with his wife. And they lived with them until shortly after my sister was born (1935), and then moved into their own apartment in a twelve-apartment house, where I was born (1940).

BS: Were you born in Hartford?

AB: In Hartford also, correct.

BS: Okay, now your Uncle George—what did he do?

AB: Uncle George was a grocery shop owner, and Dad worked for him. And they were butchers. And Auntie Sarah, Uncle George’s wife, was a gorgeous soprano operatic singer—well trained, beautiful voice, up until the day she died.

BS: Now, what was your maiden name, by the way?

AB: Der Sarkissian.

BS: Okay. So that was your family name?

AB: Yeah.

BS: And did your mother and dad have any educational background? Did they attend school, or—?

AB: Yes. Mom was well-versed in the Armenian language, and the French language, during her years at the boarding school in Marseilles and Le Raincy. Pop also was a very bright person. Whatever formal training
he got in the old country was what he sufficed with. To earn a living, however, in this country, many of their skills, like seamstress for mom and other things, had to be put aside for where the money was, which was, turn of the century, mass industrial revolution—in other words, a factory.

BS: Okay. Now, you said the stories that she told were embedded in your mind. Could you talk—tell about some of these stories?

AB: It’s very sad. I find it very difficult to talk about them. [Sobs]

BS: Okay.

AB: Mostly just being deserted, having lost her family and not knowing where they went.

BS: Uh-huh. And did she talk to you a lot about this?

AB: She talked to everybody about it, not necessarily to me. And I absorbed it, unfortunately/fortunately.

BS: Uh-huh. So you, as child—you’d overhear her talking to other people?

AB: Yeah. Very sad.

BS: Okay. In your own background, what was your childhood like? How steeped were you in Armenian community and language?

AB: Armenian was spoken in the house all the time. English was spoken outside of the home all the time. We were taught it would be rude to carry your cultural language outside of the walls, because it would not—well, you would be rude to people. They wouldn’t know what you were talking about. And I remember as a child coming home, maybe around six years old, and saying to my family, “Ma, Pa, what
are we?” Because I knew we were so different from everybody on the other side of our home’s walls.

SONDRA ASTOR STAVE: And what differences did you feel?

AB: Well, the language, primarily the language, and probably just the upbringing. We were brought up very strict. I had to go to music school. I had to learn how to play the piano, but I did have an aptitude for music. And we had to go to Armenian school on Saturdays.

SAS: What did you learn there?

BS: Yes.

AB: How to read, write, and speak Armenian. The speaking was at home, I take that back. How to read and write.

BS: Who taught that?

AB: Many different Armenians in the Hartford Armenian community that expressed an interest to volunteer to do that.

BS: Was it done in the—through the church, or was it separate?

AB: It was done—we didn’t have access to the church, which was in New Britain, Connecticut. We had no car at the time. But in Hartford the concentration of Armenians lived in the Park Street area. And on Park Street, I think it was 688 Park Street, they rented a club. And each Armenian club—and this is done in all towns, in Massachusetts, or whatever—they have what they call a Club Baba.

BS: Club Baba?

AB: The grandfather. And he unlocks the doors, makes the tea, sells the candies, sells the lelebooh (dried salted chick peas), and locks up. Turns the lights on, makes sure that the guys that are there playing cards are behaving, whatever.
BS: And he’s Armenian?

AB: Yes. Yeah.

BS: Okay. And how often would you go there?

AB: Well, the men would go whenever they felt they had to get out of the house, I think.

BS: [Laughs]

AB: And whenever they wanted to play cards with the other guys, so that could be every day, or a few times a week. And the women would go there with their husbands and children, to share in the camaraderie of New Years and other celebrations for the Armenian Relief Society, Armenian Revolutionary Federation anniversaries. Other than that, the first generation, like myself, would go there for their Armenian lessons, as I mentioned, and to attend AYF meetings, Armenian Youth Federation, which is an offspring of the ARF.

BS: Okay.

SAS: And what kinds of things would be brought up at the AYF meetings?

AB: At the AYF meetings, first of all, I was not that active in it. My age category fell between those who were truly first generation, anywhere five to fifteen years older than I, so I didn’t quite belong. Or they were five to fifteen years younger, so I didn’t quite belong.

BS: What year were you born?

AB: I was born in 1940.

BS: ’40.

AB: And most of the others were born 1935, or before.
BS: Okay. Now, in terms of your neighborhood—first of all, you mentioned the church was in New Britain. Was Saint George Church there, or not?

AB: Saint George’s Church was the so-called “other church.” It is in Hartford. Unfortunately, the Armenians became politically confused, and therefore associated that—that politic of existence with a church. So the church then took on a different color, and you were either this political thing, which means you went to Saint George’s Church in Hartford—

BS: And what would that represent? What side was that?

AB: That was the side that believed that the communist rule was okay.

BS: The Soviets?

AB: The Soviet Union, because they were protecting the Armenians from the atrocities of the Turks. Whereas the other people, of which my family attached themselves to, [sighs] would attend, when we finally got a car, the church in New Britain, Saint Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church, which did not favor the Soviet rule of the Armenians—which hoped, which prayed for a free and independent Armenia.

BS: Do you still go there now?

AB: I do.

BS: Okay, now, how does that differ from Holy Resurrection? Yeah.

AB: There is a Holy Resurrection Church in New Britain, also. I believe the head of the—well, the head of the Resurrection Church is different from the head of the Saint Stephen’s Church. The head of the Saint
Stephen’s Church is in Giligia, G-I-L-I-G-I-A. Don’t ask me where—is that Lebanon? I believe so.

BS: [Laughs] Right.

AB: And the other church, I don’t know. I’m not well versed in history. As I said, sometimes I was over-saturated with very sad information, and tried to keep some distance for the sake of sanity.

BS: Okay. But from your church activity—when did you start going to the Saint Stephen’s?

AB: As a little girl, Papa would go, occasionally Mom. The Der in Der Sarkissian signifies priest.

BS: Right.

AB: So Pop was well versed because of his family—his family practices in the old country, in the church.

BS: Uh-huh.

AB: And so I went as a little girl, then you know, college and high school take you away from these things. You get busy with school work, and working. And I started working when I was sixteen, after school.

SAS: And what did you do?

AB: I did clerical work at the Aetna Life Insurance Company. And going away to college, then meeting my husband, not Armenian, we ended up going to a non-Armenian church in Hartford, where I was baptized, communed and married.

BS: Which one was that?

AB: That’s Grace Episcopal Church. High Episcopal is equivalent to Armenian Apostolic. That was in Hartford, on New Park Avenue. So we lived in that neighborhood also, and I was baptized there. We
moved into the neighborhood. I became confirmed there, communed, married.

SAS: How did you meet your husband?
AB: At the time we met, it was a very popular practice for people to attend dances in the area at different restaurants—not quite happy hours, but a time for a social hour. And a friend of mine from college called and said, “Adrienne, would you like to go with me to—?” She was a friend, and I said I did. And that’s where we met.

SAS: Where did you go to college?
AB: I went to the University of Connecticut for a while, and stayed in South Campus. And then I dropped out because I found out that I was just too culturally different, and I could not survive.

BS: Oh.

AB: And I did not have a strong support system at all. I was always on my own. It was very hard.

BS: When you—yes.

SAS: When you say culturally different, what does that mean?
AB: Armenian. Not socially active; not into dating. And not—not having anybody ask me to go out, I guess. What else can I say?

SAS: So how long were you at UConn?
AB: On and off. I did drop off for a while, tried to go back for a semester, I even tried commuting with—with somebody. And I’d say on and off, about three and a half years. I started in ’58, when I graduated high school, at the Hartford branch, and I aced all my courses. When I went out to Storrs and felt this identity crisis, I fell apart emotionally and I couldn’t handle the coursework.
BS: Were there any other Armenian students there?

AB: No.

BS: None?

AB: Not that I know of or that I felt close to.

BS: Okay.

AB: And if there were, it was a guy on north campus, who had no interest in me, or was—I can’t remember any; let me put it that way.

BS: Okay.

SAS: Was this something that the other students kind of told you, or was this just something that you felt from within yourself?

AB: I think it was things that I felt inside of myself, because of my previous experiences in life.

SAS: So, you were living in a basically Armenian neighborhood when you were living in Hartford?

AB: Mm-hm.

BS: But you married a non-Armenian, an odar?

AB: Yes, there were no Armenians my age and none to be interested in me—an odar.

BS: An odar, right. How did your family feel about that? How did you feel about that? If you were looking for Armenian roots, and—

AB: Well, I wasn’t really looking for Armenian roots. I had looked, and I never could find them.

BS: Find them. Okay.

AB: People were very much older, or younger than I. There wasn’t anybody my age.
BS: So how did your family react to your marrying somebody who wasn’t Armenian?

AB: Not very well. In addition, he was divorced, and he had two children, which I did bring up, so not very well. It made life very difficult for me.

BS: Uh-huh.

AB: And life was difficult enough [sighs] with the children, as I was trying to finish up my degree, get a job, be a wife, mother, housekeeper, daughter, sister.

SAS: And did you finish?

AB: I did, but not at the University of Connecticut.

SS: Where did you finish?

AB: I transferred to my first love, which was music. And I went to the University of Hartford—the Hartt School of Music. And I aced all my courses there. I loved music; it came very easily to me. I couldn’t believe it was coursework. It was just—it was just a piece of cake! Everything I did was a piece of cake. And I know others were struggling, because they would ask me for help. And I go, how come they don’t get it? [Laughs] I get it, how come—you know, it’s one of those things.

BS: Okay.

AB: On the other hand, my philosophy class at UConn, I didn’t understand a darn thing in philosophy! I hated it.

BS: [Laughs]
AB: I was pronouncing dess-car-tays when I was reading, instead of Descartes. And I was wondering why the professor was talking about a person I was not reading about. Then I said, “Oh, I get it.”

BS: [laughs]

AB: Took me a half a semester to realize.

BS: You mentioned your family didn’t take to it well that you married a non-Armenian, and that you had the other difficulty. What about going into the Grace Episcopal Church? What was the feeling about that?

AB: That was okay, because I was baptized there, and that was my parents choice, because there was no Armenian church nearby.

BS: Okay, so that was—?

AB: Perfectly fine, yeah.

BS: Okay. What about in terms of just—?

K: Excuse me.

BS: Okay. Okay, so, let’s see. In terms of voluntary associations and things like that, you mentioned the Youth—

AB: Armenian Youth.

BS: But as you were older, were you engaged in any Armenian organizations?

AB: Yes. I recently finished two, two-year terms as President of the Armenian Relief Society.

BS: Okay.

SAS: And what is their function these days?

AB: Their function is to help Armenians throughout the world. I have a list of all the projects that they’re involved in. They have a
convention once a year for the Eastern Coast chapters, and there’s also a regional out on the West Coast.

BS: How did you become president?
AB: Nobody else wanted the job, I suppose. [Laughs] And they thought I was good. [Laughs]

BS: How many people are involved in this?
AB: Unfortunately, all the old Armenians have died. The ones that remain in the club are practically non-functional. I almost believe that a couple of them cannot read English. But they’re there out of sentimentality and loyalty to the cause. The ones that are active, such as myself—and we’re not exactly young—do most of the work. Whether it’s serving the food, making the phone calls, buying the table cloths, advertising, making up things on the computer, writing emails—you name it.

BS: Did you do much with the earthquake?
AB: They did. In 1988, they did. I was not active in that group then. But they did do a lot.

BS: Okay. And you said you were in another group as well?
AB: I was in the Armenian Youth Federation Juniors, and the AYF itself. But again, there were not that many people involved, so I can’t really say it was that active a group.

BS: Do you read Armenian newspapers, or magazines, or periodicals?
AB: I used to. But I only read them in English now.

BS: You read them in Armenian, previously?
AB: I did. I did as an exercise to practice my Armenian, not so much to understand the article, because it usually appeared in the English newspaper—the Armenian newspaper written in English.

BS: What kinds of issues captured your imagination?

AB: [Sighs] Actually, they were all pretty interesting in their own way. You know, the—the things that were happening in Middle Eastern countries where Armenians lived, and how they were negatively affected. There’s a mass of articles about that, just more of the same.

BS: Okay. Have you ever—?

SAS: You mentioned that sometimes you’re sorry that you’re Armenian, or that it’s particularly hard. Could you describe—?

AB: It’s a heavy load to carry. You feel like you have to do something about the horrible past that your mother lived through. And that affects your personality, you know.

SAS: Well, what do you feel you’re expected to do?

AB: I don’t know. It’s like—that would be like—I don’t know. It would be like on the inside looking out. I don’t know. I honestly can’t analyze that myself. All I know is I would be different if I were one of the kids in the neighborhood that were all Irish Roman Catholic, that told me I was going to go to hell because I wasn’t Irish, and I wasn’t Roman Catholic.

BS: Did this actually happen?

AB: Oh, yeah!

BS: A lot of tension when you were younger?

AB: Well, I don’t know if it was tension, because I had a lot of—you know, the family was not Irish or Catholic, so I felt okay in my four
walls, but once I went outside, they let me know I was different. That’s all.

BS: Uh-huh. And what did you do?

AB: Nothing. You learned to get along in both worlds. And your parents are totally unaware of what you’re doing, how to deal with it. In other words—

SAS: Did it make you—I’m sorry, go ahead.

AB: You just have to—you’re the one that’s there. Your parents aren’t there. You have to know how to deal with it, and you do.

SAS: Well, did it make you feel inferior, or superior, or something in between?

AB: It depended on the situation. Sometimes I felt I was much better than they were because I had to deal with a lot more, and they didn’t know how tough that was. And other times it made me feel inferior, because I was left out of a lot of things. Like, they would all go to confession on Saturday nights, and I didn’t. And they would talk about—they would go to the parochial school across the street, whereas I went to the public school. Very honestly, I thought I had a darn good education in the public school system in Hartford. I really do. I commend my teachers. They were wonderful.

BS: Which high school did you go to?

AB: Hartford Public High School. And my elementary school was next door to my little Grace Episcopal Church. And I thought my teachers were wonderful. Very good.

BS: Have you ever visited Armenia?

AB: No, I’m afraid to fly.
BS: Uh-huh. Okay.
AB: For which my four o’clock appointment is about. I go to a phobia thing.
BS: Would you like to visit it if it wasn’t—if you could go without flying?
AB: Not until after I had a few pleasure trips. I think it might be too hard on my being. It would be too heavy on me. There are articles and books that people have given me as gifts, because they know my background. And I take the book; I open one page. I get the flavor of it, and I donate it to the library. I cannot read it. I can’t get—It’s too heavy. [pause].
BS: Okay.
SAS: Do you feel that you’re expected to continue the animosity?
AB: Not so much the animosity; the feelings, the sympathy, and to support that cause.
BS: When we came in here, and the tape, the recorder was off, we were talking about food, and you said that Armenians are sort of like Italians and Jews. What it is—do you want to elaborate on that?
AB: Yeah. Well, before the 1988 earthquake in Armenia, people in general were not aware of what an Armenian was. But after the earthquake and all the publicity it received, people knew where Armenia was, and knew there were such people as Armenians. When I was asked, “Well, what really is an Armenian?” you know, you have to relate it to something they know. So culturally, I said, “It’s a cross between a Jew and an Italian.”
BS: [Laughs]
AB: And I said, “The Jew, because they have a great respect for tradition, history, education, and family. And the Italian, because they love the music, and they love to sing, and they like to be with people.” That was the best cross—that was the best way I could think of explaining it.

BS: [Laughs]

AB: And in Hartford in those days, there were sections. There was a Jewish section, in the north end, the Italian section in the south end. And then the west end, there were the people like myself who moved out of the Frog Hollow, the middle of Hartford, who did good. They could finally get a three-family house, you know. So that’s where I was.

BS: Okay. That’s where you moved to. But these streets that the family—the Armenian families were on, was that mostly—what street would that start off at?

AB: Park Street.

BS: Oh, you said—okay.

AB: Zion Street, Putnam Street, New Britain Avenue, Broad Street, and all the little streets off of those streets.

BS: Okay.

AB: Those are the main drags.

BS: All right. Now, what about yourself as a woman who is Armenian? How do you see the role of women within the Armenian community?

AB: Well, I don’t fall into that category. I’m really as much American as I am Armenian. But the older Armenians? I think those ladies were wonderful, because they kept their families together, no matter what.
BS: So the women were the center of the family?
AB: Yes, they were. And their husbands listened to them, no questions asked. They kept the family together. They were very loyal, even if they hadn’t met their husband before. And they did a good job. And what they said, went.
BS: The husbands didn’t—?
AB: And they didn’t make bad decisions; they made the right decisions.
BS: Now on the surface, did it look like the husband was the boss?
AB: Maybe. [Laughs] Maybe if the woman let him be the boss. [Laughs] I don’t know how else to say it. And you know, that’s not so bad. It’s kind of like the Jewish culture, in that if a Jewish person, even in today’s society, marries a non-Jew, their children are brought up in the faith of the woman. They are the culture carriers, no questions asked. That’s the way it is.
BS: Okay.
AB: Sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you as a—
BS: No, not at all.
AB: I’m just telling you how it was, and how it is, you know.
BS: Not at all. How about the role—how were children seen within the structure, within the Armenian community?
AB: You mean, the first generation Armenians?
BS: Yes—well, both. First generation, your generation.
AB: I am considered first generation, I thought. Now, what was—say that again?
BS: The children. In other words—
AB: How were they seen?
BS: How were they seen by the immigrant generation, and then by your generation?

AB: They were seen as somebody who was—who were just to carry their culture around, and to adapt well to the American society. Because they did. They went to night school. They learned English. They went to work in the factories. And even though they were different, just like I’m different, they got along, and they expected us to find our way through, too.

BS: Okay. Now was this the same from your perspective?

AB: Yeah.

BS: Your first generation perspective?

AB: Yeah.

SAS: Do you still feel as different as you did when you were younger?

AB: [Sighs] I know it’s inside of me, but I’ve learned to adapt more as time goes by. Yeah. But I know it’s still there.

SAS: Do you have children?

AB: I never had children, myself, no.

BS: Okay. Is there anything else that we wanted to cover? Do you have anything that we haven’t talked about, that you would like to talk about?

AB: Good question. [Pause] I think the Armenians and the—the immigrant Armenians fared very well in establishing their identity in this country by forming such groups as the ARF, the ARS, the AYF, the AYF Junior, by having functions where the people could interact. For example, there’s the Summer Olympics; there’s the Winter Olympics for the AYF. The organizations that are still alive are still supporting
the Armenians throughout the world. They established churches; unfortunately, they’re not what they used to—times have gone by, and people have died. And the first generation move out to the suburbs, or move out to here and there, and they marry non-Armenians. So these things happen. But they did a very good job, I think. They’re to be commended for what they believed, and for what they were trying to do. They never lost their identity.

SAS: Can we go back a minute to your music career? Once you were graduated from University of Hartford—?

AB: Yes.

SAS: Did you teach music subsequently?

AB: I did. I was actually offered a job by IBM, because they have job fairs, as you probably know, in the colleges. And I selected to go to IBMs, and they offered myself and three guys to go to take a test at IBM, and then a few days later, they offered me the job. And they were going to—they were going to send me away in the 1960s to be a programmer. And at that time we had just gotten married, in ’66, so my husband suggested that I go into teaching, which required taking quite a few additional education courses to become certified.

So I took—and it cost a lot of money, buying the books and going to class. And the children would come to class with me, and I would give them coloring books. And at the final exams, some of the professors would pass them out the blue book, and they would draw in it as I was taking my exam. And then we’d have lunch at the college, or dinner at the college, or I’d come home just simply exhausted, eat, and get ready for another day of teaching. So I went into public
school teaching. And at that time, the State of Connecticut allowed people to be music teachers provided they took x number of credits to become certified every year, which I did.

And so I began teaching. I was offered a couple of jobs; they were horrendous, awful jobs, because they could only offer them after a certain date. The other people who were certified would get the jobs first, so I ended up with what nobody wanted. And shortly after what nobody wanted that I accepted and signed a contract for, I was offered a job in the town we were living in, West Hartford, which was a lucrative neighborhood, and in a nice school. And I wouldn’t have had to travel all the way down to Meriden, to a ghetto area. And I asked my counselor what I should do. I said, “This is right in my backyard. I’m taking care of the kids. I’m taking courses.” He says, it’s highly unethical to sign a contract, to break it and go somewhere else.” So I listened to my counselor. And I never should have listened to my counselor.

BS:  [Laughs]

AB:  So I made a mistake. Maybe my name would have been mud, but I wouldn’t have been mud. It was rough. And after that [sighs] I went to my counselor at the college, a different one.

SAS:  Which college was this?

AB:  This was at the Hartt College of Music, University of Hartford.

SS:  Oh.

AB:  And I had overheard—she was like the placement officer for those in the education department. And I went up—I just needed to cry; I needed to talk. It was a tough job. [Sighs] It was a tough job. And a
lot of the things had changed from 1958, when I had graduated high school, to 1967 when I entered teaching. The children were using four-letter words. They were shooting BB guns. They weren’t listening to people; they were militant blacks. And I never hated the blacks—I had enough people hating me for being Armenian! What can I tell you? And if they want to know what a minority is? I feel like writing a book called *A Minority of One*. They would really know!

BS: [Laughs]

AB: I know this is funny, but these are deep feelings, and I have to laugh at them, because otherwise I would cry. I hope I’m not depressing everybody.

SAS: It’s fascinating. And you have a very interesting story that we greatly appreciate your sharing with us.

BS: Yeah. We thank you for participating.

AB: Thank you.

   Now, if anybody writes that book, I’d like a little credit for the title.

BS: [Laughs] Okay.

AB: Are you familiar with Dr. Stone?

BS: Frank Stone? Yes.

AB: Okay. You know he worked with a very intelligent lady—

BS: Stella Rustigian.

AB: Yeah. And I admire Stella very much. She was a first generation Armenian. Her parents, however, I think escaped the Holocaust. So she had traditions; she had family, unlike my story.
BS: I worked with Frank Stone when we did the Peoples of Connecticut project.
AB: Yeah.
BS: Back in the 1970s.
AB: Do you have those papers anywhere?
BS: Yes. They’re at UConn at the Dodd Center.
AB: Which center?
BS: The Dodd.
AB: Is that library?
BS: Yes, it’s attached to the library.
AB: Oh. Okay.
BS: It’s the research—it’s the archive.
AB: Okay.
BS: So it’s—
AB: I almost got caught between those rolling things, and I said to somebody, “I think I’ll be a permanent part of the archives.” Smashed.
BS: Well there’s a whole collection of Frank Stone’s material.
AB: That’s good to know, because I just wrote to Stella’s son George, who’s my age. George was treasurer of St. Stephen’s Church in his later years. We used to visit them on Vernon Street, across from Trinity College. And Stella brought up her children—you know, they were her own natural children, and she was the boss of the house. And Jack, her husband, died at a very young age. And they listened to her very well—two daughters, Arsine and Jacqueline, and one son, George.
BS: She was a major figure in what we were doing back in the seventies and eighties.

AB: Right. I believe she even got her doctorates at the age of 70.

BS: It’s possible. That I don’t know.

AB: And I got mine at the age of 60, or 57, so I could get my pay raise and a better pension.

BS: Oh! Where’d you get your doctorate?

AB: Actually it’s a combination between UConn, where I did multiculturalism courses, and Central Connecticut, where I did CAIM—Computer Assisted Instruction in Music. And I worked with UConn’s Dr. Leach.

BS: Yes.

AB: He was wonderful.

BS: But actually, did you work with Frank Stone?

AB: No I didn’t. Stella did.

BS: Okay.

SAS: So what year did you get your degree?

AB: Finally, it should have been 62, but after getting married, and taking courses, and bringing up the children, I got it in ’67, and I started teaching in ’67. I got my degree in June of ’67 at University of Hartford, started teaching in September of ’67, and then I worked until 2000…. So, thirty-three years.

BS: Okay.

SAS: So, what systems did you work in?

AB: Meriden for one year, biggest mistake of my life. Could have been West Hartford. Or, no, wasn’t the biggest mistake. I don’t know what
the—I made a lot of mistakes. I got to tell you! I don’t tell everybody that; I tell everybody they’re crazy and I’m perfect. [Laughs]

BS:  [Laughs]

AB:  But nobody believes me, but I keep saying that. But what else can I say?

BS:  So, aside from Meriden, where else?

AB:  And that year, I went to visit Rose Mende, my childhood acquaintance from the Hartt School of Music where I went, and just as I was going to cry my heart out to her and see what was available, and I’m waiting for my classes, you know, certification, out walks the Superintendent of the music area in New Britain. And he says, “Thank you, Rose, I really need somebody badly.” And I said, “Hi, Rose. How are you?” And she says, “Adrianne, it’s so good to see you!” And the rest is history. I got into New Britain.

SAS:  So that was good.

AB:  That was good. Monetarily, it was good. And it certainly was a lot different from the ghetto school in Meriden. But it was rough. It was still inner-city. It was not West Hartford, but that’s where God sent me [sobs].

BS:  Okay.

SAS:  So I see that you’ve got a beautiful baby grand.

AB:  Yes, I took out two loans for that.

SAS:  So, were you teaching mostly instrumental music?

AB:  Not at all. I was teaching general classroom. I had to put on at least two concerts a year. When we went into group teaching, the principal asked different grade levels to have different themes, under the
umbrella of what our magnet school was, so I had to work with them. One would do a program in September, another would do October. I was pretty busy all year round. I didn’t have any nervous breakdowns, that I know of.

BS: [Laughs] Okay. Well, we thank you so much.
AB: Would you like me to play something for you?
BS: Oh, yes.
SAS: Oh, I’d love to hear it.
AB: Well, come on.
BS: We should record it.
AB: I still have fifteen minutes.
SAS: Okay.
BS: I’ll have to turn this off.
AB: Thank you. Did I do all right?
BS: You did beautifully!

End of Interview