

EI-601  
EDWARD SHAHEEN  
BIRTHDATE: 1905 (approx)  
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 27, 1995  
RUNNING TIME: 53:30  
INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST  
RECORDING ENGINEER:  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEW HARTFORD, NY  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

LEBANON, 1920  
AGE 15

SHIP: "LA TOURAINNE"  
PORT: BEIRUT, LEBANON  
RESIDENCES:  
? LEBANON: BISKINTA  
? US: UTICA, NEW YORK

Historian's Note: MR. Wadh Zogbee is also present.

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, April 27, 1995. I am in Utica area, although this is not Utica.

SHAHEEN: New Hartford.

SIGRIST: New Hartford, New York, with Mr. Fued Shaheen. Mr. Shaheen came from Lebanon in 1920 when he was 15 years old. Present also is Wadih Zogbee, who is going to intercede in the interview when needed.

SIGRIST: Good morning!

SHAHEEN: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Where in Lebanon were you born?

SHAHEEN: Biskinta.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the town, please?

SHAHEEN: How do you spell it?

ZOGBEE: B-I-S-K-I-N-T-A

SIGRIST: Thank you, Mr. Zogbee. And where was that in the country? Where was that town?

SHAHEEN: In the mountain.

SIGRIST: In the mountains of Lebanon.

ZOGBEE: Almost in the center of Lebanon. Thirty miles..

SHAHEEN: Lebanon is all mountain. Whole country.

SIGRIST: And this village was up in the mountains. What do you remember about the village? What sticks out in your mind about the village itself?

SHAHEEN: The village. What I have to tell?

SIGRIST: What did it look like? What did the village look like?

SHAHEEN: What did it look like? Looked like over here, just the same. Same thing you see that land over there? Same thing.

SIGRIST: What kind of buildings were there?

SHAHEEN: [not understood - Arabic]. You know. They're just like over here. Exactly.

ZOGBEE: Excuse me.

SIGRIST: Mr. Zogbee, go ahead.

ZOGBEE: Okay. The buildings there are all built with stones.

SHAHEEN: With the stones. No..

ZOGBEE: And the roofs are red brick roofs. And some are zinc metal and some are flat roofs. And the town has approximately 10,000 population. It's a large town in comparison to the towns of Lebanon.

SIGRIST: The house that you lived in, what was it made out of?

SHAHEEN: The bricks.

SIGRIST: Your house was made out of bricks.

SHAHEEN: Stone yes. Big stone.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did your house have?

SHAHEEN: Oh, I got two family. Two family. Four, four, eight, eight room.

SIGRIST: Eight rooms.

SHAHEEN: Eight rooms.

SIGRIST: You said two families. Were you all related?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. My brother, my brother... [Arabic - not understood] ]  
Brother and brother. My father and his brother used to live together.  
But the half, you know.

SIGRIST: I see. So your father's family was in one half, and your  
uncle's family was in the other half.

SHAHEEN: That's it.

SIGRIST: I also should say for the sake of the tape that your mother  
told you, you were born the Saturday before Easter. Correct? That's  
what she told you.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: We think maybe 1905.

SHAHEEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: We're not sure. We think 1905.

SHAHEEN: I try to get the, the, the certificate. I can't get it.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

SHAHEEN: Sam Shaheen.

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

SHAHEEN: [Arabic - not understood] the calves and lamb.

SIGRIST: He had cows and sheep.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. That's his - that's his business.

SIGRIST: Was that a family business? Did his father do that?

SHAHEEN: His father? I don't know his father. I don't remember his  
father, what they do. But I remember my father and my uncle used to do  
the sheep business. And cow. And everything.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things they did to take care of the  
sheep and the cows? How did they...?

SHAHEEN: They had - they had two men working for them take care of it.

SIGRIST: And what did they do?

SHAHEEN: [Arabic - not understood] ].

ZOGBEE: Shepherds, you mean.

SHAHEEN: Shepherds.

SIGRIST: Shepherds. How many sheep did he have, do you know?

SHAHEEN: Oh! Plenty.. Sometime 200, sometime 100. The cow, about three, four, five.

SIGRIST: And what did they do with the sheep?

SHAHEEN: They sell them to the people.

SIGRIST: Where did they sell the sheep?

SHAHEEN: In, in -- all Lebanon. (names towns)

ZOGBEE: Those are little towns near Biskinta.

SHAHEEN: (continues to name towns) Lot of peo--lot of people.

SIGRIST: So your father sold the sheep to other people?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he use the sheep at all for the family? Did you use the sheep for your family?

SHAHEEN: One.

SIGRIST: How?

SHAHEEN: We use one.

SIGRIST: One. What did you do with the one?

SHAHEEN: Well, we take care of it 'til it gets big and then we kill him and eat him after.

SIGRIST: How did you slaughter a sheep? How did you kill the sheep?

SHAHEEN: How you kill a sheep?

SIGRIST: Yeah. Explain to me how one kills a sheep.

SHAHEEN: You kill him with a knife. You kill him with a knife and then we make him small -- the meat small, small. We boil 'em, and put 'em in the kettle for the winter. And then we eat. Sometime you fry eggs. Sometime you cook anything. And you put the meat in it. [Arabic - not understood] ]

ZOGBEE: That's it. A lot of meat.

SIGRIST: What about the wool from the sheep? Did you use the wool for anything?

SHAHEEN: Wo--?

ZOGBEE: Wool -- the wool, the skin.

SHAHEEN: We sell them. We sell them. The man buy it and he make them for the shoes.

SIGRIST: Where did you keep the sheep?

SHAHEEN: In - in the - in the front of our house!

SIGRIST: In the front of the house.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then where did you take them to eat? When the sheep were hungry, where did you take them?

SHAHEEN: In the field. They get a lot of field.

SIGRIST: Did you own the field?

SHAHEEN: Oh, yes. If you don't own it, you can't put the lamb on it.  
(laughs)

SIGRIST: I see. Did you have any other animals, other than the sheep?

SHAHEEN: No. Just two, three cow.

SIGRIST: And how did you use the cows?

SHAHEEN: We used them just like the sheep, exactly.

SIGRIST: Did you milk the cows?

SHAHEEN: We milk it. We sell the milk.

SIGRIST: Did you ever keep any of the milk for yourself?

SHAHEEN: Yes. We save the, we make Leban-Lebanese [not understood - Arabic]

ZOGBEE: Yogurt.

SIGRIST: And that's-

SHAHEEN: Yogurt.

SIGRIST: -- spelled L-E...?

ZOGBEE: N-A --N-A-B-A-N.

SIGRIST: And this is the yogurt that you...?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. We eat. We put it on [not understood - Arabic].

ZOGBEE: ... in a bag.

SIGRIST: The milk went in a bag.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Then what happened to it?

ZOGBEE: Then it got hard.

SHAHEEN: Coming yogurt. I mean [not understood - Arabic] .

ZOGBEE: When you put it in the bag, the liquid falls out.

SIGRIST: And the solids are left.

ZOGBEE: And it becomes concentrated.

SIGRIST: Did you eat yogurt frequently?

SHAHEEN: Absolutely. Al l the time. All the time. It's the best thing for you health.

SIGRIST: Were there different ways of preparing it? Did you mix it with something? Or did you just eat it plain?

SHAHEEN: No. We don't mix it with something, we eat `em like this.

SIGRIST: You eat it plain.

SHAHEEN: With the bread.

SIGRIST: What other kinds of foods did you eat in Lebanon growing up?

SHAHEEN: Oh! We eat potatoes, we ate beans, we eat rice. Ah, what else we eat?

SIGRIST: What did you drink?

SHAHEEN: What you drink? Water.

SIGRIST: Water.

SHAHEEN: And beer. It's not beer. Wine. And anisette.

SIGRIST: Did you make the wine?

SHAHEEN: We make the wine and we make the anisette.

SIGRIST: How did you make the wine?

SHAHEEN: Ah, from the grapes. You know, we put them in the kettle, forty days. Sometimes, you know, check it but sometimes eh! Take the old ash out and then be wine. Forty days.

SIGRIST: Whose grapes?

SHAHEEN: Forty days.

SIGRIST: Where did you get the grapes?

SHAHEEN: From my land.

SIGRIST: So you grew the grapes?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have other fruit that you grew?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. We got bean, figs. Lots. We never - we never buy nothing, any -- from my land.

SIGRIST: So you ate everything that you raised.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. We raise -we raised potatoes, we raised onions. We raise all kinds. On our land. And we savin' for the winter, and we'll eat it.

SIGRIST: How did you save it for the winter? How did you store food for the winter?

SHAHEEN: The fruit? We make 'em dry. You know. [not understood -- Arabic]

ZOGBEE: Dry them.

SHAHEEN: Dry - dry up. And the grapes, they make 'em just like the [Arabic ]. How do you call them?

SIGRIST: Raisins.

SHAHEEN: Rais-- yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you dry fruit? Can you explain to me how you did that?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. We gotta put them on a [not understood] , and then once in a while you put something -- oil, olive oil all around on the top. And rai-- raisin. [not understood] ] you know they make them, it was nothing. Figs. When we make them dry.

SIGRIST: Who prepared the food in your family?

SHAHEEN: My mother.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

SHAHEEN: Zardekhan.

SIGRIST: Can somebody spell that please?

SHAHEEN: Zardekhan

ZOGBEE: Z-A-R-D-E-K-H-A-N.

SIGRIST: Okay. Thank you. What do you remember about your mother in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Oh, mother. I remember a lot of things. She used to make bread. She cook. What else?

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like? Can you describe her in words?

SHAHEEN: What she look like? I show you the picture.

SIGRIST: No. Describe her. Don't show me a picture. Describe her in words.

SHAHEEN: She's a nice, nice woman. Nice looking face.

SIGRIST: What color hair?

SHAHEEN: Black.

SIGRIST: What color eyes?

SHAHEEN: Black.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about her family history?

SHAHEEN: Yes. I know.

SIGRIST: What?

SHAHEEN: [Arabic]. This my house over there, and next door. Not very far.

SIGRIST: She lived close to where your father lived.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

ZOGBEE: Her parents, his grandparents -

SHAHEEN: My grand-

ZOGBEE: His [not understood] --that's my grandfather and my grandmother used to live very close.

SIGRIST: Oh, so the grandparents lived near each other.

ZOGBEE: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met? How did they meet each other?

SHAHEEN: How you meet? You meet just like the different people! What you mean, how they meet? (laughs) How come meet? They come and see us, we go up and see her. Just the same. But they come in my house very often. All the time. And my mother, she go up to her grandfa -- you know, the mother and father. And ah, and the grandfather used to make, [not understood] ?

ZOGBEE: Used to be a mason, her father was a mason.

SIGRIST: Your mother's father was a mason. He cut stones.

SHAHEEN: Cut stones, everything. And my grand, my (laughing) grand- and, and - [not understood]

ZOGBEE: Your grandfather, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you knew your grandparents.

SHAHEEN: Oh, yeah. We knew them all.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about your grandmother? When you think about your grandmother, what comes to your mind?

SHAHEEN: I love her. I love her. Sometime you sleep, you know, every time I left my house and then I go up to her house to sleep. She used to love me. My brother and I. I [not understood] ] used to come. My grandfather (laughs) my grandma, oh boy! Can't be better. Can't be better. .

SIGRIST: And that's your mother's parents, right?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about your father's parents? Did you know them?

SHAHEEN: I don't know nothing about my father. Because they live a far away little bit.

SIGRIST: So you never saw them.

SHAHEEN: Well yeah, we saw them, we saw them. But we didn't know, we didn't do just like my grandmother.

SIGRIST: But you were close to your mother's parents.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah. The rest, very far.

SIGRIST: Did their house, your mother's parents, did their house look like your house?

SHAHEEN: No. It's different.

SIGRIST: How was your house different?

ZOGBEE: Flat roof?

SHAHEEN: They look like [Arabic]. Roof. Just roof.

ZOGBEE: Flat roof.

SHAHEEN: Not like our house. Our house is beautiful.

SIGRIST: Your house was a bigger house.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Bigger and good.

SIGRIST: What did, you aid your grandfather was a stone mason. Was he still doing that when you were a little boy?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah. I used to work with him.

SIGRIST: How did you help your grandfather?

SHAHEEN: I - I was -- getting the stone. He shoveled, I'd get him through on the other side.

SIGRIST: Do you know what kind of stone it was?

SHAHEEN: [Arabic]]

ZOGBEE: Yeah. Mostly limestone.

SIGRIST: Limestone.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was that hard work, cutting stone?

SHAHEEN: Oh, yeah. It is.

SIGRIST: Did other people work for your grandfather also?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Three, four men used to be. I don't know the name. Yeah. Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: How did he cut the stone? What kind of tool did he use to cut the stone.

SHAHEEN: Oh, boy. Oh, boy. You know, when you want to cut the stone, when you get the stone first, you have to make 'em like this.

SIGRIST: Just smash the rocks.

SHAHEEN: Smash, and smash and smash. And then we put the boulder on and put the up. And we still go this way, like this.

SIGRIST: Goes all over the place.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then, all right. Then what happens? The stone is all over the place.

SHAHEEN: Then he fix it up. [Arabic]

ZOGBEE: He shapes.

SHAHEEN: Make the shapes and everything.

SIGRIST: You pick them up. And what kind of tool did you use to shape the rocks? What did it look like? The tool that you used.

SHAHEEN: (grunts)

ZOGBEE: Like a small sledgehammer.

SHAHEEN: [not understood] ]

ZOGBEE: Small like a sledgehammer.

SIGRIST: Like something that smashes. Like, Mr. Zogbee's saying a small sledgehammer.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah. And a hammer.

SIGRIST: Then where would he sell the stones? Who bought the stones from him.

SHAHEEN: People would build a house.

SIGRIST: Did someone else build the house?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. So your grandfather just did the stones.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Thank you. That's interesting.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Beautiful.

SIGRIST: What about school? Were any of, did children go to school?

SHAHEEN: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: Where was the school?

SHAHEEN: There was this lady.

ZOGBEE: At the town's church. The one near - there were several churches but the church near them had..

SHAHEEN: At the church school.

SIGRIST: The church ran the school.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. What do you remember about going to school?

SHAHEEN: What do I remember?

SIGRIST: Yeah. What about going to school sticks out in your mind?

SHAHEEN: Well, then when you go - when you go to school you have to go to mass first. I used to go to church, have the mass, then we go to school. And when we go to school, you have to pray.

SIGRIST: Who...

SHAHEEN: And the teacher, he sit down in a chair and you study on your book. Sometime he ask you for something. You have to read it. That's it.

SIGRIST: Who taught? Who were the teachers?

SHAHEEN: [Arabic] His name Joseph.

SIGRIST: Oh, what I was asking was, did the clergy teach? Were they nuns or priests that were teaching you?

SHAHEEN: No. Not the nun.

SIGRIST: No.

SHAHEEN: [Arabic]. You know he's a [Arabic].

ZOGBEE: A regular teacher.

SIGRIST: A regular teacher.

SHAHEEN: Regular teacher.

ZOGBEE: Hired for little pay.

SHAHEEN: No lo-had no - no - no nun.

ZOGBEE: The nuns taught the girls and the teachers taught the boys.

SIGRIST: Oh, so girls went to school separately from boys?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh. Did they have a separate building?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Sure.

SIGRIST: And the nuns taught the girls?

SHAHEEN: This is the side and the other side.

SIGRIST: And then this hired teacher taught the boys.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things were you taught? What subjects did you have in school?

SHAHEEN: What subjects?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SHAHEEN: Huh. [Arabic]. I don't know.

ZOGBEE: In Arabic.

SHAHEEN: I don't know.

ZOGBEE: In Arabic.

SIGRIST: In Arabic.

SHAHEEN: Arabic and French.

SIGRIST: Why did they teach you French?

SHAHEEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: But they did.

SHAHEEN: They did.

SIGRIST: How often did you go to school?

SHAHEEN: Every day. Except Saturday.

SIGRIST: Six days a week.

SHAHEEN: But no Saturday.

SIGRIST: Why not on Saturday?

SHAHEEN: I don't know. The teachers might be busy.

SIGRIST: Did everybody go to school in town? All the children?

SHAHEEN: Everybody.

SIGRIST: Could your parents -

SHAHEEN: Not the same school, you know. They got different school. We had [not understood]

SIGRIST: Different ages went to different schools.

SHAHEEN: Different ages and different size, sure.

SIGRIST: What about your parents? Could they read and write? Could your parents read Arabic and write in Arabic?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. My mother read Arabic and my father read Arabic.

SIGRIST: So they had been educated also this way.

SHAHEEN: Yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: Did your parents teach you anything at home?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did they teach you?

SHAHEEN: (chuckles) They tell me [not understood]. When I - when I read in the book and my father and my mother, she used to - "No! You read different." (laughing) [Arabic] I can't tell you.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

SHAHEEN: What religion?

SIGRIST: What religion?

SHAHEEN: Lebanese religion! (laughing) Catholic.

SIGRIST: Catholic. You were Christian.

SHAHEEN: I used to go Mass every mo-- everyday. Never miss.

SIGRIST: What time?

SHAHEEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: What time of the day did you go to Mass?

SHAHEEN: What time?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SHAHEEN: Nine, ten o'clock.

SIGRIST: In the morning.

SHAHEEN: In the morning.

SIGRIST: Then you went to school.

SHAHEEN: And then school.

SIGRIST: Then what happened when you came home from school?

SHAHEEN: Nothing. We work. We work. Three, four fellow, you know, three, four boys. We work. You say when you see somebody, say hello Amni. Hello, Jadi. Hello, Halli.

SIGRIST: When you got home from school, did you have to help out around the house? Did you have any chores to do when you came home?

SHAHEEN: No. We didn't do nothing around the house.

SIGRIST: You didn't help out in the farm?

SHAHEEN: No. No.

SIGRIST: With the sheep?

SHAHEEN: We, we, work Saturday, you know, when they close, when the school closed? And then on Saturday, we work. We herd the sheep, we get the hashish. [Arabic].

SIGRIST: Was there a specific thing that was your responsibility to do on Saturday?

SHAHEEN: No responsibility. We have to do...

SIGRIST: You just did everything.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. We used to help our father.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

SHAHEEN: We pray the book. Just like this.

SIGRIST: Yeah. A bible? You're showing me the bible.

SHAHEEN: Every day. Every day. Every night. We read - we read the book. We read the Sunday Mass [not understood] I mean - Sunday mass. The rosary. Every night, every night. Never miss.

SIGRIST: Who was more religious - your mother or your father?

SHAHEEN: My mother.

SIGRIST: Did she teach you prayers?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. My father did have to go out and get the money, something.

SIGRIST: Right. Can you say a prayer for me in Arabic?

ZOGBEE: Let him - let him sing something. 'Cause he used to serve the Mass.

SHAHEEN: His father is -- my father -- and my father used to work together.

SIGRIST: So the Zogbee family knew his family.

SHAHEEN: Know -- friend.

SIGRIST: Can you sing something for me in Arabic?

SHAHEEN: Sing in Arabic?

SIGRIST: Sing in Arabic for the tape?

ZOGBEE: A meditation. (Zogbee and Shaheen exchange words in Arabic).

SHAHEEN: All right.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

SHAHEEN: (Sings a meditation in Syriac)

ZOGBEE: Incidentally, that's Syriac.

SIGRIST: The language is Syriac.

ZOGBEE: The language is Aramaic Syriac.

SIGRIST: What's the difference between Arabic and Syriac.

ZOGBEE: Just another language all together.

SIGRIST: Totally different language.

ZOGBEE: Totally different.

SHAHEEN: Oh, different.

SIGRIST: What was it that you just sang for me? What was that?

ZOGBEE: Syriac.

SHAHEEN: A prayer. A prayer.

SIGRIST: But what are you praying for? What does that mean?

SHAHEEN: For the God. In - in Mass.

ZOGBEE: That's what the priest says at the Mass.

SHAHEEN: In the - in the Mass.

SIGRIST: So that's part of the Mass service. Did you used to sing in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Same thing. Same thing.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy going to church?

SHAHEEN: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: You liked going to church when you were a kid?

SHAHEEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you given religious instruction in church? Sunday school? Did you go to Sunday school?

SHAHEEN: Sunday school, you pray. First begin and you pray. And then you read. Same thing. Read the religion. That's it.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what you did for fun as a child. How did you have fun when you were a little kid.

SHAHEEN: (laughs loudly) Oh, my God!

SIGRIST: What did you do for fun when you were a kid?

SHAHEEN: Well, for fun, we played baseball, you know? Catch. Baseball, catch. Seven, eight hour. Threw the ball like this, sometime, you know. You hit the fellow like this.

SIGRIST: You'd hit each other with the stick.

SHAHEEN: Not with the stick, with you hands.

SIGRIST: Why would you hit the person.

SHAHEEN: We didn't hit 'em hard. They got to move away.

SIGRIST: I see.

ZOGBEE: If you caught the ball, you touched them. If you didn't catch the ball, you lost.

SIGRIST: Is there a name for this game?

ZOGBEE: Just catch.

SHAHEEN: Tabey, Tabey, Tabey

ZOGBEE: Tabey. That's ball.

SIGRIST: T-A-B-E. Tabe?

ZOGBEE: -E-Y, or something.

SIGRIST: That means ball, in Arabic.

ZOGBEE: Ball, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you have any other toys that you played with as a child? Any toys that you remember?

SHAHEEN: I remember.

SIGRIST: Just the ball.

SHAHEEN: Just the ball I play. [Arabic] (laughing) They used to play [Arabic]. I can't explain you how they do it. They stood one here, stand over there, stand over there. Everybody standing up, around. And you go [Arabic].

SIGRIST: Is that running from stone to stone? Is that what you mean?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah.

ZOGBEE: Without being caught.

SIGRIST: So you're explaining to me a game where you put stones on the ground, and then you run around the stones and you can't be caught by somebody else?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that has a name? A name to that game?

SHAHEEN: The name [Arabic].

ZOGBEE: I don't know what that name is.

SIGRIST: No name.

SHAHEEN: [Halodie, Halodei--] I don't know.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about growing up during World War I. What happened in Lebanon during the first World War?

SHAHEEN: Oh, don't tell me about that. Son of a gun! World War I is bad, bad.

SIGRIST: Lebanon was in a bad situation.

SHAHEEN: Absolutely. Bad.

SIGRIST: What groups came in to the country?

SHAHEEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: What armies came into Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Turk.

SIGRIST: The Turks came into Lebanon.

SHAHEEN: Turkish. The Turks take everything. My mother [Arabic]. You know, when my mother, she make bread and the Turk soldiers come in. Take everything away from her. It's bad.

SIGRIST: Did the Turks...?

SHAHEEN: They getting angry.

SIGRIST: Did they ever get violent towards the people who lived in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: They don't bother nobody, but they take everything what you had to eat.

SIGRIST: Do you remember...?

SHAHEEN: Jamal Basha -- Jamal Basha, he says, "I'm gonna make Lebanon starve." Because you can't take the soldier. And the French, French people did not protect our fam-- our Lebanon. All the French, they kill everybody. That's how...

SIGRIST: So the French came in to sort of battle the Turks.

SHAHEEN: The French - the French, they say the Turk, if you - if you touch anybody in Lebanon, they kill them.

SIGRIST: But the Turks tried to starve the Lebanese people.

SHAHEEN: It is. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you...?

SHAHEEN: They make 'em starve.

SIGRIST: Well, what did you eat during that period?

SHAHEEN: Oh, I don't know. We can't find the food to eat. That's the whole trouble. [Arabic].

ZOGBEE: [Arabic].

SHAHEEN: They got -- they go on the outside, get us something like [Arabic], just like the grass.

ZOGBEE: Greens. Any sort of greens.

SHAHEEN: Green. All kinds of --

SIGRIST: Growing.

SHAHEEN: All kinds. That's what we eat. Otherwise we can't do. We can't eat meat, nothing, all, take everything away from us.

SIGRIST: The Turks took the sheep and everything, too.

SHAHEEN: Everything? Everything you see -- the sheep -take 'em.

SIGRIST: How long did the Turks stay in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: I can't tell you how long. Everybody after, once in a while they come.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when the war was over?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when World War I ended?

SHAHEEN: 1918.

SIGRIST: And what happened to your village when that, when the war ended?

SHAHEEN: Oh, everybody happy. Everybody happy -- turn the lights. The [Arabic]. They shoot.

SIGRIST: Guns.

SHAHEEN: Volley. Make happy.

SIGRIST: So did the Turks leave Lebanon at that time or were they gone before the end of the war?

SHAHEEN: No. I didn't 'stand. What do you say?

SIGRIST: Were the Turks still in Lebanon when the war ended?

SHAHEEN: No!

SIGRIST: They were gone by then.

SHAHEEN: No. All run away. Never stay.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SIGRIST: So did things get better when the war ended?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Sure. Everything.

SIGRIST: What army was in Lebanon after the war? Were the French still there?

SHAHEEN: No. Nobody stayed there.

SIGRIST: Everybody left.

SHAHEEN: Everybody left. Everybody. And Lebanese. Lebanese army after.

SIGRIST: So Lebanon had its own army then.

SHAHEEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Tell me what you knew about America when you were growing up. How did you think about America when you lived in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: My father come here first.

SIGRIST: What year did he come?

SHAHEEN: 1914.

SIGRIST: And why did he come?

SHAHEEN: He come and see his sister. He want some money. When he come and see his sister, she didn't give. She give him bologna.  
(laughs)

SIGRIST: Where was his sister living?

SHAHEEN: On Bleeker Street.

SIGRIST: In New York City?

SHAHEEN: In New Y-- in Utica.

SIGRIST: In Utica. So your aunt was living in Utica. She had come earlier.

SHAHEEN: Her coming before my father. Long time.

SIGRIST: And so your father came in 1914, before the war started.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. He want to see her sister. Maybe she give him money, get back. She didn't give him nothing. And he stayed.

SIGRIST: So what happened to him? He stayed.

SHAHEEN: He stay.

SIGRIST: What job did he get?

SHAHEEN: What job he get? He sell sheep and cow over here. Just like at --

SIGRIST: Sheep and cows, here in Utica.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So that's what he was doing while you were still in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was he communicating with you?

SHAHEEN: And then you know, he sent some money to us. After the war, he sent some money.

SIGRIST: Did you hear from your father during the war? During World War I, did you have any communication with your father in America? Was he writing you letters?

SHAHEEN: Yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: But during the war was he writing you letters?

SHAHEEN: No. You can't get the mail. You can't get mail.

SIGRIST: Why?

SHAHEEN: I don't know.

SIGRIST: But you didn't hear from him for a long time.

SHAHEEN: I didn't hear nothing. After the war, we can get the letter.

SIGRIST: Was it your idea to come to America or was it your father's?

SHAHEEN: No, it was my father idea.

SIGRIST: Did you want to come?

SHAHEEN: We want to come in 1914. We like to come when my father come. My grand - grand-- my mo-

SIGRIST: Your mother's parents?

SHAHEEN: My father's mother - my father's mother -- didn't let us come in. They want me to stay there. You know. I mean, stay there --

SIGRIST: Why?

SHAHEEN: Because he want her son come back.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. So your father's mother didn't want you guys to go because she wanted your father to come back.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

SHAHEEN: That's what happened.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what happened. Your father decided that you were going to go to America. And did you want to go? Did you want to leave Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You did want to leave Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. We want to - we want to come with my father.

SIGRIST: Right.

SHAHEEN: My grandma, she don't want us - us to come here.

SIGRIST: So did your father, after World War I ended, did your father send for the whole family?

SHAHEEN: Yeah!

SIGRIST: Oh, so who comes to America then? Your mother...?

SHAHEEN: My mother.

SIGRIST: You.

SHAHEEN: My brother, and my brother, and my sister.

SIGRIST: Two brothers and a sister, and yourself, and your mother.

SHAHEEN: One sister, yeah.

SIGRIST: What were your brother's names?

SHAHEEN: Ike. Heikel.

SIGRIST: Mr. Zogbee?

ZOGBEE: H-E-I-K-E-L, that's translated into Ike.

SIGRIST: Ike.

SHAHEEN: Freddy.

ZOGBEE: Fred, that's Fram, but they called him Frederick here.

SIGRIST: And your sister, what was your sister's name?

SHAHEEN: Ramza.

ZOGBEE: R-A-M-Z-A

SIGRIST: Thank you. Are they older or younger than you?

SHAHEEN: No. Younger. I'm the old one.

SIGRIST: You're the oldest.

ZOGBEE: Ike was the oldest.

SHAHEEN: First brother. Ike. Ike is the old one.

SIGRIST: Then you.

SHAHEEN: And then me, and then my sister, then my Fram. Fram the baby.

SIGRIST: How did you mother feel about leaving Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: She feel good.

SIGRIST: She wanted to go.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. She come with the family. She like to see her fa-her husband.

SIGRIST: Did your father go back to Lebanon to get you? Or did he stay?

SHAHEEN: No. He stay here. He sent the money.

SIGRIST: He was going to meet you here. Do you remember what it was like to pack your belongings? What did you take with you to America?

SHAHEEN: I tell you the truth, we [ Arabic ] --

ZOGBEE: Rugs and carpets.

SHAHEEN: Everything [Arabic}, when we get to Italia, they don't let us bring it over here. We left everything and the [not understood]

ZOGBEE: They brought it with them but they confiscated it in Italy.

SIGRIST: You brought all your carpets and things and they wouldn't let you take them beyond Italy.

SHAHEEN: When they get to Italy, they don't let us bring over here. We left everything right there.

SIGRIST: Did you have a lot of carpets with you?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah? Where did you get the carpets?

SHAHEEN: From my house!

SIGRIST: Where did you get them for the house though? Did you make the carpets? Did you buy them?

SHAHEEN: No. No. We don't make it. We buy it. My father, I don't know who bought it.

SIGRIST: But you had carpets in the house.

SHAHEEN: I don't remember who bought it, but you bring 'em in with me -- us over here. They don't let us bring over here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandmother and grandfather? Your mother's parents? [pause] When you left to come to America, were your mother's parents still living?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: They had died by then.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So when you left to come to America, where did you leave from? Where did you go to, to get a ship?

SHAHEEN: We got the ship. We came from Biskinta to Beirut.

SIGRIST: To Beirut. How did you get from there to Beirut?

SHAHEEN: We came with [Arabic].

ZOGBEE: [Arabic] They rode their own mules and donkeys.

SIGRIST: Mules and donkeys. You took these down to Beirut. Did you stay in Beirut?

SHAHEEN: We stay in Beirut two week.

SIGRIST: Two weeks before you got on the ship.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What happened in Beirut during those two weeks?

SHAHEEN: Nothing happened. Everybody good.

SIGRIST: Did you already have your papers? The papers you needed to get to America?

SHAHEEN: Uh, huh.

SIGRIST: What about medical exams?

SHAHEEN: Examine, not in Beirut. Examine Biskinta.

SIGRIST: Oh, before you left.

SHAHEEN: The doctor examine her eyes in Biskinta.

SIGRIST: Why -- just the eyes?

SHAHEEN: That's it.

SIGRIST: What were they looking for, do you remember?

SHAHEEN: No. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: But they looked at your eyes.

SHAHEEN: Eyes and everything, give you paper.

SIGRIST: So you went down to Beirut, you stayed two weeks, and then you got on the ship.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

SHAHEEN: La Tourainne.

SIGRIST: La Tourainne. And was that the first time you had ever been on a ship? [pause] Was that the first time you had ever been on a ship?

SHAHEEN: First time! Sure!

SIGRIST: What did you, how did you feel about being on this ship?

SHAHEEN: I feel good. The ship just like the home.

SIGRIST: You had a nice..

SHAHEEN: Beautiful.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept in the ship?

SHAHEEN: In the room. In the room like this in the ship.

SIGRIST: And who stayed in that room, with you?

SHAHEEN: Everyone. Big room. My mother and my sister, and my brother. All one room.

SIGRIST: Were there other people in the room also?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: Just your family.

SHAHEEN: Just the family.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what class you traveled on the ship?

SHAHEEN: What's that?

SIGRIST: What class - were you third class, second class..

SHAHEEN: First class.

SIGRIST: You were first class.

SHAHEEN: First class on the ship.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much it cost?

SHAHEEN: I don't know how much it cost. Ask my father, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Uh, huh.

SHAHEEN: Ask my big brother -- used to be the boss, make the money.

SIGRIST: So the ship went from Beirut. What stops did it make?

SHAHEEN: It stopped in Italia.

SIGRIST: Stopped in Italy. Did it stop anywhere else?

SHAHEEN: Afterward in --in Be-Belize - Belize. In France.

ZOGBEE: Did you change - did you change ships?

SHAHEEN: No change.

SIGRIST: You stayed on the same ship.

SHAHEEN: We stayed on the same thing.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take before it got to New York. From Beirut to New York? How long?

SHAHEEN: Oh, I can't tell you. I don't know. Maybe two months.

SIGRIST: But it was an extended period of time.

SHAHEEN: All together two months, we stay.

SIGRIST: Are there any stories you remember about being on the ship? What sticks out in your mind about the voyage across the ocean?

SHAHEEN: Nothing. I go -- used to go on the top the ship. Sing [Arabic] (laughing) I used - I used to go from the - from the bottom on the top, singing. Singing Arabic. Yeah. And sometimes, you know the lady, I sing for her. (laughing) Different people. But I don't know who is it.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the ship?

SHAHEEN: What they feed us?

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you?

SHAHEEN: They feed me in the in the middle the class. In the middle.

SIGRIST: And what kind of food did they give you?

SHAHEEN: All kind. Every kind. Everything. I can't tell you what kind.

SIGRIST: Did you see something on the boat that you had never seen before in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: Naturally.

SIGRIST: Do you remember? What?

SHAHEEN: I see different thing. But I can't explain you.

SIGRIST: But it was all a new experience.

SHAHEEN: All new to me.

SIGRIST: Did anyone in your family get sick?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Get dizzy.

SIGRIST: Who got dizzy?

SHAHEEN: Everyone. Except me. Except me. I never get dizzy. My brother, my brother, my sister, my mother - my gosh. Sleep all day long. And I go on the top of the ship.

SIGRIST: Singing.

SHAHEEN: Singing. It's the funny thing I never seen my life.

ZOGBEE: It's good medicine.

SIGRIST: Indeed.

SHAHEEN: I'll tell you the truth. I'm still living. They all dead.

SIGRIST: Did you ever see the captain of the ship?

SHAHEEN: Captain? Yeah. I --I used to drink beer with him!

SIGRIST: Where did you drink beer with the captain?

SHAHEEN: Right in the -- in the food. He come and he say "Come on, drink beer." He give me glass of beer, I drink with him.

SIGRIST: Did they have safety drills on the ship? Did they tell you where to go if there was an emergency?

SHAHEEN: Emergency?

SIGRIST: If there were an emergency, did they show you where the life boats were?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

SHAHEEN: I didn't know. No emergency when I was there. Everything okay.

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York City? Do you remember when the boat came into New York?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SHAHEEN: Yeah, I did.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

SHAHEEN: Statue... I don't know. I see some different people. That's it.

SIGRIST: When the boat came into New York, do you remember going to Ellis Island? Did you have to go to Ellis Island?

SHAHEEN: I don't remember. I don't remember. All I know. I don't know nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you have to um, when you got to New York, did you have to be examined for any reason? Did they look at you?

SHAHEEN: Examine you eyes.

SIGRIST: Did they look at you?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did your father meet you?

SHAHEEN: Right there. Right on the boat.

SIGRIST: He came and he met the family.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw your father?

SHAHEEN: Oh, boy! I jump on him. (laughs) I jump on him and kiss him and everything. He kiss everyone. He cry. And we cry, too, when we see him.

SIGRIST: Where did he take you?

SHAHEEN: Where he kiss me?

SIGRIST: No. Where did he take you, after you met him, where did he take you?

SHAHEEN: Take me the hotel.

SIGRIST: You stayed...

SHAHEEN: We slept in the hotel. Then we came, next day we came over he-- Utica.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the night that you spent in the hotel. What was that like for you?

SHAHEEN: Ah...

ZOGBEE: What was the name of the hotel?

SHAHEEN: How can you do? You go eat and then you go sleep!

SIGRIST: Do you remember what hotel it was?

SHAHEEN: No. I don't remember. But good hotel.

SIGRIST: So after you stayed overnight, you got -- you took a train.

SHAHEEN: We took a train.

SIGRIST: And you went to where?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Utica.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you had been on a train?

SHAHEEN: First time.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being on the train?

SHAHEEN: Nothing remember. [Arabic]I don't remember nothing.

SIGRIST: Okay. Your father brought you to Utica, and where did he take you in Utica.

SHAHEEN: He rent the house on Bleeker Street.

SIGRIST: What did the house look like? On Bleeker Street, like in New York. Can you describe the house for me? What did it look like on the inside?

SHAHEEN: Like outside. Looked like the houses. I don't know. I can't remember.

SIGRIST: Did your father want you to get a job?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: When you got to Utica, did your father want you to get a job?

SHAHEEN: We didn't get the job for first time. Take two weeks, three weeks, then we get the jobs.

SIGRIST: What was the first job?

SHAHEEN: We work, we work in the mill.

SIGRIST: What did you do in the mill?

SHAHEEN: My brother and I, we making the mill. We make ah, oh, for chrissakes. We used to make [Arabic].

ZOGBEE: Fingers?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. The fingers. Something like that.

ZOGBEE: For what?

SHAHEEN: Rug.

ZOGBEE: Oh, wait a minute.

SHAHEEN: [Arabic]]

ZOGBEE: Which factory did you work at?

SHAHEEN: The Utica Heater.

ZOGBEE: Oh, I see.

SIGRIST: Utica Heater.

ZOGBEE: Oh, okay. They used to make grates for the...

SHAHEEN: They made the grates for the furnace, stove, everything like that.

ZOGBEE: That's why I want to know what factory.

SIGRIST: (laughs)

ZOGBEE: Grates for the furnace.

SIGRIST: So you were making metal grates. How much did you get paid? Do you remember?

SHAHEEN: \$15 a week.

SIGRIST: \$15 a week. And do you remember, what were your hours that you worked?

SHAHEEN: From eight o'clock 'til - 'til four.

SIGRIST: And did you work with other immigrants?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: You were the only immigrants there, that you know?

SHAHEEN: After -- after I say -- I say, "I don't want to work in the factory, I'm gonna open store." I open grocery store first.

SIGRIST: What year did you open the grocery store?

SHAHEEN: I just remember what year. Hm. 1923, I think. '23, '24.

SIGRIST: So you'd been here a couple of years before that happened.

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah. Because I don't want to work in the mill.

SIGRIST: Why didn't you want to work in the mill?

SHAHEEN: Because I didn't come to work in the mill. (laughing) I was - I wanna be --

SIGRIST: Did your brother stay working in the mill?

SHAHEEN: No. No. He stay with me. We open grocery for us and then we open a shoe store after.

SIGRIST: What about your mother? Did she get a job in America?

SHAHEEN: No. She never work, just home. She work at home. Make the cook.

SIGRIST: Was your father still selling cows and sheep at that point?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: In Utica, he was still selling livestock?

SHAHEEN: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How come you didn't want to go into that business?

SHAHEEN: I don't wanna, I don't like it. I don't like it.

SIGRIST: (laughs)

SHAHEEN: I open grocery business, I make good money. Good money. After we open shoe store. From the grocery to the shoe business.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English?

SHAHEEN: Learn English? From the customer. The customer used to come in the store, can you give me potatoes? I give them tomatoes. I don't know nothing. See? The -- the customers learn me. The girls show me -- this is this, this is this. They tell me the name.

SIGRIST: Was it difficult for you to learn English?

SHAHEEN: No difficult. I used to be happy like -- I sing all the time. I'll tell you the truth. I love America. I love the people. Because these people over here is a good people. They like - they like the -- each other.

SIGRIST: Were most of your customers people who had been immigrants who came over?

SHAHEEN: No. No. They all comin' -they all Utica. All Utica customer. Nobody comes from the old country.

SIGRIST: Did anyone ever make fun of you because you were an immigrant?

SHAHEEN: Nobody.

SIGRIST: No.

SHAHEEN: Nobody make funny. Everybody laugh, and learn me how to do it.

SIGRIST: So they helped you, rather than making fun of you.

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When did you become a citizen?

SHAHEEN: 1927 - I think 19-- 1931, I be - be citizen.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit of what you had to do to become a citizen?

SHAHEEN: I go to school. I go to school to learn.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did they teach you?

SHAHEEN: Just - just things like when you go in a school. I don't know. They didn't teach me nothing. I read the book and then they tell you, ask you sometime who you president, who the this, who this. I learn them. See?

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you became a citizen?

SHAHEEN: I feel good. I feel good. I feel happy.

SIGRIST: Did your parents become citizens?

SHAHEEN: Everyone.

SIGRIST: Everyone.

SHAHEEN: Except my mother.

SIGRIST: Why not your mother?

SHAHEEN: She didn't go to school. But my father, citizen. I think she be citizen too. That's what they saying.

SIGRIST: Could be.

SHAHEEN: That's what they say.

ZOGBEE: The law changed several times.

SIGRIST: It did, frequently, yeah. Did your parents ever want to go back to live in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever go back to visit?

SHAHEEN: No.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to visit?

SHAHEEN: No. No. I don't want.

SIGRIST: Do you still have family in Lebanon?

SHAHEEN: I tell you the truth, you want to go to [not understood] I -- my brother and I we decide to go to Lebanon. But after, he change. I don't know why he change. After we - we bought the clothes. We take the picture, everything, and he stop. And I stop too. Imagine? I don't know why he change. Old Freddy.

SIGRIST: Do you think of yourself as being more Lebanese or more American?

SHAHEEN: I, now?

SIGRIST: How do you think of yourself?

SHAHEEN: I like both of them. I never forget Lebanon. You can't forget yourself.

SIGRIST: What part of you is truly Lebanese? What part of you, what part of your personality?

SHAHEEN: We love Lebanese. But we didn't love that people that killed each other now. We love it. We loved our country. But over here, now, we love the America. America's the best country in the whole world. I always say it.

SIGRIST: Well, before we end, is there anything else that you would like to - excuse me - before we end, is there something else that you would like to sing for us? Could you sing something else for us? On tape?

SHAHEEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

SHAHEEN: You want me sing?

SIGRIST: Yeah. I want you to sing. Go ahead.

SHAHEEN: Like this.

SIGRIST: Sing in Arabic or Syriac...

SHAHEEN: [Sings in Arabic]

SIGRIST: Thank you very much.

SHAHEEN: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Shaheen, I want to thank you very much for letting me come over and ask questions. It was an interesting interview. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Fued Shaheen on April 27, Thursday, 1995, in the presence of Mr. Zogbee. And again, thank you.

SHAHEEN: You're welcome.

END INTERVIEW

EI-601/SHAHEEN

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