

SPEAKER 1: I [unintelligible- 00:00:04] district governor of District 21 have the honor and privilege on this day February 15th, 1988 to interview Alexandra Apostolidis Sonenfeld the founder and first grand president of the order of the Daughters of Penelope. This interview will be handled by Catherine [Genoplos], past district governor and myself. The oral history collection interview project sponsored by the Penelopean foundation is the basis for this interview. We will begin with the biographical section.

SPEAKER 2: Alexandra where were you born?

A. SONENFELD: [Unintelligible- 00:00:48], Greece.

SPEAKER 2: And the date of your birth?

A. SONENFELD: 1899, August the sixth.

SPEAKER 2: What was your maiden name?

A. SONENFELD: [Unintelligible- 00:00:55]

SPEAKER 2: And your marriage status, your first husband's name was?

A. SONENFELD: Dr. Emmanuel Apostolides.

SPEAKER 2: And your second husband?

A. SONENFELD: Captain Howard Sonenfeld.

SPEAKER 2: Now, let's go to your father,

A. SONENFELD: Yeah.

SPEAKER 2: Do you remember his date of birth and year of death?

A. SONENFELD: No, I don't.

SPEAKER 2: You don't, what was his name?

A. SONENFELD: Reverent Michael [unintelligible- 00:01:28].

SPEAKER 2: And you don't remember where he was born?

A. SONENFELD: Yeah, at Corfu.

SPEAKER 2: He was born in Corfu Was there a village then or was is it a town?

A. SONENFELD: Sokraki on village.

SPEAKER 2: And your father's occupation was?

A. SONENFELD: Priest.

SPEAKER 2: And did he have a nickname?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 2: No, your mother's first name.

A. SONENFELD: Barbara.

SPEAKER 2: Do you remember when she was born?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 2: Do you know where she was born?

A. SONENFELD: Corfu.

SPEAKER 2: Corfu. What was her first maiden name, do you recall?

A. SONENFELD: (Condron Yales), Barbara (Condron Yales) was her name.

SPEAKER 2: And what year did she die?

A. SONENFELD: I don't know.

SPEAKER 2: You don't know, okay. So we have her birth place, do you know where your parents are buried?

A. SONENFELD: Yes, my -- in Fresno, California.

SPEAKER 2: Both parents?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 2: None. Do you recall your grandparents' names?

A. SONENFELD: No, I don't.

SPEAKER 2: And did you have a [unintelligible - 00:02:46], do you remember your [unintelligible - 00:02:48]?

A. SONENFELD: No, I don't remember.

SPEAKER 2: One of the questions is to ask if your marriage was arranged?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 2: Alright, was there a dowry involved?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 2: Okay and we'll go back to doctor's place of birth, where was he born?

A. SONENFELD: He was born in Thrace.

SPEAKER 2: Do you remember the date?

A. SONENFELD: No. Oh excuse me.

SPEAKER 2: Yes.

A. SONENFELD: 1879 he was born.

SPEAKER 2: Very good and did he have a nickname, I don't know why they want a nickname but they asked here?

A. SONENFELD: Manoli.

SPEAKER 2: Manoli, okay. Do you remember your [unintelligible- 00:03:29] at the wedding? Do you remember their name?

A. SONENFELD: We didn't have any.

SPEAKER 2: Okay, how about your father-in-law doctor. Do you remember where they came from the village or the...? No, okay and now about your children, you have how many children?

A. SONENFELD: Three.

SPEAKER 2: And could you give us their names?

A. SONENFELD: Okay.

SPEAKER 2: And the first one was?

A. SONENFELD: Alex, A. SONENFELD.

SPEAKER 2: Alexandra?

A. SONENFELD: A. SONENFELD.

SPEAKER 2: A. SONENFELD.

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: And what year was he born?

A. SONENFELD: 192 -- 1923. That was pretty hard to remember.

SPEAKER 2: And the second child was?

A. SONENFELD: Zoe.

SPEAKER 2: Zoe and she was born when?

A. SONENFELD: 1927 and Cleo the third, she was born 1931.

SPEAKER 2: The next part Alexandra has to do with the date you arrived in the United States and you can tell us maybe a little bit about that particular incident.

A. SONENFELD: 1907.

SPEAKER 2: And do you remember where you -- did you come right to New York was at the...

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: [Unintelligible- 00:04:47] and you came on the ship?

A. SONENFELD: Actually.

SPEAKER 2: Do you remember that ship at all?

A. SONENFELD: I do, it was an Italian ship.

SPEAKER 2: Were you excited on that ship or did you know [00:05:00] what was to be in store for you when you came to America?

A. SONENFELD: Of course not.

SPEAKER 2: Did your daddy tell you a lot about what was going -- where you were going? Did you come alone?

A. SONENFELD: No, I came with my sister and my brother-in-law.

SPEAKER 2: Your sister and your brother-in-law.

A. SONENFELD: My second sister and her husband.

SPEAKER 2: And her husband?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: Okay.

A. SONENFELD: And my -- excuse me and my brother of course.

SPEAKER 2: So when you arrived in the United States then you used your proper name when they asked you?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: And you travelled with your brother?

A. SONENFELD: I travelled with my sister Kate and her husband [Teriako] and my brother.

SPEAKER 2: And your brother? Okay and it's just why did you, why did you immigrate to the United States, what was the basic reason?

A. SONENFELD: To live with my sister Kate.

SPEAKER 2: And where was your father at that time?

A. SONENFELD: He was in Greece.

SPEAKER 2: And he wanted you to come to the United States?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: And where did your sister live when you came?

A. SONENFELD: Montgomery, Alabama.

SPEAKER 2: I see, so you went right to Montgomery, Alabama from there?

A. SONENFELD: Yes, yes.

SPEAKER 2: Okay and when did father come -- father and mother come?

A. SONENFELD: They came a few years later but I don't remember the name and the time.

SPEAKER 2: And the time okay. Now when you came with your sister or I should say before you came with your sister what education or apprenticeship and occupation did you, do any work or schooling in Greece prior to coming here?

A. SONENFELD: How could I? I was so small.

SPEAKER 2: Okay and how old were you?

A. SONENFELD: Let's see. Four years old.

SPEAKER 2: Four years old?

A. SONENFELD: Eight.

SPEAKER 2: Eight?

A. SONENFELD: Eight.

SPEAKER 2: Eight years old? Okay, so then you lived with your sister?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: Oh and you had a wonderful time evidently, yeah?

A. SONENFELD: Oh yeah.

SPEAKER 2: She must have been a very special person.

A. SONENFELD: My sister -- the oldest sister was Helen and my second sister was Kate and my third sister was Mary and my fourth sister was... what was my fourth sister's name? Jesus Christ (laughter).

SPEAKER 2: It's alright but you lived with Kate?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: Now were the other sisters close by or they were in Greece?

A. SONENFELD: But no, my other sisters – you see Helen was in Montgomery, Alabama.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, she was there already?

A. SONENFELD: Yeah she was there already. And Mary and my older was the fourth sister they were still in Greece.

SPEAKER 2: And they were in Greece. Well, then when you got to Montgomery, Alabama how long did you live there with your sisters?

A. SONENFELD: Seven years.

SPEAKER 2: Seven years and then what happened?

A. SONENFELD: And then we went to **[unintelligible- 00:08:05]** and my father was here already and we stayed -- I stayed from 7-16, seven more years -- and then I came to California in 1916.

SPEAKER 2: Yeah that was with your mother and father or the...?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 2: No?

A. SONENFELD: I came because...

SPEAKER 2: Oh and where did you live when you came to California?

A. SONENFELD: With my sister Kate.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, they came to?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: So where did they live then, what city?

A. SONENFELD: In San Francisco.

SPEAKER 2: Right in San Francisco?

A. SONENFELD: Yeah.

A. SONENFELD: What occupation did your brother-in-law have?

A. SONENFELD: He was a **[unintelligible- 00:08:43]**.

SPEAKER 2: So then you started school in San Francisco, you went to school here or...?

A. SONENFELD: I finished high school here.

SPEAKER 2: In San Francisco?

A. SONENFELD: Yes.
SPEAKER Do you remember the name of the school?
A. SONENFELD: Girls high school.
SPEAKER 2: Girls high school and wonderful. So, all of those time now you had a lot of special interests. Did you participate in all the church events or were you active in church?
A. SONENFELD: No, I was not active in church because...
SPEAKER 2: Alright so then from graduation from high school...
A. SONENFELD: Yeah, I went to University of California.
SPEAKER 2: University of California, very good. Alexandra you went to the university at what place, what was your major?
A. SONENFELD: Philosophy.
SPEAKER 2: And what was the feeling of... did you get any particular feeling from the Greek community about young women going to college?
A. SONENFELD: No.
SPEAKER 2: They were pretty proud of you do you think or do you think that they were in wonderment?
A. SONENFELD: I don't know.
SPEAKER 2: Pardon me.
A. SONENFELD: I do not know.
SPEAKER 2: You don't know, you got your sister and your family were very proud? **[00:10:00]**
A. SONENFELD: I guess so.
SPEAKER 2: And your mother and father now were in Fresno.
A. SONENFELD: Yes.
SPEAKER 2: And he had a church there?
A. SONENFELD: Yes.
SPEAKER 2: And you would go and visit them?
A. SONENFELD: Yes.
SPEAKER 2: Can you tell us about that a little bit?

A. SONENFELD: Yeah, we used to visit them every year, my family we adopted the children there for years.

SPEAKER 2: But while you were in college, before you got married...

A. SONENFELD: No, I didn't visit my father for major not before I went to University of California before 1919, and I graduate in the US in 1922. But in 1921 I took a leave of absence to marry 'doctor', and after 25 years I went back again to the University to get my degree and my older daughter Zoe and I got our diplomas in the same year 1949.

SPEAKER 2: Isn't that wonderful? Was pretty proud there, graduate and have your daughter right there beside you, yeah. What is your – what was your father's reaction to your university life?

A. SONENFELD: He was glad, he was really glad. Wherever he went he opened and reached to lead a good church. He -- when he came here he went first to Bourbon, Massachusetts and then he went to **[unintelligible - 00:11:28]** New Hampshire and after that he went to Biloxi, Mississippi and Dallas, Texas and then finally in Fresno. And all those places he opened a – he established a Greek church and a Greek school.

SPEAKER 2: My, that's a wonderful legacy there. Now he was quite a remarkable man, wasn't he?

A. SONENFELD: He was a glorious man.

SPEAKER 2: And your mother was right there supporting him all the time?

A. SONENFELD: Yes she was beautiful, she was beautiful, she was quiet. I had wonderful parents.

SPEAKER 2: Now you took a leave of absence on your senior there.

A. SONENFELD: 1921.

SPEAKER 2: 1921.

A. SONENFELD: We married in 1921.

SPEAKER 2: And 25 years later...

A. SONENFELD: **[Unintelligible - 00:12:27]** make it.

SPEAKER 2: Isn't that wonderful? That's beautiful.

SPEAKER 1: Sister A. SONENFELD you came to this country at a very young age, but do you have any recollection of your life when you were living in Corfu?

A. SONENFELD: No.

SPEAKER 1: You don't have any?

SPEAKER 2: Sister A. SONENFELD, as the founder could you tell us a little bit about the early formation, the ideas of the people and some of the feelings that you had that sort of spurred you on or inspired you to establish this order?

A. SONENFELD: I was taking a course in Ancient Greek in the University of California, and I had a wonderful professor. His name was James (Terrene) Allan. And we were studying the Odyssey and the Iliad of Homer and he was very impressed by the Penelope, she was the wife of Odysseus and he said to me one day, he said, "If you ever do anything for your Greek women remember Penelope. And that's why we take the traits of her character, we **[unintelligible - 00:13:55]** left at home, to children, to marriage, ideals." And he also said that if you ever say anything about this country, don't forget the ideal to Greece. So in the Daughters we try or combine the ideals of Greece, Ancient Greece and the ideals of this country and that's the way the Daughters began in 1929. When there were 25 women, relatives, what happens and they came to our house in San Francisco and we felt bad. Established in this wonderful organization **[unintelligible - 00:14:45]**.

At that time, he came to our house and he encouraged us. So that was the beginning of Daughters.

SPEAKER 2: But then you had lots of young women **[00:15:00]** or women of your age at that time, presuming you girls were quite young and enthusiastic and you all got together and met at your house just like history tells us.

A. SONENFELD: In 1929, I was 30 years old, in 1999. And we found there -- we talked about that which year **[unintelligible - 00:15:22]**. So then we elected the president and I was president for 10 years till 1939 and then in 1939 we held our first national convention in Providence, Rhode Island. But I had to do all the work at the convention I didn't have the wonderful help you have now. And then I was elected grand president again till 1930. Because the people said, " I want you to be elected by the convention, whereas before I was elected by the **[unintelligible - 00:16:13]**. In 1940 I was the second president of the Daughters.

SPEAKER 1: Alexandra, aside from being a good wife and mother, what other interests did you have?

A. SONENFELD: Taking care of my children.

SPEAKER 1: And then?

A. SONENFELD: And then I wrote a biography of all my three children.

SPEAKER 1: Well tell us a little about that.

A. SONENFELD: From the birth to the marriage and I had these three biographies printed and given to them. And also there was so much to do with the children and the home; I was fascinated by life itself.

SPEAKER 2: You wrote a lot of poetry about your children, didn't you?

A. SONENFELD: Yes I did, I thought about the children and about everything that came into my mind.

SPEAKER 2: Even when they were little babies, you talked about...

A. SONENFELD: Yes, I enjoyed writing their biographies.

SPEAKER 1: And then there was a little bit of sadness in your biography with your son.

A. SONENFELD: No, not that, his son.

SPEAKER 1: His son?

A. SONENFELD: Yes and I have that down too. That the boy died in a **[unintelligible - 00:17:47]** accident in 1969 and that is in the

poems. And every word that... the Daughters also have a couple of my poems and you saw the book.

SPEAKER 1: Yes I did.

SPEAKER 2: So all your poems and stories sent – did you send those to headquarters so they are all recorded there, kept there?

A. SONENFELD: No I sent my copy of my poems to Mary Denel, she was a past grand president and she lives in Manchester, New Hampshire. She said, “Have you had these published?” I said, “No, because I don't write a publication, I write because I love to write”, that's that.

SPEAKER 2: A. SONENFELD, other than the biographies of your children and yourself that you so graciously sent to headquarters and that everybody knows your beautiful poetry, from your – about your children. What other things have you written?

A. SONENFELD: Well I have written other the wisdom in Greek drama concerning the three greatest, the dramatist, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and -- let's see... and I once written about wisdom in life and also containing especially the ideals of this glorious country, the United States of America. In conclusion I would like to say a few words about the Daughters. Today we have over 367 chapters, here, in Canada and in Greece and I have never met a Daughter [00:20:00] who was unkind. I have never known a Daughter who was a gossipmonger. I have never met one who engaged in personalities or in any form of scurrility. I think they are wonderful and I hope that in time to come that all Daughters may never forget the ideals under which this border was founded. Now who brought them so they may never forget to study the ideals of Greece and America? For I think they are two the greatest countries on the face of the earth. The Daughters of Penelope was commemorated in the convectional record of the United States congress, did you know that?

SPEAKER 2: No I didn't.

A. SONENFELD: So that's there, it's there. I feel that as long as our hope is alive so will the Daughters be alive and I know that they're dear to another, never diminish, but always increase with the ideal, the future in mind. I'm humbly grateful to be a member of the Daughters and I wish now to extend all my most profound appreciation and thanks to every daughter in the domain of the Daughters. May we go on future greatness as power as in the wonderful ideals which endures **[unintelligible - 00:21:59]** and hold dear in your hearts and continue to help in all kinds of beneficial ideals, inventions and in scopes. I want to thank all of you for being exactly as you are, may you never change and thank you for coming.