

EI-1173

ARAM FARISHIAN

BIRTHDATE: APRIL 21, 1913

INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 20, 2000

RUNNING TIME: 00:00

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE. PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: LEONIA, NEW JERSEY

ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER

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DIYARBAKIR, TURKEY (VICKRANAGARD, ARMENIA) VIA SYRIA, 1920

AGE 7

PASSAGE ON THE "GOTTLAND"

PORT OF EMBARKATION: ALEPPO, SYRIA TO BEIRUT, LEBANON, TO
MARSEILLE, FRANCE, TO LE HAVRE, FRANCE, TO CHERBOURG, FRANCE

OLD COUNTRY RESIDENCE: ALEPPO, SYRIA

UNITED STATES RESIDENCE (S): HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY; NEWARK, NEW
JERSEY; LEONIA, NEW JERSEY

ORAL HISTORIANS NOTE:

LEVINE: Today is December 20, the year 2000, and I'm here in Leonia, New Jersey
with Mr. Aram Farishian, who came from Armenia in 1920 when he was 7
years old.

FARISHIAN: We came from Aleppo, Syria.

LEVINE: Okay. You left from Syria.

FARISHIAN: We left from Syria.

LEVINE: Okay, we'll get the whole story. Okay? At the time of this interview, Mr. Farishian is 87 years of age.

FARISHIAN: I was about 7.

LEVINE: 87. You were seven when you came and you're 87 now.

FARISHIAN: I'm 87 now.

LEVINE: And with us today is Mr. Farishian's son, Gary Farishian.

GARY F: Yeah.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

FARISHIAN: Glad to meet you.

LEVINE: It's good to meet you. Why don't we start at the beginning for the tape. If you say your birthrate again, and where you were born.

FARISHIAN: Okay. I was born in Aleppo, Syria. 1920. April 13. And...

LEVINE: No, wait. You were born in 1913.

FARISHIAN: 1913, April 21. I had it reversed.

LEVINE: Okay. What was your father's name.

FARISHIAN: Dickran. D-I-C-K-R-A-N. Dickran is another name for Richard. In English.

LEVINE: And how about your mother. Her name and her maiden name.

FARISHIAN: Her name is Arshalous, A-R-S-H-A-L-O-U-S. First name. Her last name was Vanian. V-A-N-I-A-N. And over here they called her Lucy, sometimes, and sometimes they would call her real name. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents in Syria when you were there?

FARISHIAN: Yeah. No. My grandparents were in [Diyarbakir], Turkey.

LEVINE: Okay.

FARISHIAN: They were in Diyarbakir, Turkey.

LEVINE: And were they both, both sets of grandparents?

FARISHIAN: Both sets. Right.

LEVINE: And had they, in their family tree, had they been in the same, relatively the same place in Turkey for generations before that?

FARISHIAN: Well, my mother's father and mother, my grandfather, was a civil engineer in Turkey and they sent him all through Turkey – from one town to another, another, another, until they came to Diyarbakir. And then they matchmake my father and mother in 1910, 1911, 1909. And they got married, and my sister was born in 1910.

LEVINE: Okay. Could you spell the name of the town in Turkey?

FARISHIAN: Yeah. There's two names. One is spelled the Armenian way and one is spelled the new way, the Turks spell it.

LEVINE: Why don't you give us both.

FARISHIAN: [D-Y-A-R-B-A-K-I-R] sic (see above). That's in about Central Turkey.

LEVINE: And that, did you spell it the Armenian way?

FARISHIAN: No. That's the Turkish. That would be on the map now.

LEVINE: How about the Armenian way?

FARISHIAN: Vickranagard. V-I-C-K-R-A-N-A-G-A-R-D It was named after King Vickran about 700 years ago, when King Vickran took over he was the head of the Armenians and he built the wall around the whole city. Like the wall of China. And the wall is still there. But the town is in shambles. And outside of Vickranagard, they built another new town which is Diyarbakir, and, and now they have the Hilton Hotel there and they have everything there. So, it's interesting. Some people have gone there and they've seen it, and our part of it was all in shambles. And our church is even down. That's how bad it is.

LEVINE: Did you know your grandparents?

FARISHIAN: No, I didn't. Because I was born in 1913, 1913, and ah, we left, my father left Diyarbakir in 1911. See, in 1911, my grandfather told my father, you go to Aleppo, Syria, and take care of the business there. So, my sister was born in Diyarbakir but we were all, the three of us were born in Aleppo, Syria. So, that was 19-, (pauses), 1911, they came. And we were born after that.

LEVINE: Right. Right.

FARISHIAN: And in 1915, four years after my father came to Aleppo, Syria, the massacre came on. And the Turks massacred my whole family.

LEVINE: In other words, you and your mother and father and sisters were in Syria, but the rest of the family was in...

FARISHIAN: Fifty people were massacred in Diyarbakir. Vickranagard, they called it then. And so, what then, people escaped the massacre, came to Aleppo, Syria, and they told us they burned all your buildings down. (crying) They burned the buildings down and then they massacred all your parents. My father, my uncles and aunts, uncles and aunts by marriage, and two cousins were kidnapped. Two girls. Young girls, they were kidnapped. And then later on, my cousin who was seven years old at the time, he hid in alleys. They couldn't, he was watching to see what would happen, you know, and then after the massacre was over, the Turks went away. And he came to the scene and he saw my aunt by marriage, he saw her moving. So he rushed and he got water for her, and he revived her, and then when the Turks found that she was living, they didn't kill her. But they took her as a slave. And after they took her as a slave, at times she tried to run away, and three times she ran away and they caught her and beat her up. And the fourth time, she made an arrangement with a Kurd. There's a lot of Kurds in Turkey. She made an arrangement with the Kurd – he had a horse and wagon – to take her and my cousin to Aleppo, Syria. So they got by. And they made it, and then

ah, and my aunt by marriage, she had a brother in Egyptian Sudan, working for the English government. It was English at that time. And through newspapers, she got in touch and then she went to Sudan and visited the brother and then the other brother, that's the one brother in America, no? He was a sergeant in the US Army, let him know that she was there. And then she came to America. And she came to America, and a few years later – this was in the oh, '24, '25 maybe. 1925. And she married a man in Philadelphia who was an ex-Army man. And unfortunately, he had a restaurant and it didn't go well. So then, they came to visit us up in Newark. We were living in Newark at that time. And my father and mother found that, a dry-cleaning store for them, and they worked, they went in the dry-cleaning business and they did all right.

LEVINE: Well, let's go back first to Syria.

FARISHIAN: Go back to Syria now.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, those first seven years. Do you have many memories of life in Syria?

FARISHIAN: No much. Only, I only have one memory of my father taking me to the middle of town, they called [Babufaraj]. That was the name of the town. And he bought me some goodies. (they laugh) That's the only memory I

have. Because probably, we never left the house very much, you know? And between 1915 and 1920, my father used up all his resources just to live on. Because the main, the main office in Diyarbakir was all burned down, there was no materials coming in. They were in the textile business. Millionaires. In the textile business. So there was nothing coming, so he sold all the things he had. And this was during the war. There was nothing. No business going on or anything. So then...

LEVINE: Were there a lot of Armenian people in Aleppo when you were there?

FARISHIAN: Yes, yes there were.

LEVINE: So it was an Armenian community that you were living in?

FARISHIAN: There were some Armenians. Not a lot. There were all Turks. There was Kurds and Armenians. And I know a lot of people who were born in Aleppo, just like I was, that are in this country now. So...

LEVINE: But you never went to school, before you came to this country?

FARISHIAN: No. No. No. Not over there. I don't remember, I don't think my sisters did either. Because it was during the war, and there was nothing doing over

there. My father sold all that he had and he was penniless. They sold all the furniture and everything. We were sleeping on the floors over there.

LEVINE: Did you have food? I mean...

FARISHIAN: I don't know how we got food. I don't really... I know my sister was maln-, had malnutrition. My younger sister. Two years old. But then, one day, in 1920, in July, a man from Boston, Massachusetts, came to visit us in Aleppo, Syria. And they were good friends of my grandfather, grandmother, father and all, when they were in Diyarbakir. But they came here early in the 1900's with all their wealth. And they were in Boston, Massachusetts. So that man came to visit my father and mother and he wanted to go into Turkey and get a friend from Turkey and bring him to this country. My father says, I'm sorry. He says, if you go there, they'll kill you. So the man found out that my father was right. And then the man came to father and said, Mr. Farishian, he says, I have a ticket to go to America. Do you want to go with me? (chokes up) And my father said, I'm penniless. Don't have any money. How can I go to America? He says, I have the ticket. You come to America and if you like America, you stay there, and I'll send the money for your whole family to come here. God sent an angel to Aleppo, Syria. Isn't that a miracle? (exclaiming, tearfully) So that's what happened. And ah, my father came here in July and he found a little work to do. He found, he went at the docks and they asked ah, who wants to be a fireman on the boat. My father

was a businessman, he didn't know anything. He raised his hand. So they put him on the boat to shovel coal, you know? Into the furnaces.

LEVINE: Was this in Boston?

FARISHIAN: No. This was in Hoboken.

LEVINE: I see. So the man went back to Boston.

FARISHIAN: Oh, the man went back to Boston.

LEVINE: Then your father really had no connections with people.

FARISHIAN: Oh, yes. He had a cousin in Hoboken. He had a cousin there. And that's where he went.

LEVINE: Did you know this cousin?

FARISHIAN: Oh, yes. Yes. I knew them until three years ago, when he died. The son of the cou-, my father's cousin. And ah,....

LEVINE: So did your father then go stay with his cousin?

FARISHIAN: Just for a short time, until he got a job.

LEVINE: And then he got a job.

FARISHIAN: Then, we got an apartment, I think it was two rooms. Maybe it was three. I don't remember. I think four of us slept in one bed. (laughs) That's how it was.

LEVINE: So when your father came first, when your father left first for America, did he write to you and your mother? Did he write home to his family?

FARISHIAN: Oh, sure!

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that he...?

FARISHIAN: No, I don't remember about any writing, but my father, my mother would just talk about it, you know?

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that? What he, what your father was telling your mother when he first came here?

FARISHIAN: I can't remember. But then, all I remember is, my mother said, we're gonna go to America. And then, I think we, from Aleppo, we came to Beirut, Lebanon.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving Aleppo?

FARISHIAN: I remember, yes. Coming to Beirut. I remember. And then we were held at Beirut for a month. Why I don't know. We would have been here sooner, you know?

LEVINE: How did you get there?

FARISHIAN: Oh, by, I think it was train. Train. I remember it was an old, dilapidated train. (laughs)

LEVINE: And can you remember anything about that trip, that train trip? Can you remember how you felt, or what you were thinking as a seven year old? Or what your mother was thinking?

FARISHIAN: I didn't know too much over there. But from Beirut to Marseilles, France, we came. And I remember something about Marseille, France.

LEVINE: What's that?

FARISHIAN: I remember walking through the streets, and I remember seeing all the cemeteries of the soldiers in Marseilles, and there were all kinds of, all kinds of decorations with wreaths and crosses and everything on the cemetery. And a lot of beadwork on those. I never saw beadwork on things in a cemetery, but there was in this cemetery. How could I remember beads? I don't know. But I did remember that.

LEVINE: When you, you were just a seven year old boy, but did, were you aware of the genocide? Were you aware at that young age about what had happened and what had happened to your family members? Did you know?

FARISHIAN: All we heard is that they were all massacred. That's all I heard.

LEVINE: Did you, as a little boy, did you comprehend it at that time?

FARISHIAN: I don't remember. No, not crying about it. Not anything like that. I came here a little later on, then I kept thinking. Then I started to cry. When I was maybe ten years old. Then, from Marseilles, France, we came up to Le Havre. Le Havre and Cherbourg. I think we left at Cherbourg, France, to come here. That's where we took the Gothland. At Cherbourg.

LEVINE: Now, it was your mother, traveling with your two sisters?

FARISHIAN: Three sisters.

LEVINE: Three sisters and you.

FARISHIAN: Yeah. Yeah. And we had a friend with us, also. A friend whom she sent the picture to America to a man over here, and the man wanted to marry her. The man married her by picture. And she came here and she married him and they lived in the, the daughters are out in California now. Of course, they're not living. But, her father and mother's not living, but the daughter's out in California and they visited here a couple of times. And ah, that much we know. But...

LEVINE: Well, it must have been difficult for your mother to be traveling with four sis-, four children.

FARISHIAN: Very difficult. I don't know how my mother brought all those things over here like she did. Now, I can see when we went to Ellis Island, everybody had a bundle, like a bag, you know, and I don't know how my mother brought all the things she had. I...

LEVINE: Do you know of specific things that she brought with her?

FARISHIAN: Yes. She brought a load of lamb's wool. Raw lamb's wool, that she used to make comforters with. You know? And she made comforters with those – he knows! He has one!

GARY F: It's still upstairs. Yeah.

FARISHIAN: You have one or two?

GARY F: I think we have one, but I think there's one up there.

FARISHIAN: You gave one to Connie.

LEVINE: And what else did she bring besides lamb's wool?

FARISHIAN: Oh, she brought drapes from where they lived. Drapes that had all gold threads in it. I remember that. And another kind of drapes was more designed. And we had that for a long, long time. And when we came to Hoboken, we didn't have any kind of furniture at all. We, my father got two egg crates – in those days it was made out of wood. Two egg crates and a door. We made a, that was our sofa. And my mother made all these wool comforter things, you know? Made nice cushions with them and everything.

LEVINE: Let's not get ahead. Let's talk about, you left from Le Havre. And you left on the Gothland. What was the voyage like for you?

FARISHIAN: Oh, the voyage! Oh, my god! God was with us! In the middle of the Atlantic, the boat was just like this. On an angle about forty degrees, just like this. And I was up the top here, and I ran down that hill and right into a wall. Right into a wall. At seven years old. And then a few seconds later, I heard dishes crash. Crashing like anything. I must have been near the dining room. Well, anyway, that was about ten or fifteen minutes that the boat kept on going that way and then finally it became calm. And then we came to America. (voice trembling)

LEVINE: Was this a boat with a lot of immigrants coming to this country?

FARISHIAN: Yes! A lot of Armenians, Turks and Kurds. And I remember specifically another thing. A man died on the boat and they threw him overboard. What were they gonna do with him?

LEVINE: That must have been something for a seven year old to witness.

FARISHIAN: Yeah. They threw him overboard. Well... Well, finally we came to Staten Island, Ellis Island (all choked up) We came to Ellis Island. Well, it was a huge place. And it was the same when we visited there. And the wall (voice

trembling) with the chain, like a chain link fence about oh, maybe eight feet wide for people to stand in. It was loaded with people, all from the boat, and we just stood in line there. And I remember somebody saying we had to wait alphabetically. They took us alphabetically. And we were “f” which we didn’t have to wait that long. And then...

LEVINE: So they called your name?

FARISHIAN: Yes. They called our name, and we went out. And they had to examine us, examination, make sure we were all healthy. And thank god we were all healthy.

LEVINE: Was it a very extensive examination? Do you remember anything about the examination?

FARISHIAN: I don’t think so. No. I don’t think so. Wasn’t extensive because they had so many people to take care of. Ah, so, then, my father’s cousins were waiting for us out there, and then – I don’t – somebody drove us there and I can’t remember who. But they drove us to his house. And we stayed at the cousins house for a few days until my father found an apartment, which was only a short way from there.

LEVINE: Do you remember some of your first impressions when you first came off the boat, and you got to America? Do you remember things that you saw, or things that you heard – anything that struck you as different that you remember from the first...?

FARISHIAN: No, but I just remember that Ellis Island, that building, quite well.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

FARISHIAN: I remembered it was so large, and I remember this big wall that the chain link fence, and all the people in there. And a man calling the names and us going out. And then...

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother? How your mother was taking all this? The whole trip?

FARISHIAN: Um, I don't know how my mother did it. I don't know how she did it with four children. I don't know how. And this woman was with us too.

LEVINE: Did she meet her fiancé at Ellis Island?

FARISHIAN: Yeah. Yeah. He came and he took her.

LEVINE: You saw that?

FARISHIAN: Yeah. He took her, and later on, they lived maybe fifteen miles away from where we lived. We lived in Newark and they lived in North Bergen. And, we visited them, often. And ah, watch the kids grow up from little to big, like we grow up. And ah...

LEVINE: Okay. So tell me more about the first apartment that you lived in?

FARISHIAN: Oh, the first apartment that we were in, of the people had left a huge piano there. It was a big grand piano. Oh! It was so large. Like, what do they call them? Concert grands? Well, anyway, that was my bed. (they laugh) That was my bed, and then it was my sister's bed. And then maybe three of us slept in one bed. Oh, it was really something. It was something. I remember there was a club downstairs from us. And there was a big hole in our floor. Like this. We could look down there and see the people in the club. They were all smokin', they were gamblin', they were doin' everything. (laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, that's funny. What was the reunion like with your father?

FARISHIAN: Oh! He was, oh, he was so happy that we were here. He hugged us all. Yeah. (voice trembling) It was something. And my father worked – he

worked from seven in the morning until eleven at night – two jobs. To support us.

LEVINE: One was shoveling the coal on the, one was on the boat?

FARISHIAN: No. No. That he, he only, you know what he did? He start shoveling the coal, and then they got out in the middle of, between um, Hoboken, Hoboken and um, and um, Ellis Island, and the boat wouldn't go. The steam was low. And the captain yelled, turn the boat back, hurry up! They just made it back. And they gave my father a days pay to go home. But he found other work.

LEVINE: What did he do? Do you remember?

FARISHIAN: He found a job in a dry cleaning plant. And in those days they used ah, chemicals that were oh, the fumes were very bad. And people would tell my mother that you know, he's working in that plant. He comes home drunk from the fumes. So then he found a job pressing suits on the pressing machine. So he learned that. And that's what he did, until 1928. 1928, he bought his own tailor shop. And, and that was just before the Depression. In 1929 the Depression came. '32 was bad. So, and then, but you know, my mother was a good sewer, and my father learned how to press good, and we had a business in a good neighborhood, and they made a good living. And I worked with them. When I was 12 years old, I used to deliver the suits to the

customers. Then, when I got a little older, when I was 17, they bought me a car. Now I delivered with the car. (laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember your first few days at school? When you first came here?

FARISHIAN: Yes, I remember. We didn't know English at all. We didn't know English at all. So. It was very hard for us to get adapted. My oldest sister was very smart. She was very smart. Of course, she was ten when she came here. But she went through the grades like nothing. She went through and she graduated really quick. And then, but my father couldn't afford to send her to even high school – no, she, he couldn't afford to send her to college, you know? So she went and worked for the Prudential Insurance company in Newark. And she started at the bottom, \$12 a week. In those days \$12 was bad. And spaghetti every noontime. That was their lunch. They had free lunch there. Spaghetti. And then she worked her way up, way up to division manager. And then she got married after that. She was, she was, 20, 26, 1910. Yeah. She was 26 when she got married. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about you? What was school like for you when you couldn't speak English?

FARISHIAN: Well, I managed. I managed. I learned quickly going with fellows and all that.

LEVINE: You mean playing after school? You mean when you were playing after school you would learn?

FARISHIAN: Yeah. I had friends and talkin' to them, I learned quickly.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Did you live in an Armenian community in Hoboken?

FARISHIAN: Yes. But when we got out of Hoboken, there wasn't any Armenians. We went into an Italian neighborhood. And then we went into, um, near Irvington, New Jersey. Irvington was a lot of, Jewish area. Ah, Irvington, and the Clinton Hill, they called it. That was in Newark. That was the end of Newark, and then comes Irvington. Well, we went to school over there. Augusta Street school. And, but the thing is, we were moving almost every year. It seemed like.

LEVINE: How come?

FARISHIAN: Because of job reasons. And ah, then, my cousin wanted to live with us so he paid for a better apartment and then my mother cooked for him and everything else. He was a single man. So, we got, we lived in a better

apartment then. And, and ah, after that, after that, we moved on the opposite side of Newark. I think my father's cousin got married, and then we moved on the opposite side of Newark, where Branch Brook Park is now, where all the cherry blossoms are now. There wasn't any cherry blossoms then. It was all, all, mmm, all just plain ground over there. And at that time, and then, later on, in 1932, Roosevelt had the WPA and they made a beautiful park out of it and they had all the cherry blossoms and everything. And it looked beautiful then. But then we had moved out of there, into a closer place where my father had the business.

LEVINE: Well, how about, now, you went through school and then you started delivering the clothes from your father's business. How long did you stay in school? And what did you do after that?

FARISHIAN: Well, then I went to vocational school. I went to vocational school and I learned, I learned something about diesel engines. And this was later on. And (pauses) this was later on in the early '30's. In the '30's. In the meantime, I had just worked with my father, you know, doing work. All three of us worked and that made the, it made it easier for them, and the money stayed with us. You know? And we made a fairly good living. Whereas I know, some people during the Depression had it very hard. So we were fortunate. We were fortunate that my father bought that store.

LEVINE: You were just starting out on your own during the Depression. It was during the Depression that you started working, or learning about diesel engines?

FARISHIAN: No. After.

LEVINE: After.

FARISHIAN: After, in the early '30's. '35, maybe. And I learned about diesel engines, but I couldn't get a job nowhere. But in about 1939, I went to, I went to a place and I told them I had diesel, some diesel experience in school. You're just the man we want! So I started with them, and then, the war came on. And the government says, no diesel engines. (laughs) No more diesels. So, they took me as an inspector for mechanical parts. So I was doing inspection work, I was doing inspection work for, until the war ended. I did my work so well, that they said to me, you're not going in the Army, we want you right here. And the navy inspectors and all of them were, yeah, wanted me. The one time I just neglected not telling them about my ah, about getting ah, I'm forgetting. I know what I'm gonna say...

LEVINE: Go ahead. Take your time.

FARISHIAN: Anyway. The draft board. Every six months the draft board would call me. And they would say to me, when you get that letter, we want it right here in

the office. This one time I didn't hand it in. And then they, draft board called them up at the office, at the place I work. They said, we're gonna take this man. He said, cause, he said, no, he said, you can't take him. So they called up and straightened it out. They didn't want me to go.

LEVINE: Well, in other words you kept getting deferred because of your job.

FARISHIAN: Deferred for every six months for the job. And I did a big job for them one day, and such a big job that I saved the lot, the necks of three big, big men from getting fired. And the company knew that, and they didn't want me to go at all. So, it was a mistake somebody made. Like we would get parts from vendors and they want to return parts if it was no good. And these parts they wanted to return was goods, that they wanted returned. In other words, they would have two inspectors and a foreman and an assistant chief inspector. They all signed to return the parts. Well, they were looking at the wrong blueprint. There were four pages of the blueprint to the final finish. And they were before the final. And while I was doing the checking in the final, the chief inspector walks in. He says, what are you doin'? I said, I'm checkin' this part. Oh, he says, I know. I know they're supposed to go back to [Lycoming] Motors. I says, you can't send them back, I says. He says, why? I said, there's nothing wrong with them. If they had sent them back, the plant would stop just like that. It was the main part of the engine. The crank shaft.

LEVINE: Oh!

FARISHIAN: So, he said, put it up and check it for me, he says, again. I says, I'll check it for you. I checked it for him. I said, see? There's nothing wrong with them. And the blueprint was like, four feet high and about eight feet long. That's how big the blueprint was. So, so he says, okay. He called, all those fellows in that had the rejection signed to send it back and he showed them now. I put it up and checked it again, and he sent them all out. He sent them all out, and he says to me, you know, three of us would have lost our jobs, he says, if you hadn't caught that mistake.

LEVINE: Where were they going? Where were these engines going?

FARISHIAN: They're B29 bombers. B29, it was the, it was the engine to electrify the whole plane and to release the torpedoes from the plane. That was the engine we were makin'. A five cylinder engine. Yeah.

LEVINE: So then after the war was over, did you continue working for the same company?

FARISHIAN: No. The company went out of business because the government owned it. They sold all the stocks they had. I was out of work for a year, and I was

lookin' for a job. Then I found Bendix Corporation, right here in Teterboro, and I was living here, which is only ten minutes away, and I worked there and they saw my resume, they said, you have to wait until the Chief Inspector – he's at a meeting now, he'll call, he'll come out and interview you and then we'll see. So I waited for an hour. I says, when is the chief inspector comin'. He says, he's not over. He says, I'll call him up. This was the personnel manager. I'll call him up. And he read my resume over the phone to him. He says, hire him. He says, you know what he said? He said, you're the first one that's been hired without an interview. So I worked there 31 years. And I did so much for that company. I did so well. They considered me my own boss. They had a mechanism there one time, they designed, a computer. To check parts. Circuit boards. And they bought this big thing that was over \$100,000 in those days. That was a lot of money. And fellows would go there to use it and it would take them two and a half hours to set up the job before they could get started to even check it, you know? So nobody would use it, and the boss was getting mad. Because why wouldn't they use this here? It cost so much money. Then I kept looking at it and looking at it. Hit me in the head. I said, I got an idea. So I drew up a blueprint. I says, if you make this part for this here, we won't have any trouble settin' the job up. So they took my blueprint, and they made the part, a fixture to make, to put the part on, and they made the fixture and it came. It took me thirty seconds to set up the job instead of two and a half hours. A minute the most. Then everybody was fighting to use the machine. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Well, how about your father? How did he feel, do you think? Having been in the textile business and very successful and then coming here and having to learn to press clothes?

FARISHIAN: Oh, he just had to take it. Do what he could. He couldn't speak English well. But my mother knew English better because she took up English on the other side. She did. And ah...

LEVINE: Did your father, do you feel your father was happy that he had come here?

FARISHIAN: Well, it was better than being there.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

FARISHIAN: And not only that, my father was a very distinguished man. When he stood in front of his store, people would say, there's President Hoover. That's how distinguished he looked. He wasn't like me. (they all laugh) He was, and he had the cigar in his mouth. (they laugh heartily) Oh, my.

LEVINE: What was his temperament? What was his personality like?

FARISHIAN: He was good. He was good to all of us. He was real good. He would come home with things sometimes to surprise us, you know. And ah, we had a good time. We had a good time, for the years. Those years. And I did well at Bendix. Being there 31 years. I'm still on with their Blue Cross Blue Shield and I'm still on with their pension. And everything. And my wife was on too. With their insurance. Until she died.

LEVINE: Well, how about your mother? Do you think she adjusted to life here?

FARISHIAN: Oh, yes. She did! She liked it her. She liked it. You know, I have a tape that a young professor in Brandeis University in Boston ah, she interviewed her, about 25 years ago.

LEVINE: Wow.

FARISHIAN: Twenty-five years ago, she interviewed her and ah, she asked her questions and answers just like, you know, and she asked her, the tape is "Life in Turkey, Life in Aleppo, Syria, Life in America".

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful!

FARISHIAN: And I have the tape. It's in Armenian. And he's been bugging me to translate it to English.

LEVINE: Oh! I wish you would.

FARISHIAN: I know Armenian. I know how to speak it. I don't know how to read and write.

LEVINE: But you could hear the tape.

FARISHIAN: I could translate the tape to English, and then my granddaughter, this little girl here, she's right after me all the time. Grandpa!

LEVINE: If you translate it, I would love to copy it.

FARISHIAN: Oh! I'll make a copy and send it to you.

LEVINE: We can put it in your folder.

FARISHIAN: I can make a copy right here.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, there's more reason to do it.

FARISHIAN: Oh! Maybe it won't be on tape. I'll copy it on paper, and he's going to re-write it.

GARY F: We can record it on here.

FARISHIAN: He said, I could record it on here. I could do that.

LEVINE: Okay, well let's ah, we've got about fifteen minutes here. Ah...

GARY F: You know what?

LEVINE: We're going to pause for a minute.

We're resuming here. When you look back on it, coming here as a seven year old boy, do you think that experience of being in Syria and then having to start over again, your family having to start over again, do you think that made difference in your personality?

FARISHIAN: Oh, it certainly did! Oh! Oh, god! I know what condition we were in over there. I come here, I'm trying to help everybody. I try to help everybody that needs help. (voice full of emotion) All my life, I've been helpin' people and doin' things free of charge. Because I love my life here. I've been married 52 years, and my wife passed away. But, everything comes to an end sometime.

LEVINE: How did you meet your wife?

FARISHIAN: Oh, I met my wife – my cousin and her cousin got married together. They were, they married each other and my wife was, stood up for them and I stood up for them, and then we start going out. And then we got married like a year later. And then we start...

LEVINE: What was it about her that you liked?

FARISHIAN: What was...?

LEVINE: What was it about your wife that you liked?

FARISHIAN: Oh, I came to my mother, I said, mom, she's just like you! (voice breaking)
And my mother was the same way.

LEVINE: What ways were they? What were the ways that they were similar?

FARISHIAN: She, my wife, and my mother, they were so kind-hearted. A woman came, in the Depression days, and asked my mother for \$20. In Depression days that was big money. My mother took \$20 out and handed it to her. A woman that she didn't know, you know? The woman paid her back, eventually. But that's the kind of kindness she has. And my wife, the same way. She does

everything she can. And with little kids, oh! I have six, ah, jigsaw puzzles, you know, like for little kids? From little and up? I have it over there, and I called the girl across the street. She has a two year old. And I said, does your little Joey want jigsaw puzzles? She says, oh sure. I says, I got them like brand new. My wife used to buy it to entertain kids that came here, you know?

LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

FARISHIAN: Victoria. Same as her.

LEVINE: Ah! And what was her maiden name?

FARISHIAN: Her maiden name? Turpanjian.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

FARISHIAN: T-U-R-P-A-N-J-I-A-N. Turpanjian.

LEVINE: Now, had she, had she come also to this country?

FARISHIAN: Oh, no, no, no. She was born here.

LEVINE: She was born here.

FARISHIAN: She was born in um, (thinking) I don't know if it was Union City or Secaucus. One of the two.

LEVINE: And her parents?

FARISHIAN: Her parents, her parents came from the other side. Yes.

LEVINE: They were Armenian?

FARISHIAN: Yes. They're Armenian. Yes.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

FARISHIAN: Do I have? Two. Two boys.

LEVINE: And their names?

FARISHIAN: Their names? This one is Gary, and Richard is the other one. After my father's name.

LEVINE: And, grandchildren?

FARISHIAN: Yes. She's my, little girl, and you know, when she was born, my son and my (pauses) daughter-in-law, had a very hard time. She was born autistic. My wife, my ah, daughter-in-law had a big job in a hospital, big hospital. Head nurse, of all the nurses, and she had to leave her job just to take care of this little girl. She would get down and bang her feet on the floor, and do everything. My son almost lost his mind. He had to leave school for a year. (voice breaking) And then they put her, when she was old enough, they put her in a special school.

LEVINE: Montessori?

FARISHIAN: Disability learning. Learning disabilities. They put her there. And she graduated two and a half years ago. And about six years ago, there wasn't any sign of autism left in her. And she graduated and now she's going to Livingston High School. She's been going there for two and a half years. And look at this, for two and a half years, she's been on high honor role for two and a half years.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful.

FARISHIAN: Isn't that amazing? (voice breaking)

LEVINE: So now this is your only grandchild?

FARISHIAN: No. I have two more in McLean, Virginia. Rhine and Diano. And my son works for the NIH, and they were raised in this town. We've been here 53 years now. 54 years by myself. And they went to the local high school here. And my son went to a collect in, in Michigan, related with Michigan State. And when he graduated, he graduated with honors and he got a full grant to go to University of Penn to get his doctorate. So he got his doctorate from University of Penn, and then he went on research for eight years. Six years on cancer research, two years on genetic engineering. So... Then he says to me one day, he says, I quit my job. I says, why Rich? He says, I'm going back to school. I want to get my MBA. He went to NYU, got his MBA, so he would get into administration. Now, that's what he's in. Administration in NIH. He's deputy director of the planning department of the diabetes and infectious kidney diseases. So, when I had kidney trouble, I went to a doctor and the doctor says, we got to take the kidney out, you got a cancer on it, cancer. There's cancer in your kidney. I says, doctor, let's wait six months and take another ultrasound again. He says, you know, it's liable to take off just like that. He wanted to operate immediately. I said, no. I'm gonna wait. I waited six months, had another ultrasound. Benign. No. It didn't progress. It was exactly the same. And then, for six years I had the ultrasound and it hadn't moved at all. So I sent, and this doctor still insisted the operation. And I sent my records to my son. He knew the biggest head doctor in the

country over there. Where he works. He's in kidney. So the doctor says, tell your father don't let anybody touch his kidneys. I still have it. (laughing)

LEVINE: Ah, you still have the same kidney.

FARISHIAN: Isn't that something? Amazing!

LEVINE: Well, let see. Let's just um, we just have about five minutes so I want to, I want to ask you on the tape about ah, the name you began with.

FARISHIAN: Oh, when we came here, we changed it immediately.

LEVINE: Now, did you change it or was it changed by someone?

FARISHIAN: I don't know. But when we went to school, it was changed immediately to F-A-R-I-S-H-I-A-N. It must have been done by someone who knew something, you know?

LEVINE: Because on the manifest, it's the old way.

FARISHIAN: It's the old way, right. Right.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's see. Is there anything else, just looking back that ah, that you would say about the changes in you and your family after you were here in this country for a little while?

FARISHIAN: Well, the changes are for the better. All the way. I love this country.
(tearfully) I just love this country. And when Lee Iacocca wanted money for Staten, Liberty and Ellis Island...

LEVINE: Ellis.

FARISHIAN: We're members of it. We became members.

LEVINE: And did you grow up religious? Was your family a religious family?

FARISHIAN: Yes. To an extent. I'm more religious now than ever.

LEVINE: Is it the Armenian Orthodox?

FARISHIAN: No. No. We're not Orthodox, we're Apostolic. But, see, I belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, but I don't go there any more because I can't walk. You can't park your car anywhere near there. So I'm going to St. James Episcopal now. We knew the reverend there for 40 years now. And he's such a nice man. He is such a kind person. When my wife was in the

hospital, he came every day to visit her. And he gave us communion four times while we were in the hospital. And she was there two weeks, and she passed away.

LEVINE: When you think of yourself, how do you reconcile American with Armenian? How do you think of those two elements of you?

FARISHIAN: Well, I say, the present Armenians, I don't want to deal with at all. The present Armenians, not here, the present Armenians in Armenia, they have changed. It's not their fault. Because from 1918 to 1922, Armenia had their independence. They were independent. But then, Russia started invading all the countries. Here's Russia up here, and they start invading all the little countries all the way down. Armenia was last. They took Armenia over. And it became Communist. And when it became Communist, the Russians paid monthly or weekly income for their living, and the income was not enough. Six old people would live in one room. And that's how it was. My sister went there and she saw it. And, so, now, the Armenians over there, like the Russians, like all them, became, they became to steal, to, to black market, they did everything. Now, how are we gonna change them? How can I change them? Not in my lifetime, I can't do it. They're trying to do it. Now, you know Kirk Kerkorian, who is ah, ah, the biggest stockholder in Chrysler stocks? He has given \$250 million to Armenia to people who are eligible to start businesses. He doesn't give it right out to them. He has an

office there, and who's eligible, they loan it to them, with very low interest. And whoever succeeds, I guess will pay him back. Whoever doesn't, they won't. But he has gone there and he's built roads to get to certain areas, all mountainous over there. And ah, he has done that. But ah, ah, I say, I don't want to deal with those Armenian people. We have those Armenian people that come from Russia. And most of them are in Los Angeles. And half of them are in jail.

LEVINE: Mm. Mm, hm. It's a different, right...

FARISHIAN: My father and mother came with pride and dignity. They didn't want any handouts. But when I went, to, for my social security, when I was 65, I heard an Armenian family in back of me with their lawyers. How much money they're gonna get. They just came over. Why should we support those people? Why do they take those people in who, can't support themselves. I don't think it's fair. That's why taxes are going up. Up, up, up, up. I don't know what to say. I'm not the judge for it. But my belief is that.

LEVINE: Have you stayed close, in an Armenian community in this country? Or not so much?

FARISHIAN: Well, not that close. No. But we've had Armenian friends, you know. And through the church. See? We made friends and all. At one time we used to

get together and all. But my wife was not able to, about seven or eight years ago, so she couldn't continue. And ah, so...

LEVINE: Okay. Well, the tape is just about over. Is there anything you want to say in closing. Rather quickly.

FARISHIAN: I love America! (laughing)

LEVINE: Thank you very much.

END INTERVIEW