

EI-279

EMMA GABRIEL SOURIAN BABAIAN

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Oral Historian's Note: Mrs. Babaian is the wife of John Babaian, Interview EI-278. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 3/3/1994.

OFLAZIAN: Good afternoon. This is Grace Oflazian for the National Park Service. Today is April 16, 1993, at the home of Mrs. Emma Gabriel Babaian in Franklin Square, New York. I'm here with Mr. Paul Sigrist, Jr., the Director of the Oral History Project, and Mr. Kevin Daley, the recording engineer. Mrs. Babaian is an Armenian who was born in Istanbul, Turkey. She came to the United States when she was nine years old. So why don't we begin to give me your full name and your date of birth, please?

BABAIAN: Emma Gabriel Babaian.

OLFAZIAN: Can you spell it to me?

BABAIAN: E-double M-A. The middle name is Gabriel, G-A-B-R-I-E-L, after my father's name, whom I lost very early. And the last name is B-A-B-A-I-A-N nee Sourian, S-O-U-R-I-A-N. My father, is it proper to say? My father changed his name from Der Aris Takes because "Der" means there is a priest, reflecting on a priesthood. So they, he felt, the family felt that if he carried that name he would be related to a priest, which with the Turk it may have offended or aggravated the situation, since they were living in Turkey.

OLFAZIAN: So how many people you were at home?

BABAIAN: (she sighs) Well, when I was born we, they, we were in a house in a town named Yenikapu, outside of Istanbul. And apparently my father's family had two houses there, a big house and a little house, and we lived in the big house, wherever.

OLFAZIAN: Can you describe the house for me?

BABAIAN: No. I have absolutely no idea.

OLFAZIAN: What was your father's occupation?

BABAIAN: My father was a doctor.

OLFAZIAN: What kind of a doctor?

BABAIAN: Can I go into specifics? He was a venereal doctor, venereal diseases. Because apparently where he first went, I'm assuming as a very, very young child, there was a lot of venereal diseases. No comparison. But there, apparently he must have thought that was very important, so that's what he followed.

OLFAZIAN: Can you talk to me about your mother?

BABAIAN: My mother was a doll.

OLFAZIAN: What was her family name? Her former name?

BABAIAN: Marie Tashjian, and she had three living sisters. They had lost two brothers in between. One had, like, he had fallen into a tonir, and the other brother had fallen out after birth, this was two years old, out of a second floor window. They both died. And there were four living sisters, and they all lived to a ripe old age.

OLFAZIAN: You had how many sisters and brothers?

BABAIAN: I have one sister still living.

OLFAZIAN: What is her name?

BABAIAN: Anahid K-A-D-A-Y-A-N, Kadayan.

OLFAZIAN: Have you ever tried to help your mother cleaning house and cooking?

BABAIAN: OH, I did. That was, it was an impulse. And we were given duties, even as children, even as nine-year-old.

OLFAZIAN: What kind of duties?

BABAIAN: I went to school, uh, well, duties like officially one had to wash the dishes, the other one dried the dishes. And on weekends we cleaned the kitchen floor. And I was nine years old.

OLFAZIAN: Did you go to school?

BABAIAN: Yes. I went to, I went, in Massachusetts. I went to high school. I graduated high school there.

OLFAZIAN: I mean in Istanbul.

BABAIAN: In Istanbul I had just started. I had gone to school for seven months. And what happened, this was after my father was killed. My father was killed when I was seven.

OLFAZIAN: Okay. Can you talk to me about the school, please?

BABAIAN: The school that I attended was I guess local, very local schools, they were. And someone took us some sort of a, I know the man. He held our hands, me and my sister, and took us to school and brought us back again. And my grandfather who was still in, my mother's father, he would go and bring us home. The old man would take us in the morning and my grandfather would bring us home. He had a very pro-German background because as a child he grew up with the intention that was on the European side of Istanbul. And I guess that was expected, with a big beard. And he was in antiques. He dealt in antiques. That's how he brought his children up. They were never wealthy, but they were well off.

OLFAZIAN: Did you graduate from this school?

BABAIAN: No. It, what happened was the houses there in the, in all European countries, they're made of wood. This happened to be an old house. But it was exquisitely beautiful inside. It, we had three floors almost attached, very close to each other. Because that led down to where the ships would dock. And it was more

congested than another area. But still very clean and very exclusive. But this was my oldest aunt's house, as I remember it. Now, this is after my father had been killed, okay. That's the way I want to put it, because prior to that I do not remember, except the story where my father was killed. I'll tell you that later. But we lived in Istanbul about two years. And in the meantime I feel my mother was going to leave there. I can describe the house to you very clearly.

It was a big, a very, very large house, but it was separated. You'd go into the front door and directly on the right was a small sitting room. Then, and then directly in front of you to the right was a kitchen that led down about two, three steps. And this was just a cooking room, because there were people who came and cooked there. I don't think it was my aunt who cooked, because there was a large family, meaning my aunt's family were living there.

OLFAZIAN: So you were living with your aunt.

BABAIAN: Yes, because my father was already killed at this time, when I was about seven, now. This was seven going onto eight. So the kitchen was just enormous. And it's funny that that I don't forget at all

because . . .

OLFAZIAN: Did you have a garden?

BABAIAN: A what?

OLFAZIAN: A garden.

BABAIAN: Oh, yes. But besides that, when you went down the stairs into the kitchen this was a tile floor where they, a cistern and, I think what you call it, where you would, on a rope you would extend the things down if you wanted to keep the food cold. That's what it's for. Then on the right of course there was some sort of enormous black oven. That's all I remember. And that also led into a backyard which, in a small area there were chickens. There was a chicken coop on the right, and there was, then it led further in to an enormous garden, really enormous. With a center fountain, I'm assuming, with a fence around it. So that much I remember. And then to the right there was enormous walnut trees. I've never seen the top of it. I was too little.

OLFAZIAN: Besides the walnut tree, what kind of other fruit trees?

BABAIAN: Oh, I can tell you those, too. To the right there was, besides, to the left is where the fruit trees were, and then there was a very high wall, about eight or ten feet, maybe more.

OLFAZIAN: What kind of fruits?

BABAIAN: There were big, black plums. And there was a green plum that they used only for as lemon, because their lemon was very, very expensive. I don't think, perhaps there wasn't even any lemon there. And on the wall on the left there was a grapevine, and there was apricots. But to the right there was a little section that tapered off from the garden, which was also below, had high walls. And there an enormous walnut tree, enormous. I remember that because my first cousin, in other words my aunt's older son, they had a son and a daughter, would go up on the tree, and then would throw these raw green nuts down. And that made an impression on me. And I was sent over where there was parsley and different condiments and different things to the right where I would go and pick that towards the afternoon for the food for the evening.

OLFAZIAN: Did you go to church in Istanbul? Armenian church?

BABAIAN: I do not remember going to church, no. Because I think there was just too many things that were happening around me that I don't remember. I went to school, and until there was a fire. There was a fire and the whole town burned.

OLFAZIAN: What kind of fire? In Istanbul?

BABAIAN: Oh, yes, yes.

OLFAZIAN: Like an arson, purposely was done, or just an accident?

BABAIAN: No. Because there was, everyone had a, if there were ever a fire it would be someone, you'd have to have your own firemen because otherwise there was no way of saving the house. Apparently the top caught fire, but the whole, the whole area was burned down to the bottom, and it was never built. That area was never built, because . . .

OLFAZIAN: What happened to your house?

BABAIAN: Everything, down to the bottom.

OLFAZIAN: How did you manage, then, to live?

BABAIAN: I just remember that when it started burning my

grandfather was still alive at the time. He says, "Come, come, now. We have to go." And we, they called them phaeton, phaeton, I think. They're wagons. They have, I think, one horse. And they have a cover on top that's hard. It's larger than just the one horse wagon. It's much larger. And we got onto that, and we just had to go away.

OLFAZIAN: So where did you go?

BABAIAN: Oh, this was in the town of Uskudar is where we lived previously, where the fire was. And . . .

OLFAZIAN: Was it close to Istanbul, Uskudar?

BABAIAN: It was all a part of Istanbul.

OLFAZIAN: A part of Istanbul.

BABAIAN: Well, there's a, this was on the side of the bridge. I don't remember that much.

OLFAZIAN: Can you describe Uskudar for me?

BABAIAN: Outside of going to school and coming back I remember very, very little. I don't even remember my friends there, because we're family, just by ourselves.

OLFAZIAN: So you didn't go to school in Uskudar?

BABAIAN: I went for seven or eight months. And we would learn both Armenian and French. That's how I got my first ABC's.

OLFAZIAN: You did not learn Turkish over there?

BABAIAN: No. Not at the time. Not when we were there. Not 1922.

OLFAZIAN: And you said you were, your father was killed.

BABAIAN: My father was killed. That's why we were in Istanbul. Because, we have to go back to the war. When my, when there was independence in Armenia, and they're, supposedly the World Peace was going to be signed. Supposedly, this was all on paper. And of course Wilson had no doubt. He was honest in his feeling.

OLFAZIAN: Winston Churchill.

BABAIAN: No, no, I said Wilson. We're talking about 1918, okay. My father, and I have all his mail here in Armenian, that we were coming to Kars. Because after World War he, since Armenia was independent, we were going to be the first ones to be there, okay? So he

wrote "I am making arrangements. Just bring this, bring this, bring this." Meaning everything that we could possibly bring, including sugar. There was no sugar in Armenia, in Russia. So, oh, my father, whatever his, the things were, a blanket, anything you could imagine, furniture, too. We went to Kars, Armenia. I remember a lot in detail of the house, and I remember the location. Because the transit, I remember also, from Istanbul. Because we took, all I know in the beginning, we took a boat. The boat was not an enormous boat. And, of course, this I don't remember that much, because it's just what mother related, that it was very, the water in the black sea is very, very rough, and the only thing that we had to eat all those weeks that we may have been crossing the Black Sea, I don't know the distance, was just dry toast, a certain kind of dry toast they called galita, which was only for that purpose. Well, the rest, we must have gotten to Batum, because this is all I can remember. We went straight to Batum, I am assuming, from Istanbul. And from Batum across Georgia, the most ridiculously old train rails you could possibly imagine, which had been used for transportation of the cattle and the horses, so just picture from that. And

we set up whatever we could on our own after we got off the boat, which I don't know how long that took. Across to Batum. From Batum we went to Kars. But that transit was across Georgia, because I seem to remember Batum and Tiflis, I remember. Now, how we got to Kars was another train, a most decrepid thing. And every few miles they would stop and fix the track and then go on again.

OLFAZIAN: How old you were, then?

BABAIAN: At that time I was about seven. See, my sister doesn't remember. She was eighteen months younger than I. But those things I remember. Maybe I just wanted to see what was happening.

OLFAZIAN: After you came to Kars, to Armenia, then what happened?

BABAIAN: That was a very flat area where, I remember where we, the truck, an army truck picked us up there. And very level.

OLFAZIAN: Was that the Armenian Army?

BABAIAN: That was Kars. That was Kars. And I know that we first took the boat from Turkey, and we took a long

rail trip. And from Kars there were American soldiers too, because I seem to remember one or two who spoke in English. My father spoke most every language that there is to be spoke.

OLFAZIAN: So you accompanied with your parents.

BABAIAN: My father, my mother, yes. And we got to, uh, we got to Kars and I was depressed.

OLFAZIAN: Why you were depressed?

BABAIAN: Because of the, it was on top of a mountain, the house was beautiful. The heating system, which was, I am assuming, expressly either rented or, for us. And we were right next door to the what do they call it? Protestant missionaries. They had quite a large place. And I don't remember where the orphanage was. See, because my father was sent there to take care of the orphans. And there were, I think, about three or four other doctors. I think there were about five. I don't recall. I only know the Armenian doctor, whose name was Iscanderia. That's the only one I recall. And I don't recall, he had two children, but I don't recall. And he, okay. All right. This was his job. He was going to take care of the orphans. Like the

other doctors, there were two American doctors, and the other doctors' name I don't recall. One was a Mr. White and one was a Mr. Fox. I don't know how long we stayed there for. I don't know how long we stayed there. I don't recall. History tells you exactly how long, when the Turks invaded. But the way we lived it was very comfortable. Then one day my father had gone to the hospital and we see his horse is back. At that time they used to have someone who took care of the horse while the one who was riding the horse would go where he had to go and the other man would watch. When the horse came back by himself my mother said, "There's something wrong." So then we see it a while later. My father came, completely bare, except an army blanket wrapped around him. And apparently he must have dressed. He says, "Hurry, hurry!" he says to my mother, "Make some bread. We shall have to leave." Then he goes to the, where the kitchen window, and he goes and he shows us across the, there was a ravine, a river but way, way deep right across the street from where we lived. And it was very deep. Maybe, I would say, at least fifty, maybe a hundred, maybe two hundred feet. And this river would be frozen the whole winter, and in the

winter time they would have the Russian music there and they would ice skate to the music. Across the river I see my father's pointing at a lot of horses and soldiers running away, obviously. Some, what I recall is someone was, one of the soldiers, there was no horses. Apparently some were running, and I see this man holding onto the horse's tail so he'd go along with the group. All right. That was supposed to be the Armenian Army that was fleeing, okay? Which you cannot blame, because that's the way it was. They had no ammunition to fight, and what else were they going to do? They were not expecting anything. What had happened that the Turks had come. There was a small narrow area of a road that led into Kars and that is where they had entered. There were, the Russians tried to fight, because I recall someone saying that, and there wasn't any way of fighting them. So my father said, "I have to go to the hospital." There were two hundred orphans in the hospital. I am assuming they were all there. Now, the other doctors lived. I have heard that a stray bullet came through the wall or through the window, I don't know. Hit him in the groin and he told the other doctors, "You cannot save me. The bladder was

punctured." So we never saw him. But I do recall that one of the other doctors came back and he said, "This is what has happened, and there's no sense in letting Marie," my mother's name, "going to see him, because it's useless, and then you'll be caught in the fire, in the crossfire." Anyway, he died. He was buried there. What is surprising that, you know, you don't think about things until many years pass. We were taken by the missionaries. In fact, my mother, the only thing my mother ever saved was a bag, an old bag, with whatever valuables she had, and this went to the missionaries where we were safe, fortunately, because the American flag was flying there. So the soldiers didn't get to us. They came to the fence. You know, all these old houses had very high fences. They came, the soldiers came to the fence, the Turkish soldiers, trying to get to us, and my mother threw this bag that she had with everything that she had in the world and, "Get out of there." Went, they didn't touch us, apparently. And we went to the missionary and we stayed there, but, you know, children are very inquisitive. I had to look out. I had to see what was happening around me. It wasn't, even though we were told, "Just stay away," what did we have to eat.

I don't recall eating anything except a piece of, a beet, and I remember a piece of meat that even my teeth could not break apart. At any rate, that was, I don't know how many days passed after that. We stayed with the missionaries, and one day I had to see what was happening outside. I heard noises. I look out, here's an army truck and you know what they're putting into the army truck? From the top, the hospital was very large, and they used to have enormous bathtubs, true bathtubs, like we have here. Very large, to help the children, a number of children take their bath at the same time. And what I'm seeing from the windows is these bodies being thrown into a truck from above.

That made an impression on me, because I, they didn't feel like bodies to me. There must have been pieces of something or another. But I know that every one of those orphans were killed. I don't know how many, but I have heard two hundred. Maybe more, maybe less, I don't know.

OLFAZIAN: These were Armenian orphans?

BABAIAN: These were Armenian orphans. My father had been sent there, because we had, my father had an established office in . . .

OLFAZIAN: How did you manage to get out from that situation?

BABAIAN: Some of the doctors did go to, and the missionary. There were two missionaries, Dr. White and Dr. Fox, a Mr. Fox. They stayed with us at the mission. And they feel after a while, it was towards spring. I remember that, because the top of the mountains were still snowing, but there were flowers down slope, further there were flowers. And we had a wagon. I don't know where the wagon came from, but a good clean horse, a strong horse. And we had, they found the one wagon. So both the husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. White and Mr. and Mrs. Fox came with us. Most of the time I had to walk. My sister was small and she couldn't walk through the snow. But the paths that the horses made we followed, and that way, in transit. We stopped in different places with the animals, slept with the animals. And we got all the way down to Tiflis. Now, Tiflis is a, and then from Tiflis to Batum. I think Batum is where we took, we were going to take a boat. I guess we knew, they were forewarned, they found that, the dinner, of course. We didn't have much food there. But then they put us on a boat to go back to Istanbul.

OLFAZIAN: So you went to Istanbul.

BABAIAN: We went to Istanbul, stayed there about another six, as I say, from 1920 to '22, eighteen or maybe twenty months, twenty-four months. There were problems there. After the fire we had to go elsewhere until time we got out our visas to come here. My mother had no choice. No one would work in Istanbul. Not a doctor's wife. She had no choice. She had to work, so she had to come to America.

OLFAZIAN: Weren't you scared going back to Istanbul to a Turkish neighborhood?

BABAIAN: A child doesn't have fears as long as you have someone who is there, you know, for you. You can't fear.

OLFAZIAN: So how long did you wait to get your visa?

BABAIAN: Well, all I know is that by September 1922 we arrived here.

OLFAZIAN: How did you arrive? How did you manage to get from Istanbul?

BABAIAN: The boat's name was Acropolis, and . . .

OLFAZIAN: Was it a Greek boat?

BABAIAN: It was a Greek boat, yeah.

OLFAZIAN: So where did you take the boat?

BABAIAN: From Istanbul. What part of Istanbul, I don't remember the port. I don't know. It was a long way. I don't know. Perhaps I'd forgotten, but I thought it was a long trip. And we were all, I was the only one who wasn't sick. My mother was sick constantly.

OLFAZIAN: We are going to pause for a few minutes while Kevin flips the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

OLFAZIAN: This is Grace Olfazian. We are resuming now the interview on Side B with Mrs. Babaian. Mrs. Babaian, you just told us that you took the boat from Istanbul to come to America. Can you describe the boat for me, please?

BABAIAN: Our level was clean. It was first grade, I think they called it, so our food was good, too.

OLFAZIAN: What kind of food did they serve?

BABAIAN: Honestly, they were fancy things.

OLFAZIAN: Like what?

BABAIAN: Oh, God. I honestly don't remember. I always had a good appetite, and everything was just beautiful, just beautifully handled, but I don't recall any of the food at all.

OLFAZIAN: Where did you sleep?

BABAIAN: We had bunks, two on one side. And since my mother's sister, middle sister, was coming, was also with us, and there were several other Armenians, they were not the only ones. There were teenage boys and different people I remember. So I'm assuming that we, I don't know how we bunked with the five of us. Because my mother, my sister, I and my aunt would make four, right? Four. But I recall that my aunt was also with us, although she does not, she hasn't said that. She thinks she was in steerage. I don't know.

OLFAZIAN: Did you play with these kids in the boat?

BABAIAN: I was very active. I loved to be all over the boat. Not my sister, at that time, but I was, and I did not

get sick at all. So I was sort of overseeing the others. My mother was sick, my aunt was sick, and my sister was sick.

OLFAZIAN: Do you have any anecdotes to tell us?

BABAIAN: Not on the boat. There were a lot of roaches, if that means anything. (she laughs) Yeah, it was not clean.

OLFAZIAN: How long did the voyage took, please?

BABAIAN: I am, now, there's a disagreement here, because I can't tell you. I, at least seven days. But I have lost all contact of time, and really I think it was much more than that, because we're talking from Istanbul. We're not talking from France, you know. So I feel twenty-eight days. Now, whether it was so or not, I don't know. I really don't.

OLFAZIAN: So you crossed the Mediterranean, and then Gilbraltar, and then . . .

BABAIAN: Yes, yes, yes. It was a very slow boat. Very rough, very rough water.

OLFAZIAN: When the boat arrived to New York, what was your

feeling?

BABAIAN: What I felt then and what I feel today are two different things. Because to me, at that time, I was awed. And I remember being pointed out the Statue of Liberty, and I thought this is beautiful. But I was more interested in our, after our landing, and I was up and down those stairs to Ellis Island, that was more fascinating to me.

OLFAZIAN: How did you get to Ellis Island?

BABAIAN: You see, I don't remember that. I don't remember. All I knew was "Where am I going?" You know, this was so different?

OLFAZIAN: Was it crowded, Ellis Island?

BABAIAN: Terribly, terribly. But, and I remember there was food there, but I don't recall exactly how long. I think we were there about a month.

OLFAZIAN: Where did you sleep?

BABAIAN: The cots, I remember, they were like cots, they were. Two-level cots, I think. And on, I am awed. I don't know if I should say this towards the end, I am awed

at America. Because even as young as I was, I didn't recall the fact that we were in America. I am thinking, "Well, my mother is free." That's all she was thinking. My mother was free. And, you know, it's funny. I mean, this is just within. You feel a psychological feeling that just pushes you. We were subservient to my family on the other side, and my father, my father like that, "Why should we have gone through this?" And that pushed me. From the day I was born that pushed me. I could not feel, why should my mother have to go through this, a doctor's wife. And it wasn't fair to her. And I felt that from the beginning.

OLFAZIAN: So why did you stay in Ellis Island?

BABAIAN: I don't remember, you know, like little benches. They were clean. They were like stalls, they were.

OLFAZIAN: Okay. I understood that. But what was the major reason that you stood . . .

BABAIAN: That's why I can't recall whether, why was it, did we stay that long. I don't recall that it should have been that long.

OLFAZIAN: Did you go to the medical examination?

BABAIAN: The first thing that they checked there, "Oh, you're coming from the East?" Your eyes. They have to make sure, because there used to be an eye disease that came from the middle west, the middle east there, that was very prevalent and everyone had it. No, we didn't have any problems. Maybe that's why we didn't have to stay long. I don't remember that.

OLFAZIAN: Was there anybody in Ellis Island or . . .

BABAIAN: That we knew?

BABAIAN: That you knew, or anybody came to welcome you in Ellis Island?

BABAIAN: I don't even recall who brought us out of there. Because when we got off the boat my uncle, my grand uncle, my grandfather's brother, who lived in New York City, was the one in whose name we came.

OLFAZIAN: So you were with your aunt, your mother, your sister, right?

BABAIAN: Yes. At that time, yes. Yes, because she wasn't married, my aunt wasn't married until later. And we

did stay two months in New York City.

OLFAZIAN: How did you go? Where did you go to in New York City?

BABAIAN: Oh, this is my uncle's, my mother's uncle.

OLFAZIAN: So your mother's uncle came from Ellis Island?

BABAIAN: He must have, he must have. I don't recall that.

OLFAZIAN: So do you recall how did you get to his house?

BABAIAN: Subway.

OLFAZIAN: The subway.

BABAIAN: Yeah. Nobody had cars then.

OLFAZIAN: Do you remember how the subway looked like in those days?

BABAIAN: At that time, no. I don't remember it. No. I remember it being clean long afterwards when I went to work. No. Everything was a surprise. Everything was just shocking. But it was clean where they lived. But we didn't stay there too long. My uncle's wife . . .

OLFAZIAN: How many rooms did he have?

BABAIAN: They had a small apartment.

OLFAZIAN: How many rooms?

BABAIAN: They had five rooms, and after two months being there my uncle's wife, whom I call aunt, came one day to my mother. And she said, "You know," she said, "I rent these rooms for five dollars." She says, "You can't stay here any more." Okay. Well, so I had another aunt, my mother's sister was married earlier on to a, my uncle. They were very generous. And he said, "You're going to come over here. Where else are you going?" So we went to Massachusetts and we lived there.

OLFAZIAN: The three of you.

BABAIAN: The three of us. I don't remember, I don't recall my aunt coming there with us, but she was married a while later. So she might have stayed with my uncle. I don't know.

OLFAZIAN: Where in Massachusetts?

BABAIAN: Lynn. I went to, I finished high school there.

OLFAZIAN: What was the name of the high school?

BABAIAN: Lynn English High School. We had a nice, very comfortable. And my uncle was extremely generous, although she, don't forget . . .

OLFAZIAN: What was his family?

BABAIAN: Antreasian, their last name. Their son is still living. He's about sixty-five, no, sixty. Sixty, sixty-two. And we're still very friendly. But I, we stayed there, the whole family. My mother worked interim.

OLFAZIAN: Did you get to visit them?

BABAIAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

OLFAZIAN: Did you continue your education?

BABAIAN: Well, I finished high school there. I said I would come to New York and continue my education here. I went to, where did I go?

MR. BABAIAN: Hunter.

BABAIAN: I went to Hunter for two-and-a-half years, but I was not matriculated. So I could not possibly do what I wanted to do, which was medicine. So I settled for writing, which I never pursued. Then I met him.

OLFAZIAN: Did you work?

BABAIAN: Oh, yes. I worked for a lot of places.

OLFAZIAN: What kind of places?

BABAIAN: My first job was stock girl in Bonwit Teller. My second job was Bergdorf Goodman, in dressmaking. But I knew I wasn't going to stay there.

OLFAZIAN: Did you sew as dressmaker?

BABAIAN: Yes, yes. And then I had a job under Mr. Hike, telephone operator, which I did not enjoy. So I eventually got married. That's it. (they laugh)

OLFAZIAN: Okay. So would you like to say something, Mr. Babaian?

MR. BABAIAN: She wanted to be a doctor, but she's still the doctor. She studies this every day, argues with the doctors.

BABAIAN: Oh, yes. I'm a doctor.

MR. BABAIAN: She tells the doctors what to do, and sometimes they agree with her.

BABAIAN: That's right.

OLFAZIAN: Wonderful. That's great.

BABAIAN: Oh, I've been very active. Let's just say so far this is my story, that my, they surprised me in one of our groups that is not, it's nothing important.

OLFAZIAN: Did you write this? Did you write this?

BABAIAN: No, my daughter wrote it for me, and they were all present at the presentation of, honorary presentation, at a dinner.

OLFAZIAN: What was the occasion?

BABAIAN: Shall I tell them?

MR. BABAIAN: Yeah, sure. Why not?

BABAIAN: Daughters of Vartan. Brotherhood. Brotherhood, yeah.

OLFAZIAN: Where it happened?

BABAIAN: In New York. Ani Otyag Lodge here in New York. And we were, I was astounded. It's nice. I mean, not because I am worthy of it, but it's nice that people do things sometimes, that you worked with something and you really, superficially it's not an

accomplishment, but internally you feel you have affected one or two people. That is something.

OLFAZIAN: It's wonderful. That's great. So they honored you that day.

BABAIAN: They honored me. I was surprised. I was really surprised.

OLFAZIAN: And the Daughters of Vartan. Wonderful.

BABAIAN: I haven't worked with them long, because I was much more interested in the Armenian school and the church. Because you don't instill anything in anyone. They first have to accept it.

OLFAZIAN: You still follow the activities in the church?

BABAIAN: Yes, but I don't do anything any more. Not physically I don't, and I don't do it.

OLFAZIAN: Can you tell me how the Armenians celebrate Christmas in America?

BABAIAN: We still go through the motions.

OLFAZIAN: Okay. Mrs. Babaian, can you continue?

BABAIAN: Well, Christmas we celebrate because we feel it from

our hearts. But when it comes to actually celebrating I do, I celebrate our Christmas. But don't forget there's two generations, and those have affected a lot. We don't go through, other nations still stick to the same origins. We go to church on the proper days and we celebrate, and we still go, even during the week, if the holidays come during the week, we still go. But outside of that, we don't. We give gifts, and that's about all. And I have written. I want to tell you, I have written for my grandchildren and my children, different things that I feel are important. It's not important whether you, different things I've written. It's not important that you live the way your parents lived, but it is good to remember your backgrounds regardless of what you are today. You are going to marry a non-Armenian. That's okay with me. But make sure you don't forget what your background was. And make that tell you that there's a lot of things that you did, you weren't aware of, that you are now, and you can have that history help you for your future. I mean, my grandchildren's future. And I feel that at some, one time or another that comes back to you.

OLFAZIAN: Have you ever managed to raise up your children in Armenian traditions?

BABAIAN: I have never, tradition, yes. Tradition, yes. Religion, yes. Culture, yes. But I have never influenced them who they were going to marry. Never. I have never said you should, because all my four children married non-Armenians. That has never bothered me. I have three very good children, and I call them children because they, one hasn't turned out right after fifteen years. But that's also, I mean it takes two to tango. So I don't blame that on anyone.

OLFAZIAN: So what about their children, your grandchildren, what do you think?

BABAIAN: They're, I am not going to say anything, because I think that children have to be a certain age before they will have opinions. I don't think it's fair because all through the growing period they're, they're going to change a hundred times. It's not because that's their characteristics, it's just that they're, at that specific time they're going through a lot of changes that will reflect them later. That's the point.

OLFAZIAN: So are you happy that you are being in America?

BABAIAN: I love America. And as long as I breathe, and I don't, it's not, it's not the way people are today. Because we came because we had to find a place to live and grow, and I've tried all I can to make that grow important. And I haven't seen it. I have seen it in my children. My grandchildren are much too young. My oldest granddaughter, I see her that, she's good, she's good. She's good. I'm not going to say she's Armenian, but she knows the background is there.

OLFAZIAN: As long as there is a root, Armenian root, over there.

BABAIAN: That's all. That's all you can do.

OLFAZIAN: This coming Sunday is Mrs. Babaian's birthday. She was born on April 18, 1993. Happy birthday.

BABAIAN: 1913, '13. Thank you. (they laugh) I'm glad I'm just . . .

OLFAZIAN: I thank you so much for your precious time and your wonderful story you shared with us, we shared with you. This is Grace Olfazian signing off with Mrs. Babaian for the National Park Service.