DP-010
MALJAN CHAVOOR
BIRTH DATE: JULY, 1911
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 5, 1989
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW LOCATION: NAPA, CALIFORNIA
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: STACEY B. MENAKER, 6/1995

TURKEY (ASSYRIAN), 1922
AGE 11
PASSAGE ON "THE KING ALEXANDER"

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mr. Chavoor is the cousin-in-law of Farida Chavoor, Interview EI-403. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 5/31/1995.

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm visiting with Mr. Maljan Chavoor in his home in Napa, California for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. Today is Wednesday, April 51, 1989, and we're going to be talking about Mr. Chavoor's experience coming through Ellis Island in 1922 from Turkey. And this is the beginning of interview number 384 [DP-010]. So, let's start back at the beginning.

CHAVOOR: All right. You ask the question, and I'll answer it.

DALLETT: Okay. All right. Tell me where and when you were born.

CHAVOOR: Born in Harput, in Turkey. That's in Asia.

DALLETT: Can you spell that?

CHAVOOR: H-A-R-P-O-O-T [sic]. Harput, in Turkey, in Asia. Part of Turkey, most of, a large part of Turkey is in Asia, a smaller part is in Europe.

DALLETT: What year was that?

CHAVOOR: I was born July 1911. I'm seventy-seven. I'll be seventy-eight in July. I was eleven years old when I came here.

DALLETT: Do you have memories of what life was like in Turkey?

CHAVOOR: Well, where we lived it was a terrible place to live. Like you see in different Latin American countries, how poor the people are. There was no such a thing as middle class people over there. You were either rich or you were poor. And, of course, in my time, that's

before World War One, the Ottoman Empire was a big empire, and right after World War One, Turkey was an ally with Germany, and they lost. And, uh, people were starving and we were, my father died 1919, right after the flu.

DALLETT: He had a flu? He died from the flu?

CHAVOOR: There was a flu that was taking a toll in the old country. And everybody got it was dying, almost. Matter of fact, there were so many people dying they had to burn them. They couldn't bury them. And right after my father died, I had a brother that was fifteen years old. He was taking care of my mother. My sister, two sisters, one of them was blind, and myself. He had appendicitis. A lady, no doctors over there, lady says if apply brick it will be all right. His appendicitis broke . . .

DALLETT: How do you mean apply a brick?

CHAVOOR: Put a, make it hot and put it on.

DALLETT: A warm brick?

CHAVOOR: Yeah, warm it and apply it there.

CHAVOOR: In order to do what? To burst it?

CHAVOOR: To get well. Nobody knew what was wrong. And so she did and the poor thing, it burst. He died. And we had no contact with our people in America. Our folks came here around the turn of the century, my uncles and everybody. And, uh, my mother says, I got to get out of here. In 1920, I guess it was, America, right after, I forgot to tell you, right after the war, World War One, Americans came to our rescue. Now, I can't understand how this country operates. I've been here all these years. They fight with a country, they turn around and help them. I don't understand it. They came over there in Harput. I don't know how they got there. One thing I can remember, there were no roads. How the army trucks got up there with supply and equipment, they set up kitchens, orphanages, and they had their own electricity. They set up their own hospital. And they assigned my mother to one of the areas, about a hundred people in it to take, be in charge, the American Red Cross. And, uh, she was in charge of that. The first year they were there, I can remember they had a party for the kids. And the first time in my life I tasted hard Christmas candy. It was

wonderful. And a Dr. Ford was the man that was in charge of this. Right after that we made contact with our family and they said you've got to get out of there. They raised money here, my sisters and my uncles, they raised money here and they said, you're going to come to America. In 1920, yeah, '20, 1919 or '20? I was nine years old. My mother rented a wagon. My two sisters and myself, we started for America. Five days were traveled through mountainous, very dangerous country, you know, just high mountains, just a path.

DALLETT: Now, who was traveling? Your mother?

CHAVOOR: My mother, my blind sister, my other sister and myself. Four of us.

DALLETT: And what were the ages of the children, if you remember?

CHAVOOR: Well, I was nine, my blind sister was eleven, my older sister was about fifteen. Five days we travelled by wagon and there was no, you see these covered wagons traveling through the deserts, nobody stops. Only at nighttime we'd stop an inn, we'd eat and rest, the

next day we'd travel again. So after five days we came to a town called Samsun, a port on the Black Sea. And we thought that we were going to go to Istanbul the next day, the next. Well, there was a revolution going on at that time, and we were, we didn't know what was happening. A fellow by the name of Mustaf Akama Pasha, known as Ataturk, was fighting to oust the allies, occupation forces, and this Ataturk was trying to get all the forces out of Turkey. Well, he won. In the meantime we were stuck in Samsun for a year. Now, how we survived, I don't know. I took typhoid fever. I became, at that time I became ten years old. And my mother says I almost died. The only thing that saved me was milk. My sister went from door to door at midnight, she says, to get some milk. And my mother says we warmed the milk and put it in your mouth little by little with a little spoon. Now, whether that saved my life or the milk, or it wasn't my time. Thank God that ended. A year later there was a cattle boat, or a ship or whatever it was, stop at Samsun, it was going to Istanbul. You know, it's, you'd see the refugees trying to get on. We took a, not a canoe, a small boat, and went to the ship. What little money we had, my sister gave it to

the man at the boat so he'd let us on. You know, confusion. He says, "You're a few dollars short," whatever it was. She says in the confusion, she says, "I grabbed some money from him and I said, 'Here.'" She paid him, we got on the boat. Thank God, we were on our way to Constantinople, which it was called at that time.

DALLETT: So this is your fifteen-year-old sister who was negotiating this?

CHAVOOR: Oh, she was sharp. She was sharp. And my sister, blind sister and I, we were having a ball. We were just kids. Five days to get to Istanbul. On the last day, at midnight, we hit a storm, a very, very, a storm. And we were all sleeping on the deck. Everybody got wet, including whatever baggage. We had just our clothes on our backs. I was, well, I was ten years old and I started crying. My mother pulled me, I'll never forget it just like it happened yesterday. She said, "Son, don't cry, my baby. We're going to be all right." I thought the ship was going to sink. The next day the sun was shining. We hit Constantinople. We got over there. We'd rented a

cheap place, naturally. We had friends of ours made arrangements for us, and after we got organized, we wanted to go to the United States. They said that the quota's filled, you can't go. We were stuck there another year.

DALLETT: In Istanbul.

CHAVOOR: Istanbul, Constantinople, whatever you call it. In the meantime, my sister here and their families, which they had come here, like I said, turn of the century, raised money, they sent us over there, so we exist.

DALLETT: Now, was this your mother's family that was here, or your father's family?

DALLETT: My mother's family. My mother's, my mother's five brothers, along with my grandfather and grandmother, my mother's father and mother, came to America in 1901 or 2. There was so much homosexuality in Turkey that my grandfather and grandmother wanted to get their sons out of there along with their three daughters. And my mother and our other sister were left there. Anyway . . .

DALLETT: Were they, was the plan that your grandparents would

send for your mother?

CHAVOOR: Would they what?

DALLETT: Was it the plan, why was your mother and one of the sisters left behind?

CHAVOOR: Well, my father was there. My grandparents, I told you, they got them out of there. And, along with their five sons and three daughters. The other two daughters left behind. They were married.

DALLETT: They were married.

CHAVOOR: Yeah, they got married, the ones that came, they got married later. But the two over there got married over there. So they sent us money a year later in 1921, I think I was right. I guess it was September because we got in America October. We got passports. The man says, "I'm giving you passports, I'm going to put you on board." You see, they'd communicate with our family. Now . . .

DALLETT: Where was your family?

CHAVOOR: I beg your pardon?

DALLETT: Where was your family that was here?

CHAVOOR: In Los Angeles, yeah. He says, "Don't bring Alissa on board until you get to New York. Keep her down below. And when you get over there, then it's up to you to be able to go." So, okay, we got on the ship, twenty-one days on the Atlantic. Our of that twenty-one, of course we were in, it was a Greek liner, King Alexander. We stopped in Greece to take on supplies and everything. Anyway, we came to New York, the ship had docked in the morning. They said we're in New York, everybody can go. Happy, happy. Come down the dock. We had made arrangements for a man by the name of Mr. Barsum [ph] from Worcester, Massachusetts, to meet us there. You know, we couldn't talk English. Immigration officer, the minute, he's looking at our passports, he says, "How'd you get her on the boat."

DALLETT: Meaning your sister.

CHAVOOR: My sister, blind sister. He said, "All four of you are going back." We all started crying. Can you imagine? All two years struggle, he says, "All four of you are going back." So this Mr. Barsum says, "Wait a minute, sis. They'll go to Ellis Island.

We'll see their case here in Washington." They put us on a boat. To Ellis Island we went. In the meantime, naturally they're, our family was working on it. I had an uncle here, very, how do you say, influential?

DALLETT: Influential?

CHAVOOR: Yeah. He worked for Jack Warner. And he had a lot of power. And Jack Warner knew a lot of people. And they, in the meantime, they tried to fix everything for us. So we went to Ellis Island. Confusion, confusion. You should, great big room, and everybody's over there, and they're all, naturally, they can't speak English. Anyway, they ask us a lot of questions. They put tags on us, and they put us in this one room. Nighttime they said, okay, dinner time. Nighttime they count you. Every move you make, breakfast, lunch, dinner, they count you. Some people escaped. Every night they gave us two, two or three cookies, fig bars, glass of milk. I never tasted that before in my life. They're good. (he laughs) Every morning they come over there in that big room and they read the names. So and so, so and so, you're going either America or you're going back. And people

have to make a decision whether they're going to separate from their family. Twenty-first day it said, "Margaret Chavoor, America." That's all we wanted to hear. When we heard that we jump up and down and crying. Oh, God, it was, it was really emotional. They put us on that same boat. We went to the same place we had landed. And this Mr. Barsum was there waiting for us. He said, "First we'll go to Grand Central Station get a bite to eat, then we're going to Massachusetts." We got a bite to eat. Jello. I fell in love with it. The first time in my life I had jello. I've been eating jello for seventy, sixty-five, seventy years, since I've been here. Would you believe it? I just love it. Anyway, we had that. We got a train, we went to Massachusetts at their house, they're a friend of ours. And we stayed there for two weeks. In the meantime, they're waiting for us in California, for us to come home. They said, your, my grandfather had passed away. He passed away in 1910 and in 1911, when I was born, they named me after him, Maljan Chavoor. That's where I got my name. They said your grandmother is very sick, you'd better go. So we left. And, oh gosh, it was cold over there, October. It was so cold. We took the Santa Fe train.

We came to Los Angeles, California. Uncles, nieces, all families, mothers, fathers, everybody's there. The train stopped and I says, my mother said, I told my mother, I said, "I'm going out there and see what's happening." When I went, my sister Mary, my older sister, incidentally she just passed away about two years ago, ninety-two years old, she says, "Are you Maljan?" I says, "Yes." She says, "I'm your sister." She had never seen me. She says, "I'm your sister Mary." "Mama, Mama," I said, "Sister Mary's out there." We got out and there they were. Everybody was there. We went over to their house. Oh, you know how it is, reunion. We went over to their house. I had a brother here. In, uh, after my grandfather and grandmother, and they came here, my mother sent my sister Lucy and my brother Johnny over here so we could go later. And when that war came, we got stuck. That's how we got stuck.

DALLETT: Oh, I see.

CHAVOOR: My brother Johnny was here and my sister Lucy was here. And we stayed with my brother Johnny for two or three, we stayed with my sister Mary at this house on

Washington in L.A. and two, three weeks later, I guess it was, and we rented a house and my brother took care of us. We stayed there.

DALLETT: Sorry, I'm a little confused. Now, were you born when, you weren't born yet when your brothers came, all right. So you'd never met these brothers and sisters.

CHAVOOR: I wasn't born when my grandparents left. My sister Mary came here, but my sister Lucy, the one, I had another sister here, Lucy, and Johnny, my mother sent later. Now, my sister Lucy stayed there until I was about two years old, but she sent them over here so she could come later. We went, stayed there, my brother rented a place and he took us and immediately my mother and another, uh, mother, in the old country they made marriages, uh, matches. They made a match for my sister Esther to get married, get her off her hand, right? We got rid of her. Poor thing. She got married right away. That left us, my mother and my brother, Alissa and I. It's a long story. Then, naturally, my sister took me by my hand and entered me to school. My sister, Mary, she was like a mother. I suppose she was wonderful. She was the one that made

all arrangements for her to come here. She took me by the hand and took me to San Pedro Street School. And they, I was eleven years old, they put me in the ungraded school, because I was too old. Naturally, there were a lot of Spanish people and I started speaking in Spanish instead of English. They took me out of there. Anyway, after that, they skipped me to junior high school, John Adams Junior High School in Los Angeles. I went over there two years, they skipped me in the third year, sent me to high school, Poly, in L.A. Polytechnic High School. I went over there. In the meantime the Depression had come. My brother was taken, having to struggle. In the meantime, uh, in 1937 or '38 my blind sister Alissa met a Arthur Rogers and, at their club, the blind, you would have a club. They got married. Would you believe it? And my mother almost had a fit. She said, how is she going to, she never could do anything. Thank God they were both on relief for the blind. They got along fine. She's still living. She just turned eighty. And her husband passed away about two, three years ago. They bought their own house. Great country. I've got to keep saying, it's a great country, a great country. You know, everybody takes

it for granted. But me, it's a great place. My blind sister got married. That left my brother, my mother, me, and my mother. The four of us. 1938, '38 my brother got married. I told my mother, just the two of us, I rented a place, and we lived in an apartment. 1940 is, incidentally, my uncle who was, I told you he was with Jack Warner, he got twenty-one relations in that studio during the Depression. Now, that's a big thing. There was no jobs. Before that, during the Depression, I was going to say, while my brother was taking care of us, he was working in a fruit market, they went broke. Everybody went broke. Then I got a job driving a truck for a couple of markets. I used to get up twelve o'clock midnight, work until three o'clock the next day. Six days a week, half a day on Saturdays, for twenty dollars a week. My mother, every time I'd get up twelve o'clock she was up. She'd say, "Son," she says, "You're a good son." I says, "Mom, you were a good mother. I want to do what I can for you." Anyway, that market went broke. That's when I went to my uncle, my mother went to my Uncle Abdul and says, Abdul says, his name was Abdul. She says, "You've got to get a job for my son." We didn't have any money. He got me a job in the studio,

thank God. One or two days a week. Then, little by little, then the war came, you know, then there came eight hour, six hours days. Roosevelt made a six hour day. Then little by little, why, we were working two or three days a week. We moved to Burbank, next to my sister Mary. She was the one who brought us here. My mother says it was the happiest time of my life. I worked on and off in the studio. It was rough. It was rough. But I made a few dollars. Six dollars a day, six hours. If I worked two days I'd get twelve dollars. If I worked three days it was a big week. Eighteen dollars a week. We got by. My mother took, I got married in, I met my wife, I met her, she came here on a, her, my uncle, this Abdul, and her father were good friends. She came to visit him, and I met her Monday. Wednesday I says, "Do you want to get, marry me?" She says, "Yes." My uncle says, "I'll put you on a plane and send you to Las Vegas, you get married." I says, "I got a few dollars." We went to Las Vegas and got married. Met her Monday, Wednesday we got married. We've been married since 1941. Anyway . . .

MRS. CHAVOOR: Forty-seven. Almost forty-seven years.

CHAVOOR: Forty-seven years.

MRS. CHAVOOR: Forty-seven-and-a-half years.

CHAVOOR: Forty-seven years. Yeah. My mother took sick in 1943 in January. August 1943 she passed away and my wife took care of her. She took wonderful care of her. After she passed away we lived there until 1948. We bought our, Blanche and I, we bought our house in Burbank in 1948. We had two boys, Stanley and Walter. Walter is the one that lives here now. He's thirty-nine, thirty-seven or thirty-nine? He's going to be thirty-nine next month. Our son Stanley, in 1941, he hit a telephone pole going to work.

MRS. CHAVOOR: Not 1941. 19 . . .

CHAVOOR: '81. 1981. He was, in Fresno, he was working. Hit a telephone pole and got killed. So we got the only son here. Like I told you, I got a job for Warner Brothers in 1933 on and off. Ronald Reagan was working for Warner Brothers as an extra. We used to play handball over there. He was making thirty-five dollars a week. He married, uh, what's her name.

MRS. CHAVOOR: Jane Wyman.

CHAVOOR: Jane Wyman, and naturally they got divorced. And, uh, I worked with every one of them. Very interesting life I had. I was very fortunate. I didn't realize how glamorous it was until I got out. In the meantime, things changed. I got a little more steady job. After twenty years I got a better job as taking care of the Property Department. The Property Department was a big, couple of blocks long, and all the furniture, just like in the museum, they put me in charge of that, and I was on a flat salary. Now, instead of hourly, I was making good money. Blanche and I, we were making good money. Uh, a lot of people. Randolph Hearst came through there when Marion Davis made a picture called "Page Miss Glory." Every morning she would have food for the employees. She was such a generous person. Stage, sound stage, Randolph Hearst, you know, he was a multi-millionaire. He had it raised from the foundation, the whole thing, just to make a picture for her. Can you imagine that? Anyway, diplomats would come from different places and my boss, they called me Johnny. He said, "Johnny, take so-and-so through the Prop Department." And I'd

give them a nice tour. I met a lot of people. But the last person I had were a couple of people from Japan, very wealthy. They owned I don't know how many department stores, just like May Company on the Broadway. They took me for lunch. The guy gave me a ten dollar tip, which was very nice. I said, "Thank you." He give me his card. He said, "If you ever come to Japan look us up. We'll give you the," you know, I'd take the cards, I'd tear them and throw away. During the Korean War the General of the Turkish Air Force was here. Jack Warner took him through the studio. My uncle had passed away then. And one of the prop men says, "Quick, come over here. The general of Turkey is here. They're entertaining him on stage and maybe he'll say hello to you." I went over there. He had an interpreter, he was an army captain, I think. I told him, I says, "I'm from Turkey." I says, "I'd like to say hello to the general." I went over there. In the meantime he was with Jack Warner. He told him that, he dropped Jack Warner, he comes to me, and I, I could speak a few words in Turkish. He says, (Turkish). That means, "What's your name?" In Turkey you say Chavoor (Turkish) Maljan. Everything is backwards. He

thought I was Armenian. Armenians all have the I-A-N name after them. I says, "Chavoor (Turkish) Maljan." He took me hand to shake it. He said a few words, I says, "I was too small when I came here, I was only eleven, I can't talk too much, I just can say a few words." I took his card out. He says, "If you ever come to Turkey, show this card, you'll get a tour through Turkey." I said, "Thank you very much," (Turkish) "Thank you very much," in Turkish. I went, that's another one, some, uh, governors of different states, I'd take them through the building. A fascinating place, fantastic place. Anyway, 1948 what did I tell you, we moved to Burbank, we bought out house. Twelve thousand dollars. I was very fortunate. (Mrs. Chavoor interjects) Well, we were renting at first. We were renting. I rented from 1940 until 1948. Yes. Then in '48 we bought this house for twelve thousand. Fortunately, I was in the service. I bought it on the Cal Vet Loan for, uh, twelve thousand dollars. I think I had three, four, three thousand or something like that. In order to qualify you had to have seven thousand, but you couldn't have, own over seven thousand five hundred. I went to my sister Mary and told them. She says,

"I'll give you a thousand dollars." Without asking her. My sister Lucy, I asked her. They were pretty well-off. I says, her husband gave me a thousand dollars. I was able to put down five thousand dollars. Five thousand dollars. Mr. Russell of the California home loan in Los Angeles says, "Mr. Chavoor," he says, "I want to ask a personal question. Where did you get the five thousand dollars?" I says, "I'll tell you, Mr. Russell." I says, "I come from the old country." I says, "I worked hard, I saved my money." I didn't tell him I borrowed the two thousand. He says, "Wonderful." He says, "You're going to get it." We bought our home. Forty-two dollars a month. Forty-two. There was a studio strike. After the strike, the owners of every studio shut the studios down. We had a wonderful union at that time. They got sour. When Harry Warner was going through the line they'd call him a dirty Jew. He says, "That's what you did, I'll shut the studio." Six months I didn't work. I had a thousand dollar policy or something I cashed in. We had fifty dollars left. Incidentally, this is a wonderful woman, I don't know how she did it. We had fifty dollars left in a can, that's the last money we had.

The studios opened up little by little. Little by little I went back to work again. In 1948 this man says, "I'm going to sell this, three units," he says, "nineteen thousand. You want to buy it?" I says, "Oh, how are we going to buy it at nineteen thousand?" We bought this other house for twelve. We sent, I was able to send, I forgot to tell you, I could only go to tenth grade. I didn't finish high school. Because the Depression came, I had to get out and work. I told you this. I was able to send my sister Alissa, my blind sister, and she graduated from Poly Technic High School. And we were at the graduation when they, she went up to get her diploma, they saw that she was blind, everybody in the auditorium got up and started clapping. It was so emotional. And naturally we were crying. And they said, "Let her say a few words." She said a few words, and again, we cried. Such a satisfaction that she was able to finish even though I was only went to tenth grade. Anyway, we came to Burbank in 1948. We had Stanley, our first older boy, and then Walter. I sent both of them to Burbank High School. They graduated. Stanley went to junior college. I sent Walter to Cal Lutheran College in Thousand Oaks. He graduated from college. That's the

boy that's living now. Eight hundred dollars every three months I had to send. Boy, that was tough. We made it. Even though I couldn't make it, they made it. So what else can I tell you.

DALLETT: Let me just flip over the tape.

CHAVOOR: Let me stop here.

DALLETT: Let me just flip over the tape and we'll talk about some things. This is the end of side one of interview number 384 [DP-10].

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is side two of interview number 384 [DP-010] with Maljan Chavoor. So take me back a bit to the time when, unless there's anything else you can tell me about Ellis Island itself. You sort of went over, I think, what you remembered there.

CHAVOOR: Ellis Island, uh, I forgot to tell you.

DALLETT: How long did you stay there?

CHAVOOR: Twenty-one days while our case was being, at that time

it was in the Labor Department. I got papers I'm going to show you. Our case was being tried, twenty-one days. Like I said, the last day they read my mother's name and they said we're going to America. The first night we were over there, I was eleven years old, they separate the men from the women. They gave me two blankets, I think it was, a pillow. They said, "You go with the men," and my mother and them go with the women. They put us in a cell. Boom, they locked the door. I cried all night. Eleven years old. I don't know anything, you know. I cried all night. I grew up in a hurry. The next day I told my mother what happened. She says, "Son, everything is all right. Now we're in America. Don't worry. Like I said, every day we'd go to, seven o'clock in the morning we'd go to breakfast, then lunch, and then dinner. They count you every time you go and come back. No matter where you go they count you. In the meantime, naturally, there were other people came from different countries. And some of the people from Harput came over there with us. Everybody's for themselves, believe me, at a time like this. And we'd sit in this one big room and everybody would try to tell their own problems. They'd talk and what else

could you do? Everybody's waiting to get out. But, uh, it was like a jail.

DALLETT: And your case pretty much revolved around your sister, whether . . .

CHAVOOR: The what?

DALLETT: The case revolved around your sister.

CHAVOOR: Oh, yes, yes. My older sister and I, we could go. But my mother had to go with my blind sister. That was, that man says, this, so this Mr. Barsum says, "Let them all go to Ellis Island. We'll have their case here in Washington." But, in the meantime, we were kids, my sister Alissa and I, we were having a ball. We didn't know anything, eleven and thirteen years old. Just like a jail. But I don't know what else to tell you. It was, it was terrible on my mother. My mother was terrible. She was fifty, or something like that, forty or fifty years old. She looked like seventy years old when we came here.

MRS. CHAVOOR: You'll see her picture shortly.

CHAVOOR: I'll show her after a while.

MRS. CHAVOOR: You'll see her picture. You'll see his sister's picture.

CHAVOOR: What else would you like to know, honey?

DALLETT: Tell me about when you got to Los Angeles. Was it a Turkish community that your uncle lived in?

CHAVOOR: No. We're Assyrians. We're of Assyrian descent. In Los Angeles, all the people that came from the old country were mostly from Harput, where we lived. And they all settled in Los Angeles. And they all settled in, just like all nationalities settle in one community, they settled on 25th and San Pedro Street in L.A. That's where we were. And all of the, all of the Assyrians, As a matter of fact, all the families lived there. And little by little they would go different places. Just like my sister Mary. We came over here. They were on Washington Street. And eventually they moved from the east side, they went to the west side just like we did. And we kept going and going. And we'd, better, better neighborhoods. But, uh, what can I say?

DALLETT: All right. Tell me more about that initial, that

initial period when you were in L.A. in the beginning. How was your mother adjusting to it, I mean . . .

CHAVOOR: Well, my mother, naturally she couldn't talk English.

DALLETT: Did she learn it?

CHAVOOR: No. Very few words. and, uh, like if she'd go to the store, instead of saying I'd want a loaf of white bread, she'd say, "vite" bread, you know.
(he laughs)

MRS. CHAVOOR: Foreigners have this problem. They cannot say their W's.

CHAVOOR: Their accent's bad.

MRS. CHAVOOR: It's always "vhh."

CHAVOOR: When I took my mother, naturally I wanted to have a place for her, because my brother got married. I took my mother and rented a place in Los Angeles, the first time. An apartment. We lived in an apartment. I didn't, we didn't have any furniture. We couldn't afford it. I had an old, old stove and naturally an old icebox where you put the water under it. Our rent was twenty-five dollars a month. Our grocery bill,

incidentally, was, you were born after the Depression, our grocery bill was five dollars a week. Five dollars. Leg of lamb was one dollar. All the bunch goods and everything, in those thirties, penny a bunch. Apples, ten pounds for twenty-five cents. Potatoes, ten pounds for twenty-five cents. I worked in the market. Like I said, I was driving a truck for them. They went broke. People didn't have any money. People didn't have any money. When we moved to Burbank, I was going back and forth in L.A. on a streetcar and a bus to work at Warner Brothers and one of the fellows would pick me up and take me back and forth. I didn't have a car. Then I bought a, in 1938 I think it was, I bought a Model A Ford for two hundred and fifty dollars. I bought a Model A Ford. Little by little I paid that off. When we moved to Burbank I bought my mother a brand new stove, I bought her a brand new refrigerator, a brand new vacuum cleaner, and I got some furniture. I still got the one table there of that furniture. I paid thirty-five dollars for that in 1938. All the furniture, I think it ran to about three hundred dollars, all that stuff. She was so happy. She was so happy. She says, you know, the expression like, a bird in a golden cage.

And her daughter was right next to her, my sister Mary, the one that brought her. It was the happiest time of her life. Twenty year she said she had the best time in her life. Incidentally, we never had any money. Never went to a restaurant. Couldn't afford it. Just imagine, nowadays everybody takes their folks to a restaurant. But anyway, that's the way it was. That's the way it was.

DALLETT: What about citizenship?

CHAVOOR: 1937, I'll show you, I have the papers inside. My sister Alissa and I applied for citizenship and, if I'm not mistaken, you had to wait two years to get your second papers. We became a citizen in 1937. And I still have my citizenship paper and my sister also. And I thought that was a great, I've got to tell you this. I voted, every, I'm a Democrat. I voted Democrat. The only time I voted Republican was Eisenhower. I thought he was a great general. In 19 . . . when Carter was the President, I never write letters. They were having a riot, these Iranians, in Beverly Hills. They were burning the place. I got so mad I wrote a letter. I says, "Why do these

foreigners come over here and do what they're doing?" I'm just the one person. Who's going to listen to me? I says, "They're burning the place. Why don't you send them back, for God sakes? I went through hell to get to America. These guys come here and they're (?)." They wrote me a nice letter, very polite. In other words, why don't you mind your own business? I have never voted since. Isn't that terrible? I can't help it. I can't help it. I love the country so much, honey. When I was on this AM America the girls said something about traveling. I says listen, you give me a million dollars, I wouldn't leave this country. I won't. Somebody says here, here's a million, I won't go. This is a great place. It's the most wonderful country in the world. Where can a man at my age sit home and get social security and my wife get social security. It's unheard of. People take everything for granted. How can a country like the United States fight Japan and turn right around and help them? I can't understand it. They explain it to me, but it don't sink in. It's impossible. That's the way they are, but that's what makes it so great I guess.

DALLETT: Were you, were you in the war, in the second World War?

CHAVOOR: I went in the war. I was exempt until I, well, I was taking care of my mother, and she was sick, they exempt me, until '44. And the minute my mother passed away, naturally, I had to go. I have high blood pressure. I went over there. Three times they turned me down, the fourth time they needed men. This captain says, send him in. He'll be all right. Okay, I went in. They sent me to Camp Hood, Texas for an infantry replacement training center. One of the biggest in the United States at the time, I think it was. Naturally, with high blood pressure, you know, you get out in that sun, boom. I passed out. I passed out, and I ended up in the hospital. The first thing I remember is when I opened my eyes he said, do you know . . . (break in tape) I got sick, I passed out and, uh, the first thing I know the man says, "Do you know who I am?" I says, "Yes. You're, uh . . ." What do you call it? No, no, no, not a colonel. The one below him.

MRS. CHAVOOR: Major.

CHAVOOR: Major. And he says, "When did you come to this country?" That's a heck of a question to ask. 19, 19, 21. Okay. That's all they asked. I got, I was in there about a week or two. I don't remember exactly. They says, back to training. Eighteen weeks of basic training. Evidently they had orders for me not to do certain things. And one time we were out there and we were marching, or they were going through infantry, infiltration center, whatever, under the wires and all. I got dizzy. I see a tree over there, I went and parked over there. The sergeant comes and says, "Soldier, what are you doing under this tree?" I says, "Hey." Oh, I was sick. I says, "I'm sick. I can't do that." He says, "Go to your barracks and take it easy." Hmm. I went to my barracks. I took it easy. (she laughs) A couple of days later, in the meantime I'm going with my, uh, company and taking my training. Two days later they, my company commander, wonderful person, Captain Karney [ph], he says, "Private Chavoor," he says, "go to company headquarters. You're going to get an interview." I go, all right, I go to company headquarters. Evidently it must have been a court marshall. I go over there, there was a colonel, two majors and two

captains sitting at the table, a big table. And they, uh, one captain is my company commander, Colonel Lott [ph]. I can't forget him. A moustache. "Private Chavoor, we're going to put you in the Air Force. You're going to have good conditions." I don't know what made me say is, I just, "I don't want the Air Force. I'm happy here. I'm a sick man. I need medical attention." "At ease," he says. They have a conference, come back, "Dismissed." I went to my barracks. In the meantime, I went through eighteen weeks of basic, whatever I could do. At the end of eighteen weeks, there were three people out of that that didn't go. They all went to Fort Meade, Maryland, port of debarkation, I imagine. I didn't go. There was a fellow that was crippled. He didn't go. And there was another one, I don't know, what was wrong, three. You know, in the Army, in the service, you don't get a discharge. Never, unless you're, radically something wrong. They all got shipped out. In the meantime I'm doing yard work, picking up papers. The third day I'm sleeping, twelve o'clock, midnight, eleven o'clock, midnight, my sergeant comes and says, "Pack up. You're leaving." "All right. I'll pack up." Twelve o'clock he could put me on a

train. He says, "You're going to Monterey? Salinas. Monterey, California." He gave me an envelope, sealed. He said, "When you get over there give this to the man over there." Okay. I got on the train and came to Monterey and I give that man, it was a sergeant, I believe it was. A captain, a sergeant. He opened it up and it said, "Discharge." He said, "You're going to get discharge." That's okay. Thank you. I got on the telephone and I called my wife. I says, "Blanche, sit down. I got news for you. I'm coming home." What are you going to do? In the meantime, I had hurt my back. It's still bad, still bad. Once you hurt your back it never gets well. They said, "Okay, sign these papers and you're going to go home tomorrow." I read it, says, "Nothing wrong." I says, "I can't sign these papers," I said. "I got a bum back." The guy says, "Do you want to go home or don't you?" "Yeah." He says, "Sign them." I says, "Okay." I signed the doggone thing and the next day they put me on the train, I headed for Burbank, California. My wife, my wife and neighbor were waiting for me. I think it was seven o'clock in the morning we pulled in. My sister Mary was there and she was, she was there. And my sister Mary come over

and she forgot, the poor thing forgot the water in the tub or something. We went back there and it was all on the floor. I rolled up my pants and cleaned up the house. Then, naturally, from there, I went back to the studio work. They put me back to work again. And in 1976 I told my boss I'm going to retire. One thing, I grew up with that studio. I knew it from the bottom up. When Warner Brothers moved to Burbank, California they bought the First National Studios. They, in 1937 or '38 they built the Property Department. It was only, there were only six or eight stages. There was 21 stages when I retired. And I knew the studio backward, I knew that Property Department, I knew exactly where every piece of furniture was. Columbia and Warner's merged. Head of the Columbia Studios came over there and my boss said, "You're going to take him to the Prop Department." Mr. Hagel [ph], poor guy. He got sick. He committed suicide later. Anyway, I was taking him and a couple of other executives. He said, "I want to ask you one question, Johnny." They called me Johnny. "How can you remember all of this?" I says, "Mr. Hagel [ph], it's all up here." I said, "I grew up with this." I knew exactly where every piece of furniture is. He

took a liking to me. And they gave me a good job. That's when they says, put this man on flat salary and leave him on flat salary. So, in 1976, I told my boss, I says, a couple of months ahead of time, I says, "I'm not going to wait until I'm sixty-five." Sixty-four-and-a-half, February, I'm retiring. The studio gave me a party in the studio cafeteria. All the Warner bosses, most of them, were over there, including the Columbia men. I got pictures, my wife was there. I called my wife and my son was there, Walter. The next day they gave me a party in the Property Department. And I still have this watch. My boss gave this to me. And, uh . . .

DALLETT: I see it's inscribed here, "From your friends at the Burbank Studios, 1933-1976."

CHAVOOR: Yeah. They called it Burbank Studios.

DALLETT: 1976.

CHAVOOR: Yeah. My boss gave me this, and they gave me a present, over there. Incidentally, they gave me ten, I got ten weeks severance pay, which is wonderful. I didn't have any money until then. I'd never had any

money until I retired. Now, isn't that amazing? (they laugh)

DALLETT: I hate to sort of keep harping back to that one period, but I'm really interested in that period when you first came, and were there any difficulties in getting used to what must have been a very different life here in Los Angeles.

CHAVOOR: There was no difficulty. The only thing it was that I couldn't speak English. I couldn't express myself. And I've got to tell you this. When I went to, uh, first school, I was eleven years old, they used to always pick on me. And this one kid started a fight. I can't fight. I can't do anything. I bit him. Boy, did I bite him. They took me to the principal's office. (she laughs) And, he explained to me. He says, "One week you're going to stay after school." I went right away to my sister Mary. She was like my mother. I said, "Sis, here's what happened." She come the next day, explained to what happened. "Okay," the principal says, "you don't have to stay after school." So after that, little by little I picked up the English language. I couldn't read, I

couldn't write, I couldn't speak. I had never been to school in my life until I came here, on account of the war over there. But I, uh, I picked it up. I picked it up very good, thank God. And, uh, here I am eleven years old, and here I am seventy-seven. In July I'll be seventy-eight, and I've had the most wonderful life that anybody could ask for. I've always told my son, if you've got food on the table, you've got a roof over your head, you have nothing to worry about. Money is secondary. And health. Money will come later, second. And I'm so satisfied with so little. He can't, my wife can't understand that. I'm so satisfied with so little because I never had anything. You know what I mean? I never had nothing. I forgot to tell you one more thing. When we came through New York, of all the people at that Grand Central, the station, who did we meet? Dr. Ford. That's the man that gave my mother, offered a job in Harput. Dr. Ford. Can you imagine that?

DALLETT: You mean, it was a coincidence?

CHAVOOR: This was the man. He was representing American Red Cross in Harput after World War One. He is the man

that told my mother you're in charge of these hundred men, and you take care of them.

MRS. CHAVOOR: Orphanage.

CHAVOOR: Orphanage. That's right. Prisoner camp or orphanage, you want to call it. When we hit Samsun, soup in the morning, soup in the afternoon, soup at night, maybe a piece of hard bread, that was it. And my mother would always save a piece of her bread so we could have it. We had hard times. But in America, if I just had bread and butter, I'm satisfied. I'm happy. Just to think, how can a man at my age sit home, get a check from the government every month. I just can't, not only that, I'm a millionaire. I'm a millionaire. You people say, hey, what do you do all day. I have a nephew who is a millionaire. A pill for heart trouble, a pill for gout, a pill for his other, what the heck kind of life is that? I don't have to worry about anything. Nothing. It's a great place, a great place. I tell people all the time, it's a great country. They take care of not only the people here, and another thing, I'm very fortunate. I worked in the motion picture business. They had their motion

picture health and welfare plan. In Los Angeles, outside of Los Angeles, is the motion picture home where they take care of the people in the motion picture industry. Now, I was sick, I had two operations, two weeks I was, a week each time, thirteen thousand some odd dollars. Medicare and what they paid. It didn't cost me a penny. Not a penny. They paid all my prescriptions, they paid part of my, uh, what Medicare doesn't pay. So what have I got to worry about? Nothing.

DALLETT: Were you active in the union?

CHAVOOR: I was a union man. Outside of that, I paid my union dues. We had a very good union. After the strike they came to with an agreement with the studios. It would be a studio union. The union and the studios would come together and say, we're going to give you so much raise, and we'd take it. That was it. We had no voice in that.

DALLETT: Which union was it?

CHAVOOR: I.A.T.S.E. International, you know, I.A.T.S.E of motion picture, of the United States and Canada.

Wonderful union, Local 44 of Los Angeles. And incidentally, I was the shop steward of the studio until I retired for quite a while and I still communicate with, I can't think of, one of the fellows that was the union boss of the local, of our local. Not the steward, but the, I can't think of it now. So, uh, had not that strike come along, Warner Brothers would always take care of their own employees. Every Christmas they would give us a party, give the kids a gift. We had a Warner Club, twenty-five cents a month. Twenty-five cents a month. When I went in the service, they gave me two hundred dollars. Wonderful. They were so good, Warner Brothers. That strike ruined everything. They were going to have a big pension for us, a big pension. That Warner Club they created for the employees, when they sold the studio, what that club owned, had, they sold it. They divided among all the people that were still in that club. Now, a lot of them dropped out. For twenty-five cents a month they dropped out. I kept it up twenty-five cents a month. I got nine hundred dollars. Nine hundred dollars for no reason. Oh, they were so good. I have to say, Warner's were wonderful, wonderful people. Of course, they started

out from nothing. Wonderful people.

DALLETT: What was the strike? What was the issue?

CHAVOOR: Two, two fractions. The, Surell was the opposite side, and Warner Brothers, I mean, our union, there were two unions. They wanted to take over. The studios got together. I think at that time they said it cost them forty or sixty million to beat those guys, and they beat them. They were radicals. They were radicals. That's when they were marching up and down. That's where that, all this communistic, uh, things in Washington happened. You know, they had a hearing about the Communists. These guys were a bunch of Communists. They beat them. That's what, but after that . . .

DALLETT: Was this in the '50s with the McCarthy hearings?

CHAVOOR: Right after the war, 1946. The attorneys told Harry Warner don't talk to any of the employees. He'd come around, "Hi, how are you?" You know, he says, "My attorneys told me not to talk to anybody." Terrible! Can you imagine the owner of the studio going through the line and calling him a dirty Jew. Can you imagine

that? Terrible. Well, that's what happens when these strikes are bad. Strikes are bad. I was lucky. I was lucky. Very fortunate. Anyway, I have to say, I've had a wonderful life. If I die tomorrow, thank God, I can say, thank the good Lord I've had a wonderful life.

DALLETT: You have a beautiful home here.

CHAVOOR: Well, I can thank my, my I bought it, I bought a new car after we sold our house in Burbank, I came here, I bought a new car two years ago, like that. And my son says, "Now that you've got a new car, Dad, you're going to get a new house." He bought this house. We helped him a little bit, not much. He says, "I want to put you in a nice home." I took care, I took so good care of him, I did my best and he knows it. I struggled to put him through college. He made it. Now he's so happy. He's so happy. Comes over here every day. We've got a nice grandson. And it's a wonderful place to live. Give me a million dollars, I'd say keep it, keep it. I just want to stay here in the United States of America. God bless, whoever said God bless America, what else can I tell you?

DALLETT: Unless there's anything else you want to add . . .

CHAVOOR: There's a lot of things I can add, but I'll send you, I'm going to send you a copy of it.

DALLETT: We'll go off the tape for that. Okay, this is, this is the end of Interview Number 384 [DP-10] with Maljan Chavoor.

CHAVOOR: Whew.

DALLETT: And the time is 7:45.