

EI-487

JOSEPH (YOUSIF) BAKERIAN
BIRTH DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 1902
INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 2, 1994
RUNNING TIME: 1:01:24
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: TROY, NEW YORK
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 8/1998

TURKEY (ARMENIAN), 1922	RESIDENCE: AINTAB
AGE 20	US RESIDENCE: ALBANY/TROY, NY
PASSAGE ON "THE LEOPOLDINA"	PORT: BEIRUT/MARSEILLES

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National
Park Service, Ellis Island Museum. Today is
Saturday, July 2nd, 1994. I'm in Troy, New York,
with Joe Bakerian.

BAKERIAN: That's the boy. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Mr. Bakerian is an Armenian, came from Turkey, came
to America in 1922 and he was twenty years old when
he came. Anyway, Mr. Bakerian, thank you for
letting me come out and talk to you. Can we begin
by you giving me your birth date?

BAKERIAN: Birth date? 1902, February 20.

SIGRIST: That's right. February 20th, 1902. And what, what town in Turkey were you born in, please?

BAKERIAN: Aintab, Turkey.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that again, please?

BAKERIAN: A-I-N-T-A-B.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about that town? What did the town look like when you were growing up?

BAKERIAN: In the town?

SIGRIST: In Turkey, yeah, what did the town look like?

BAKERIAN: Well, it was all right except the Turks, you know. They massacred us 1915. They came in the house. They asked my father's name and, "You better move out in twenty four hours." Where are we going to go? Where are we going to go? So we get out the following morning. They gave us two donkeys

to put our, anything we could put it on, you
know. So, we traveled. We traveled. They
haven't got no train there. And then we went to
some place, there's a, they call it Agjagoyan
[ph].

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BAKERIAN: Agjagoyan [ph] So, there's a big (Jewish?), you
know, not big (Jewish?), just, anyway, my
grandfather,uh, (correcting himself) my
grandmother was lame. We put her on the donkey.
And when the donkey gets in the water, they don't
like. You got to push, you know. Then you got
the other side. And then you got to wait until
train comes. The train came and we get in it. I
don't know how many wagons was, you know, open, open
wagon. Just like cattle they put in, you know.

Anyway, we went to Aleppo, Syria. From Syria, to
Damascus, Syria. From there on, (Dura?). (he coughs)
(Dura?) is rough place. The last stop of the train.
And then they, we get off. We start to walk. We
stayed there overnight in the street. And we
went to, they take us to Arabia. We walk but my

grandmother they give the donkey again, you know.
 (he coughs) And we walk. We were seven in the
 family. Only I'm left. My mother died in my arm in
 Shefmaskin [ph]. That's in Syria. And my father
 died in Arabia, in Arabia. The town is named, is
 (Saudi?). First we were up in someplace that
 Moses put his cane on the rock. That's the place we
 were, you know. The boulder came out. It's still
 there (?) that time. I don't know how it is now.
 So, we stayed there. And then they take us to
 some village. You can't stay over there because
 it's wide open unless there's a tent. And we went to
 (Saudi?) village. There was only, there was only
 five, fifteen family, Christian. They are Greek
 Orthodox. And it was on Sunday we hear the ring,
 ding, ding. "What's that?" My grandmother doesn't,
 no, my grandmother died on the way, on the road.
 So we put her down someplace and my father and
 somebody else, they helped with, dump, dump it
 there. And, yeah, (?) and my father was very
 good Christian and he start to cross. And then we
 went to church. It was holiday, must be. We went
 to church and we start to cross and pray, you
 know. And the priest came in. His name is

Horay [ph] Abdullah. I never forget that name. He
was a good man. So, "Oh, what's your name?" "My
name is Yousif." Yousif, you know, in that book
(gesturing to some family documents), the writing
Turk, Turks, in Turkey they called me Yousif.

SIGRIST: How do you spell Yousif?

BAKERIAN: Just like Joseph. (exploding fireworks can be heard
outside in the background of the recording). Hey,
don't start today. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: They're starting the firecrackers early, I think.

BAKERIAN: Y-O-U-S--, Yousif...

SIGRIST: (referring to the family documents) I'll check it in
the book.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so anyway, you're in the church.

BAKERIAN: So, we went to church, except they don't know

anything about us. We say we are Armenians. Well, Armenians, "Erman? Erman? [ph]," they called it Erman [ph]. "Yes, Erman [ph]," Arabic, you know. (he laughs) So, we stayed there about, uh, I would say, until my father start to go someplace else. Anyway, I was only that high. (he gestures) And we lost the mother. We lost the father. We lost my big sister. When I say big sister, you know, she was born after me. And my little sister, we were, uh, the mountain, what was the mountain? I forget, you know. (he laughs) Oh, before you go up the mountain, there was a brook, a little nice brook. And my little sister just started to say, "Mama, mama, mama," and start to walk a little bit, and she died over there. Me and my brother, (?) hand, honest to God I raise my hand. We had, we open the place that big (he gestures) right by that border. And then my father and my brother left, all gone. And we came back to old place. All this, Alhamba [ph] they call it, that big mountain.

SIGRIST: What was the name?

BAKERIAN: Alhamba [ph].

SIGRIST: Alhamba [ph].

BAKERIAN: (correcting Mr. Sigrist) Alhamba. [ph] So, it was nice place. But my father fall off of the camel and broke the leg because they were to pick up, the people there, they got to cut the trees from the orchard from the, anyway, he broke the leg and came back to old place.

SIGRIST: The place that you left from in Turkey?

BAKERIAN: The place, no.

SIGRIST: No.

BAKERIAN: Back to church.

SIGRIST: Oh, back to the place with the church.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, (Saudi?) And we stayed there. And my father died in the, died chicken coop. And we were sleeping in the shop, they called it bakery. We

used to call it bakery shop, but they were at
small place and they make, they make bread. And we
used to, me and my brother, we sleep over there
on the floor, nothing on us. I didn't even have
pants, pants, you know, just like a shirt.
Anyway, we stayed there. But this Horay [ph]
Abdullah, he gave us a chance to work. You know
what we were doing? He was, he had, uh, what
they call that? You don't have to leave any animal,
go to the, uh, in the...

SIGRIST: Like an animal cage of some sort or...

BAKERIAN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Like a cage for the animals?

BAKERIAN: No, no, just animals, the donkeys or horses and,
because they had to, they going to, to the,
growing the wheat, you know...

SIGRIST: Like a farm of some sort.

BAKERIAN: Farm, farm, yeah, like a farm. You don't have to

leave animal, go over there. And now me and my
brother, nobody else. (he laughs) I'm going to
tell you something. Don't laugh. My brother, he
was sleeping under the apple, (correcting
himself, uh, the fig tree, sleeping daytime. It's
hot. We never see the hot water to take a bath or
anything, you know. So, you know what fall down
from the, one big honey. (he gestures and laughs)

SIGRIST: Ooh, a bee hive.

BAKERIAN: Bee, bee hive, yeah. Just big one, right on his
head. (he laughs) And that's it. And then 1918
came. They start the airplane come from, I don't
know where they were coming. They were British and
Germans are running. You can, you can give
German soldiers loaf of bread if you have it. You
got one good (he coughs) gun. And then they start
go all the way down to (Dura?) they start the
bombing, English, British.

SIGRIST: This is during World War One.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, 1918. After that 1918, we came, we went from

there, me and my brother, back to where we came from. Not, not Aintab because we had an aunt in Aleppo, Syria. But first Damascus. But anyway, to cut the long story short, he came first.

SIGRIST: Your brother came first?

BAKERIAN: Yeah, my brother came first because my uncles over here, they sent five, five thousand, yeah, five thousand dollars that time they were in the business, to bring all the Bakerians. I'm in the orphanage. (he laughs) I'm in the orphanage, (?) orphanage.

SIGRIST: Were both you and your brother in the orphanage before he was brought to...

BAKERIAN: No, he didn't go. He just went right from Aleppo.

SIGRIST: I see. And then you were put in the orphanage.

BAKERIAN: And then my aunt put me in the orphanage. And I stayed in the orphanage until I came to this

country.

SIGRIST: Well, let's back up a little bit to before the
massacre. What do you remember about your life
before the massacre, before you left Aintab?

BAKERIAN: Well,...

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

BAKERIAN: Yeah, we have the one house. The rain comes, the
rain come in and drip in the house. (he laughs) And
my mother used to put pan under wherever it
comes, you know what I mean?

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

BAKERIAN: Just, just like a clay, you know. You had one
family, one family house. Small, just a small, and
two rooms. One on here there (he gestures) and one
here, you know. Two rooms. Where you going to
sleep? But the other room, my father rented it to
a couple, married. (he laughs) And, after the war,
I went back to Aintab. They bring us from

Aleppo. We were under the tent. We came, they sent us to Aleppo (correcting himself), uh, Aintab. Then we were sent over there and that was it. My number was five hundred and twelve orphan boys. All boys. Then, when we went over there, it comes, my number came out to six, six hundred. And over there we went, I had a cousin in Aintab. Every Sunday he come and pick me up to go his house and have dinner with them. So anyway, it was nice. Nice climate. Nice fruit. Everything is fresh.

SIGRIST: What kinds of foods did people eat in Turkey? What, what kinds of foods did you eat?

BAKERIAN: Mostly grapes, figs, apricot, that's it.

SIGRIST: What kinds of foods would your mother have prepared?

BAKERIAN: Food?

SIGRIST: What kinds of things would be cooked? What kinds of foods would you cook?

BAKERIAN: What kinds? I cook over here, yes.

SIGRIST: But I mean, what did she cook?

BAKERIAN: What did she cook?

SIGRIST: Before the massacre, what did your mother cook for
you in the house? What did people eat other than
fruit?

BAKERIAN: Yeah. We eat whole wheat, grind, you know.

SIGRIST: Like bulgur wheat?

BAKERIAN: Yeah, whole wheat, grind, but it was cooked, you
know, and dried up. I'll show you something. (he
starts to get up)

SIGRIST: Oh, no, no, that's all right. We'll look later.
We'll look a little bit later.

BAKERIAN: (he laughs) yeah, so, she make anything. She make
eggplant with the meat, you know what I mean, and
she make everything.

SIGRIST: Was there a stove or some fireplace in the house to
cook on?

BAKERIAN: No, just, uh, fires. We say fireplace. That's all.
We burn the wood or coal, wood, coal, you know,
that's all.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

BAKERIAN: Hovanes.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

BAKERIAN: John.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Hovanes.

BAKERIAN: Yes, Hovanes.

SIGRIST: How would you spell that? Do you know?

BAKERIAN: H-O-N-E-S [sic, Hovanes]

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living in Turkey?

BAKERIAN: Well, he was, uh, he was labor, you know. And then my brother start high school. He get a job in some merchant's office. And my father working now for the merchant. You know what they sell it? They send over this country chest--, uh, pistachio nuts.

SIGRIST: Pistachio nuts.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, it was coming from our hometown, from Aintab. Each one like this. (he gestures) They selling it in here, what, nothing, no good.

SIGRIST: So after your brother got the job with this merchant, then your father got a job with this merchant.

BAKERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like? What was he like as a person?

BAKERIAN: Well, he was, he was young, got married, I think he

was, uh, my mother, at thirteen.

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

BAKERIAN: I don't know. You know how they met? They were living, I don't know, they were living over, this house and the wall is build up from rough stones. You can see. And my father got nice voice, too. And she, he's looking from this window and she, I mean this home and the girl looking from (he laughs), you know. And one day his (unintelligible), friends, they go out and get drunk. And my father is only seventeen. And my aunt, two aunts, you know, and he got a nice voice, and three friends, they, his name (?) start to drink, you know. (unintelligible) And he start to sing.

Right from here you can here the (?). And my aunt says, "I told you don't drink and now you're drinking and you're singing in the street." And the two aunts, they take (he makes a slapping sound), there, bang (he makes a slapping sound), "You want to do it again?" Now, they were going to go see the girl, you know, for him. "Oh, no, no, no. Not again, not again." Now, next week (?) they having another

party. (he laughs) They hit him with the board.
(he laughs) That's the one thing, they called
(us?), you know what I mean? But in this country,
now, they say twenty five years old, oh, she's too
old. Over there, he ain't got no job. Then he
got the job in my time. So, we were happy.

SIGRIST: So, your mother was thirteen when she married your
father.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

BAKERIAN: Mary.

SIGRIST: Do you know what her maiden name was?

BAKERIAN: Yeah, Mary, Mary.

SIGRIST: Do you know what her last name was before she was
married?

BAKERIAN: (he pauses) Her name was, uh, what was her name?

Oh....

SIGRIST: Well, maybe it will be come back to you later.

BAKERIAN: You, you, you asked me something that (he coughs)...

SIGRIST: What was your mother like as a person?

BAKERIAN: Oh she was, she was very quiet lady, she was, but
good Christian.

SIGRIST: What did she look like? If you had to describe her
in words.

BAKERIAN: (gesturing) Right there is the picture, over there.

SIGRIST: Right, but try to describe it for the tape, what she
looked like in words.

BAKERIAN: She looks pretty nice, very nice.

SIGRIST: What was her size? Was she...

BAKERIAN: Her size? About four and a half, five. My father

was taller than you are.

SIGRIST: And you said that she was a very religious woman.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me, tell me some of the things that she did that made her religious.

BAKERIAN: Well, she didn't have no education but she goes to church every time, every Sunday. And my grandmother, too. And matter of fact, our ancestors came from Armenia, now real Armenia now, now we have the presence, uh, president now. I mean, our ancestors came right from Armenia, in Turkey.

SIGRIST: Now, the grandmother that you're talking about, is that the lame grandmother that went with you?

BAKERIAN: Mariam [ph], that's Mariam [ph].

SIGRIST: Is she your mother's mother?

BAKERIAN: Father's, my father's mother.

SIGRIST: Father's mother. What do you remember about your grandmother?

BAKERIAN: Oh, she was lovely. She was dressed, she was making the clothes for Christ--, yeah, Christmas and Easter. You know, we have enough money to get material and she would measure it and, just like evening gown.

SIGRIST: Did she live with you?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yes. We all live, we all together like this. (he gestures)

SIGRIST: What about your grandfather? Was he living with you, too?

BAKERIAN: I don't remember my grandfather. I don't remember my grandfather.

SIGRIST: What about your mother's parents?

BAKERIAN: Mother's, Mother's parents.

SIGRIST: Were they living when you were in Turkey?

BAKERIAN: Yes, next door.

SIGRIST: And what can you tell me about her parents? What
were they like?

BAKERIAN: Same as ours, you know what I mean. They eat the
same thing. They talk the same language. That's
all.

SIGRIST: What did people do for fun when you were a little boy
in Turkey? What did you do for entertainment?

BAKERIAN: Well, you sit down and play the beans. (he laughs and
gestures) You throw like this. What are you going
do? Now in this country the people are spoiled.
The kids, they got this, "No, I don't want that."
No, you can't do that because we haven't got any.
My grandmother used to make ball. We had
to, to put the piece of rag in her hand and then
turn the, the, turn around just like a ball and she

give it to us and we play. And when we went to school, we start to play football. I was a good soccer player.

SIGRIST: Tell me about going to school. Is this before the massacre or later?

BAKERIAN: What?

SIGRIST: Going to school. Did you go to school before the massacre?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about going to school?

BAKERIAN: Oh, that's, that's wonderful thing. We were walking with the wooden, wooden shoes because we didn't have nobody to buy good shoes. Winter, summer, and I was second grade when I started. First, one school was just build up where we were living about half, quarter miles. I went over there, first of all, start on the kindergarten. And then, then I went to, finish there the school, get diploma.

(he laughs) Then I went to another school, not the high school, just (original?) school. Then I start there. I went there until the war started. The massacres start.

SIGRIST: And were you taught Turkish in school or did you speak Armenian? What, what...

BAKERIAN: Well, we were learning Armenian.

SIGRIST: It was an Armenian school?

BAKERIAN: Yeah. If anybody talked Turkish, (he makes a slapping sound and then laughs), yeah. And when you go to school, you better have handkerchief in your hands and go like this. (he gestures) The teacher look at it, you know, like this. (he gestures) If she see that, uh, if you (?), it's not clean... (he gestures having his hands slapped)

SIGRIST: She just hit your hands. (they laugh) Well, tell me a little bit about what you remember about when the massacre happened. What, what do you remember happening at that time? You already said

that your family was force to leave their
house...

BAKERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...but can you explain to me how it all started?

BAKERIAN: How it started? It started away from Armenia. From
Armenia they lost more people than we did, you
know.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: But in your town, how did it all begin? Did the
Turks come into town or, how did it happen?

BAKERIAN: No, they send a policeman, police or soldiers. They
call your father's name first and then they say,
"You better move tomorrow morning. You got to
move." That's all. That's all I know.

SIGRIST: And that's what happened in your family. They came
in and...

BAKERIAN: Not only my family. The whole Christians, the whole
Christians, not only my family.

SIGRIST: Were there other people living in this town, were
there other religions in this town?

BAKERIAN: Oh yes, same. Catholic, Protestant and Turks, they
had their own.

SIGRIST: Islamic.

BAKERIAN: Islamic, yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. So the family packs everything up and,
when you left the town with the burros and your
family, were there lots of people leaving with
you? When you left town?

BAKERIAN: Nobody leaving (any more?) because lot of people
living there yet, you know what I mean? But my

people is all gone, just me and my brother left.

SIGRIST: But I mean, when you were forced to leave your house, were lots of people all put together...

BAKERIAN: Oh, thousands of them, thousands of them. Just like cattle, they push us.

SIGRIST: Was anyone killed in your town before everybody was forced to leave?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yes. A lot of people they did, they killed. (he coughs) And I know one Turk was hanged up, hanged. Me and my mother, we were in the church and we were going to my cousin's house, my mother's cousin, I don't know, who is she? So, and this guy is hanged. And my mother say, "Oh, look at this. That's a shame" And then an old man Turk says, "Don't say 'shame.'" It's good. If they didn't kill him, if they don't hang him, you don't have this child in your hand. They kill him." You know how they find him? These two guys in the business, both two Turks, I don't know what they had, an argument or a fight, they don't

speak together. Then they say, "Oh, let's go. Forget
 all about it. Just come into my house tonight. We
 have dinner together." And the other guys believes
 it. Two Turks. So, after they eat and drink,
they must have one extra. And this guy, he get,
uh, cut his head, his friend's head, his friend.
 And you know who found the body? My mother's
brother-in-law. Cut the arm from here (he
gestures), cut the leg from here (he gestures), cut
the, everything in different places. And
this guy's wife is looking for her husband.
"He is all right? Where, where, where is he?"
Anyway, you know what he did, they did? They put
the head, head in the bag and bring it to Armenian
church doors. "Who killed it?" They say Armenians
 killed it. No, that means, his friend killed it. (he
 coughs) So, and the priest was coming into church in
 the morning. He saw the one bag in there. And he
 called up the guy is always go there first and ring
 the bell, you know. He say, (?) he name is Joe,
for example. "There is a bag over by the doors.
Take this and dump it in the, near, down to
farm." They find the head. They find the head.
(he coughs) And before he was killed, Armenian

dentist, he fixed his teeth. They find them (from then on?). "Where, where, where he was?" And he told his wife, says, "If you open your mouth, you will be same thing." If it was an Armenian, maybe they gave him the medal. You know how long it took his (he coughs), uh, case, how long? His case went from Aintab to Aleppo. Aleppo is higher than Aintab, you know. Aintab is only the, so anyway, to cut the story short, they find him. They find him. It took, the case went from Aintab to Aleppo. They looked at it and they, from Aleppo, to Istanbul, Constantinople. When they heard in Constantinople, the order came, "Hang him. Hang him." That's the way they find him. And they find the whole body. My mother's brother-in-law, he pick up the arm and pick up the leg, pick up the body, they put it in that bag and dump it out.

SIGRIST: That's an awful story.

BAKERIAN: Yes, awful story is right.

SIGRIST: You've already told us how your family traveled to all those different places, you know, after you were

forced to leave.

BAKERIAN: Well, supposed, well, if you're rich, you got horse
and wagon, you know. If you're poor, you got to
walk. Better stay home. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: And why were you forced to keep moving? Did, did
each place that you stayed, did they not want to
have Armenians there? That's why everyone
kept moving?

BAKERIAN: Where? In Arabia?

SIGRIST: Well, you went from Aintab to Aleppo, correct?

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Then from Aleppo you went to...

BAKERIAN: Damascus.

SIGRIST: ...Damascus. And then from Damascus you went into
Arabia, correct?

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Why did you keep traveling like that?

BAKERIAN: Why? Do you think we (unintelligible). (he laughs)
Do you think we were going around the way we want?
No.

SIGRIST: So you are being forced to move from place to place.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, just move, that's all. Three or four on the
horse, on the horses, not the cops, soldiers, they
push you. They don't care if you fall down and
die. I seen with my own eye, I was only child, you
know what I mean, 1902, '15, how many years?

SIGRIST: Uh, thirteen.

BAKERIAN: Thirteen years old, yeah. I saw, I saw the German
soldiers, a child drinking the waters, he kicked
that kid, that kid. So, only a baby like this. (he
gestures) Hot, mother says, "Go and have a
drink over there," and she goes and drinking, no
cup, no cup, no nothing. She goes on her knee and

then drink. And this son of a gun kicked him
[sic, her?], soldiers, German, because they had
allies with the Turks.

SIGRIST: Were you allowed so much food that you could take
with you?

BAKERIAN: If you have it.

SIGRIST: If you have it.

BAKERIAN: If you have it.

SIGRIST: Because surely this takes a long time to go from
these places...

BAKERIAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...and if people don't have food, of course, they're
dying along the way.

BAKERIAN: That's right. That's right. That's only this side.
We didn't see nothing on the other side. They
killed, until you go there, they called "desert."

If you go over there on the, out, not on the road,
on the side of the road, you can find a skeleton
or head. They killed over there, lot's of them.
But anybody came into the Syrian side, nothing
happened like that.

SIGRIST: I see. (he sighs) Well, we should get you to America
sometime soon here. You and your brother are the
only ones left of your family...

BAKERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...after all of this. And your uncles send for your
brother.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is your brother older than you are?

BAKERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

BAKERIAN: Stepan [ph], Stepan [ph], Steve.

SIGRIST: And where are your uncles in America?

BAKERIAN: They were living in Troy.

SIGRIST: They were in Troy, New York.

BAKERIAN: Troy. 52 King Street.

SIGRIST: How old was your brother when he left to come to
America?

BAKERIAN: In, uh, he came in '21.

SIGRIST: And how old was he?

BAKERIAN: He born in 19-- , 1900.

SIGRIST: So he was roughly twenty one years old, probably.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long was it before your uncles brought you over?

BAKERIAN: Well, I was in the orphanage. Until then, that time
my brother start to work over here and he send me
the money. Then I came.

SIGRIST: How long were you in the orphanage before you came to
this country?

BAKERIAN: Uh, I was in the orphanage '18, '18-'22.

SIGRIST: So you were in the orphanage for four years before
you came over?

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you one of the older children in the orphanage?

BAKERIAN: Old one?

SIGRIST: Were you an old, old for the children in the
orphanage? Were most of the kids younger than
you?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yes. We were about twelve hundred.

SIGRIST: It was a big orphanage.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What town was the orphanage in?

BAKERIAN: It's, uh, that's, it goes with, I think my orphanage was American orphanage. We were about (?) in that building. Twenty, hundred, hundred fifty about, maybe more. And one night, we had a doorman, you know, the time comes he close the door and he go to bed and, there was three different kind of a thing, flag; Turkish, American flag and French flag. And we get up in the morning, we saw, they took the Turkish flag off and the other ones all (?) pieces. Then...

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you saw that?

BAKERIAN: (?) Well, what can I do? What can I do? They were going to, they were going to come up to the roof down to orphanage, down to kill us but the porter, the guy sitting by the door, he had the gun. He, bang, once and then they ran up (?) But he was

going to come and open the door and the rest of them
coming in. But they didn't, they didn't come.
When we said this to Mr. Travis [ph], our
principal, then he talked to Armenians. The
following day, they moved out from there because
that was just Turks joint. And we were hand, hand
by hand we were walking on the road and they
said, "Oh, we missed hundred fifty lambs." They
couldn't kill us. They talking to each other like
that but in Turkish, you know, of course. Then we
came up the other one, the big one, that's, uh, and
then in Aintab they start a revolution in Aintab.
Armenians and Turks. But, and this time they were
smart. They had everything. They had everything
except food, you know, but Jewish people, they
had plenty in their house. They feed us.

SIGRIST: The Jewish people.

BAKERIAN: Yeah. And mostly raisin and pistachio nuts. They
give it to you. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Of course, the pistachio nuts came right from there.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you knew about America when you were in Turkey? What ideas did you have about America?

BAKERIAN: God bless America.

SIGRIST: But when you were in Turkey before you came, what did you think about America? What did you know about America?

BAKERIAN: (he laughs) I don't know nothing about it. We didn't ever go that far in the school.

SIGRIST: You had a brother here.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was he writing to you or...?

BAKERIAN: No. Just, just a common, uh, writing, you know. he don't say, he don't read about what's going on here, no. We didn't know.

SIGRIST: Did you want to go to America?

BAKERIAN: What?

SIGRIST: Did you want to go to America?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yes. Sure I did.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me how your uncles went about getting you
out of Turkey. You said they sent some money.

BAKERIAN: They send, then I get the visa. And the guy who is
working in the consul, he was an Armenian, my
French teacher. He was my French teacher,
Armenian. So...

SIGRIST: How long did it take to get your visa? Did it take a
long time?

BAKERIAN: Yeah, three years.

SIGRIST: And did you have to have examinations before you left
Turkey?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yes. Because they had examination, if you had
trachoma in your eyes you can't, you can't go.
You can't come.

SIGRIST: Was that a common disease for that part of the world?
Did lots of people have trachoma over there?

BAKERIAN: (misunderstanding the question) Not too much, not too
much. Not like this country. They don't say you,
you don't need this, you don't need that over here,
you know. This is this, give you the fat thing
and fry the stuff and eat, you know. Over there,
whatever you got in your hand eat, that's (?).

SIGRIST: Now, where did you get the ship to come to America?

BAKERIAN: Uh, from Marseille.

SIGRIST: So how did you...

BAKERIAN: From Beirut, from Beirut to Marseille.

SIGRIST: So you went from Aintab to Beirut?

BAKERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you do that?

BAKERIAN: Well, they moved our orphanage to Beirut, sixteen hundred orphans. Then we built the building. We built the building. Then start, another one come, they start to build another building for them. Those are young ones. They call them "bird's nest."

SIGRIST: Bird's nest.

BAKERIAN: Yes. Those are child like this. (he gestures)

SIGRIST: So you were already in Beirut by that time.

BAKERIAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you take, how did you get from Beirut to Marseille?

BAKERIAN: You got, uh, boat.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that boat trip from, from
Beirut to Marseille in the boat? Does something
stick out in your mind about that trip?

BAKERIAN: (he laughs) Well, nothing, just we're happy to get
out of the town, get out of there.

SIGRIST: Were there other orphans traveling with you or were
you by yourself?

BAKERIAN: No we were five kids, five boys, five boys.

SIGRIST: Who were the other boys? Where did they, were they
from one family or...?

BAKERIAN: No. They are different families. I don't know what
kind of family they had. But we were in the
orphanage just like brothers.

SIGRIST: And, uh...

BAKERIAN: And from Beirut, from Marseille, French airline
(correcting himself), uh, French boat.

SIGRIST: Ship line.

BAKERIAN: Ship, ship line, yeah. (referring to his immigration records) It's on the, in the book.

SIGRIST: So when you, so in Marseille, that's when you got the big ship to come to America.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, yeah, to come to this country, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the name of it was?

BAKERIAN: Over, (referring to his immigration records) in the book.

SIGRIST: Let me look in the little, in the book here because it does say here. (reading from some records) It was the Leopoldina.

BAKERIAN: Leopoldina.

SIGRIST: The Leopoldina was the ship that you came on. And how long did it take to get to the U.S. from Marseille?

BAKERIAN: From Marseille? Twelve days.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about being on the
ship?

BAKERIAN: Well, nothing, just (he laughs), I tell you, the ship
you say. We went to, from Armenia, from here my
wife and I, there was a tour...

SIGRIST: This is much later.

BAKERIAN: Over here.

SIGRIST: Right, later in your life.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, over here now, yes. We were coming with my
wife together and the war start, 1939, August 28th.
The war start but the boat that we were going to
get before, before that, my mother-in-law
says, "Please, one more week, please." "Okay,
just for your sake." I was there about seven
months, you know. I'll never see them again.
"Please, just one more week stay for my sake." I

says, "Okay, Mother, we stay." Now, following
day we took the boat and we went. And we went
following day. Get on the boat. Before we
reached Egypt, we turn back. I talk to, I talk to a
guy, "Where are we going?" (unintelligible) War, the
war. Then we turn back to Beirut, me and my wife.
And she, poor girl, never been out from the house.
She says, "If the boat gets hit back, you go to the
front." I says, "My dear, if we get hit, we all
go down." (he laughs) So I said, "Don't worry."
(they laugh)

SIGRIST: Well, when you were coming in 1922, does anything
stick out in your mind about that boat trip?

BAKERIAN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

BAKERIAN: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Do you remember arriving in New York Harbor in 1922?

BAKERIAN: Well, New York Harbor?

SIGRIST: Yeah, what do you remember about when the ship finally got to America? Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty, for instance?

BAKERIAN: Yeah, just, we went in there and signed our names and out. That's all. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: You mean at Ellis Island you went in and signed your name and went out?

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing New York for the first time? Did it...

BAKERIAN: First time I saw New York I says, "Gee, what a tall place." (he laughs) Here, when I went to get married in Aleppo, (gesturing to a photograph) that's my wife over there, and that's my little daughters the other side. I went with my friend on Queen Mary. Queen Mary we went. And we didn't know that when we came up to, what do you call, uh, England, everybody, everybody is,

the band is playing and all them things, you know,
isn't it? (he pauses) Senator, anyway, when I
find it I'll give you his name, (he clears his
throat), we went, I went with the Queen Mary. In the
war, I stayed in Marseille seven weeks, no boat. (he
makes noises with his hands) (secretary (?),
secretary (?)), and we went everyday. Time is
changing. Now, how you going to walk in there?
Everybody got something on their arms, belong to
some organization or this and that. And I'm like
this with the coat. (he gestures) And on the
sidewalk (cooked?) breakfast, me and my wife, we
used to do it. (he makes sounds with his hands) I
turn, (?) identification card. (?)
identification card. "I'm American?" "Oh, is it
Roosevelt? Is it Roosevelt?" "Yes, Roosevelt."
"Okay, pass." (he laughs)

SIGRIST: When you arrived in New York in 1922, let's get you
back to 1922, what do you remember about being at
Ellis Island, if anything?

BAKERIAN: Ellis Island? I said, "What a building." That is
what I said. That's all. Well, I didn't have too

much (?) for it to come over here.

SIGRIST: Did you have to get examined when you were there?

BAKERIAN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did they do? Do you remember?

BAKERIAN: Yes, everything, especially your eyes.

SIGRIST: What kind of luggage did you have with you? Did you
have any suitcase?

BAKERIAN: Just like that (gesturing to his clothes), a pair of
pants and a cotton shirt. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: And then when you left Ellis Island, where did you
go? Did your uncle come and meet you?

BAKERIAN: No, I took the train. I took the train. I had a
couple dollars in my pocket. Took the train, they
met me in Albany [NY].

SIGRIST: So you came right up to Albany.

BAKERIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what time of the day it was when you got to Albany? Was it...?

BAKERIAN: I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Bakerian, we're just about out of time. I just want to ask you one final question. Are you happy that you came to this country?

BAKERIAN: Well, I'm glad, very happy. But, now, the time I came, different than now, you know. Now is different. You take the paper at night, you don't see nothing but the rape, killing, look over here (he gestures to a newspaper), right there...

SIGRIST: It's a different world right now.

BAKERIAN: Look, this is a priest, this is a priest.

SIGRIST: Mr. Bakerian is pointing to a newspaper right now. It's a whole different world.

BAKERIAN: Yeah, a whole different world is right. Before, you
take the gold in your head, on your head, nobody
say anything. But you can't even walk in the
street today. You can't even walk in the
street.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Bakerian, I want to thank you very much for
letting me come out and ask you questions about
what it for you to come to America. (Mr. Bakerian
laughs) You told some wonderful stories and I
appreciate you letting me ask you questions. This
is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Joe Bakerian, in
Troy, New York on Saturday, July 2nd, 1994.
Thank you, Mr. Bakerian.

BAKERIAN: Thank you.