

EI-808

ARMEN JERMAKIAN (GERMAKIAN)

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BORN ON ELLIS ISLAND OF ARMENIAN PARENTS FROM TURKEY

BORN IN 1923

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, September 26th, 1996. I am in Springfield, Massachusetts and I'm here with Armen Jermakian. Mr. Jermakian was born on Ellis Island and is going to tell us about his parents' experience and then about his experience growing up in the United States with his parents. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

JERMAKIAN: September 8, 1923.

SIGRIST: And, and where were you born?

JERMAKIAN: Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Thank you. (Mr. Jermakian clears his throat) I suppose the best way for us to start would really be to start talking about your parents and then eventually get to the birth at Ellis Island. What was your father's name?

JERMAKIAN: Well, his original name was Arakeo.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

JERMAKIAN: A-R-A-K-E-O.

SIGRIST: And was that Anglicized?

JERMAKIAN: He used, when he started working he used "George" (he laughs) for his name because he, the last name was difficult enough. And then the first name, when he had to spell it over and over again he changed it to "George." (he coughs) But his legal papers, no, Arakeo.

SIGRIST: What do you know about his family background?

JERMAKIAN: All I know about my father was that he was here before the massacre, a few years before it his parents had sent him over here to avoid the Turkish draft which they had to get into when they were eighteen years old, I guess, or something like that. And he was a member, his family was quite a large family, seven or eight people in the family. And he came here and he was working at, uh, odd jobs. First was roadwork, construction, and he didn't know any English, of course, when he first came. And then he started working with Ford Motor Company for a while in Troy, New York, and I guess it was in Green Island, New York, Ford Motor Company had a plant. And he was a very close friend with another man named Carnig Vahradian...

SIGRIST: Can you spell Vahradian, please?

JERMAKIAN: Vahradian, V-A-H-R-A-D-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: And Carnig being C-...

JERMAKIAN: Carnig, yeah.

SIGRIST: Carnig. C-A-R-N-I-G.

JERMAKIAN: Right. Carnig Vahradian. And together they were here for a few years. And then after the 1915 massacre, they both decided they'd go back, although Carnig Vahradian had gone back as volunteer and fought for the liberation of Armenia. And the only reason I'm mentioning that is because he was under that General Antranig, who was a national hero.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

JERMAKIAN: Antranig was fighting at that time to liberate Armenia from Turkey.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

JERMAKIAN: A-N-T-R-A-N-I-G.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

JERMAKIAN: He was an Armenian war hero. And when he was fighting, while he was fighting under, with General Antranig, General Antranig told him that his niece was alive and she was somewhere in Bulgaria or Constantinople, I forget which, but someday after the war with Turkey was over to go by and find that niece and take care of her. Anyhow, I'm just mentioning that because they were both in Troy and they both went back to Istanbul. My father went to an orphanage there, Calfayan Orphanage, C-A-L-F-A-Y-A-N, which is still there, still existing in Istanbul. And then they line up all the girls there for them to pick up a girl to get married and bring them over. So he picked my mother out. Her name was Erchanig (he clears his throat), E-R-C-H-A-N-I-G, and her maiden name was Demirjian, D-E-M-I-R-J-I-A-N. You want all these spelled out?

SIGRIST: Thank you, yes, please do that.

JERMAKIAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: We'll get them right.

JERMAKIAN: (he clears his throat) So he picked her out. She was only fifteen or sixteen years old, I guess. And my father, at that time, was twenty seven. And this Carnig Vahradian found that Lucy, uh, Ozanian, Ozanian was their name, Lucy Ozanian, because General Antranig's last name was Ozanian, too, so...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, too, please?

JERMAKIAN: Ozanian? O-Z-A-N-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

JERMAKIAN: And they both got married the same day and they were going to be each other's best man. And then one of them said, "Well, no, let's not be each other's best man because maybe our children may want to get married some day. Who knows, you know." So they got different best men, someone around there to be a best man, anyhow. At that time, the Armenian culture, best man was like the father and their children would not, they were supposed to take care of the children in case the parents died. So they wouldn't want their children to be married together. So they didn't, anyhow. So, they got married and, same day, and I don't know why it took so long for them to get back here to the United States. Although, I know that both couples went to Bulgaria, Sophia, and then from there they went to Marseille, France. There they took a boat to come here but by that time it was almost nine months. And that's why, it was a French liner, and I was born in New York.

SIGRIST: Do you know what the name of the ship was?

JERMAKIAN: I don't know the name of the French liner but it docked that day. And that other couple stayed in Bulgaria. And the only reason I'm saying that is because they had a son, Michael, who was born in Bulgaria. So when, by the time they came, they had to come with their son when I was born here in Ellis Island. They were married the same day but I was born a couple of months before he was, a couple of months older. So, they were going through the immigration building there, my mother got her pains. She didn't know one word in English. And the only reason she got through the line, I understand there was some kind of rule that if you're pregnant you're not supposed to be entering as an immigrant? It was some kind of rule apparently because she had those long coats and they hid her pregnancy on the boat. They used to wear long coats and, uh, so when she was going through the line, she started to get her pains. So they separated her from my father, who knew English a little bit, and took her to the hospital on Ellis Island. I know this story there because she used to tell it all the time. The people came and asked her, "Well, you got a baby boy. What do you want to name him?" She just raised her arms. She didn't know what they were saying. She

didn't know a word in English. So they ended up putting "No Name Germakian." That was my name when I was born. In fact, they spelled Jermakian with a "G." My father always spelled it with a "G." So it was "No Name Germakian" and I was born there. And from there we went to Troy, New York. My father was working at, like I said, he worked at the Ford Motor Company. And eventually he opened up a little business of his own on Fifth Avenue in Troy, a laundry. He learned the hand laundry at that time. He opened up a dry cleaning and laundry. And my mother used to help him out. She used to, they used to bring with a wagon clothes home to wash and bring back and forth shirts. Primarily shirts they used to do, iron shirts. He used to iron shirts from eight in the morning until eight at night. He was a hard worker.

SIGRIST: Let's, let's stop the story there...

JERMAKIAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: ..and let's back up a bit. And I want to talk a little bit about your father specifically. First of all, can you tell me a little bit about his personality.

JERMAKIAN: Very conservative. My father was well dressed, always had to put a shirt and tie and suit on. Whenever he went any place in public he always dressed, at that time, very well dressed man. And he was a stern, a stern father.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that can reflect his sternness? Do you remember something that happened that, that shows us why he was stern or how he was stern.

JERMAKIAN: Well, my wife [sic, mother] says he was stern. I thought he was pretty good but my wife [sic, mother] says, I mean my mother. She liked to dress up, my wife [sic, mother], you know, they were married because, once she learned American ways, although she worked hard at the beginning with him. She wanted, we went to movies all the time. It was very cheap. She always wanted to go but he never wanted to go to movies with us and, and she used to, and then she started working at Cluett and Peabody, Arrow Shirts, and she was making, bringing shirts home. They used to, all these immigrants used to bring the shirts home, and collars. They had separate collars at that time and they used to bring it home and do the work at home and then go back.

SIGRIST: Were there rules that, as you were growing, up your father set down?

JERMAKIAN: He was head of the family! They, you know, they were, they had the old tradition, yes, he was head of the family. he decided what we were going to do.

SIGRIST: What were the things you couldn't do at that time? When you were growing up, what were some of the rules you had to obey?

JERMAKIAN: Oh, I, things were a little different then because, well, he bought a car. Because during the Depression, I

remember, he had an old, big Studebaker. And then I
remember him buying a two family house. But he worked so late
and my mother was always lonely, really. I'm, I'm getting to this
point where when she gets, when I get twelve years old they
get divorced. And that was unheard of in the Armenian community,
all right, because he was kind of stern. He wasn't her type. She
was the happy-go-lucky type, like to have, you know, big parties
and go to movies and theatres and, at that time, women, very few
women liked to smoke but she liked to. She started smoking
cigarettes, you know, and having her nails done and high heels
shoes and that was, she was a very attractive woman, my
mother.

SIGRIST: So, so therein lies...

JERMAKIAN: My, there was a little bit, there was a difference in
age. She was only seventeen years old and my father was twenty
eight, twenty nine. You know, as they're going on, the
discrepancy was getting, when she was twenty one he became thirty
eight like, you know, things like that.

SIGRIST: When your father wasn't working, what did he like to do
for his own pleasure?

JERMAKIAN: Well that's, they had Armenian social clubs, all
right, where they played cards. He loved to play cards, too.

SIGRIST: What kind of card games did they play?

JERMAKIAN: Pinochle they used to play and, pinochle, poker.
Mostly pinochle they, Armenians play pinochle. They loved to play
pinochle. So when he worked hard, he had to have that
recreation. So their day, the only day off he had was Sunday so
he liked to go on Sundays and, otherwise, he would go after work. So
he was absent from home a lot. And on Sundays we went on, my
mother would like to go with the whole family some place and he
would end up going to church and then to the club. Always went to
church. We always went to church. He made sure we always went to
church, went to Sund--, I said he was stern.

SIGRIST: What was the church? What denomination?

JERMAKIAN: Armenian Apostolic Church.

SIGRIST: Is that a Protestant...

JERMAKIAN: On Fifth Avenue. No.

SIGRIST: Orthodox?

JERMAKIAN: A regular Orthodox Armenian Apostolic Church. Fifth
Avenue in Troy they had a beautiful church.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever speak of his own childhood to
you?

JERMAKIAN: Not too much.

SIGRIST: I mean, did he ever tell any stories, maybe about...

JERMAKIAN: That's all I know about his large family. They had a big, large area, large farms and everything, you know. And they were all wiped out. His whole family was wiped out. That's why you find very few Armenians of my generation that had grandparents or ever saw grandparents. My mother's family was wiped out. That's why she was an orphan and was in an orphanage. She grew up in the orphanage. And my father's family was all wiped out. No relatives.

SIGRIST: Well, maybe this is a good time to talk about your mother. You told us her name. Tell me what you know about her background.

JERMAKIAN: I don't know too much about her background because she grew up in that orphanage.

SIGRIST: Well, what did she used to tell about that experience, or before...

JERMAKIAN: It was nuns in, by the way. They were nuns in that, Armenian nuns that she had in that orphanage. They gave them a very good education. She liked the orphanage. I mean, the classmates were nice and she didn't mind that environment too much. It was better than being an orphan on the street, like in those days, you know, they could have been.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year your mother was born?

JERMAKIAN: Well, 19---, well, 1923 when I was born, I think she was seventeen. Go back seventeen more years from, 1906, maybe.

SIGRIST: Yeah, '05, '06. Did she ever talk about her experiences...

JERMAKIAN: She, she didn't know too much of her own, she didn't know too much about her own, uh, I don't know what year she went into the orphanage, either.

SIGRIST: She would have been a young girl during the Genocide.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I mean, did she ever talk about that or what she went through at that time?

JERMAKIAN: I don't know how she ended up there. I don't know how she ended up in Istanbul, you know. She never talked too much about that. She never did. I don't know too much about her background there.

SIGRIST: What was her, well, you...

JERMAKIAN: Well, she came from a small town. She called it Popert. It was outside of Erzurum, Erzurum, Turkey. Whatever

happened over there in that village, they were wiped out and she was taken by some friends or relatives to, Istanbul is the only safe place. And they, you know, the children, they got to Istanbul, were put in orphanages. They didn't want, the Turks didn't want to show their bad face to the whole world in like that big city. So they, they, she survived there.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the village she was from?

JERMAKIAN: She called it Popert.

SIGRIST: How would you spell that?

JERMAKIAN: P-O-P-E-R-T. And she said it was outside Erzurum. Erzurum is a city in central Turkey someplace.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. Did she ever talk, you mentioned the nuns. Did she ever tell any stories about...

JERMAKIAN: Very strict nuns. When they were growing up, they were very strict with her and, then when we came over here, she met another one, one of her classmates who was married. Eventually, in a few years, she found one in New York City, in Brooklyn and one in Washington Heights and one in Springfield. And the one in Springfield, you know, they grew up together in that same orphanage and have kids my age almost. So they, they're around, too.

SIGRIST: Did she ever speak about how she felt about being lined up to be chosen as a bride?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, well, I, she used to always say, you know, when this divorce thing happened, I was about twelve years old, like I said, "Oh, well, I never loved your father. He came and picked me out and I wanted to get out of there to come to America, so we married." But I, I've got a trunk up there with love letters when they were separated for a short while when he went to Bulgaria or she went. I don't know what happened but they wrote a lot of love letters together, so she was pretty, I had some of them, you know, read to me. And she, at that time, I think she did love him but, at any rate, that's, that's why I'm trying to, if I ever write a book or a movie, it's going to be quite a story because a lot of other developments, side line developments took place.

SIGRIST: Did, did either your mother or your father speak about the journey itself to Marseille?

JERMAKIAN: Not too much. I don't know too much about that part.

SIGRIST: Actually, you said they went to Bulgaria first, traveling with this other couple.

JERMAKIAN: Bulgaria first, Bulgaria first with that other couple. They were there for a few months, I guess. And then they took a boat from there to, by boat, I think, they went to Marseille. You know, on the Mediterranean. That's why it took them so long. And

then they took another boat and wait there for a while. They stayed a few months in Marseille with some other Armenian families they met there. And commun--, there was an Armenian community in Marseille, and Bulgaria, too. So, there are a lot of Armenians in Bulgaria and Marseille.

SIGRIST: Do you know at all what either your mother's or your father's families did for livings in Turkey?

JERMAKIAN: My father's were, owned a farm, I think. I think they owned a farm. Mother, I don't know anything about her families. She never knew too much herself about them. I don't know why. She never talked about that.

SIGRIST: Well, she may not have wanted to or never had asked...

JERMAKIAN: Or never, never really knew too much about it herself. Maybe she was very young when she went into the orphanage. I don't realize that part there, I'm not sure, you know. But I know that she had no family, no relatives and came here with, and my father's family was wiped, my father talked more about. he was older. He knew what was going on. His family was there. He had a large family, I don't know, ten or eleven he used to say, and they were all wiped out.

SIGRIST: I'm just curious, here you are now. You're seventy three.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, how do you feel about not being able to know chunks of, of your own family history?

JERMAKIAN: Well, see, when they used to probably talk about it, we were, we were so young and we were just starting to go to school. Like, when I was five years old I started to go to kindergarten. I'll never forget that. I didn't, I didn't even know any English. That's all we knew was Armenian. They put me in school the first day and I just cried my head off and they brought me home, kindergarten, because I didn't know what was going on there, you know. So we were all, only knew Armenian. We, everybody, my father made sure we all knew Armenian, went to Armenian school and we, we were doing that.

SIGRIST: But now, as a person who is interested in your own family background and there are these chunks that are missing, I mean, how does that make you feel now? Are you curious about it? Do you just accept the fact that you will never know this information? I'm just curious how you think about that.

JERMAKIAN: Well, I always felt, I have a granddaughter now. Now, she's got grandparents on both sides, you know, from her mother and father and they love her. One granddaughter I got. I never knew what grandmother, grandfather love was. No uncles, no nothing, you know. We just grew up by friends. We developed friends and we lived like in an Armenian ghetto, so I knew, you know, we had a pretty good life growing up. I loved growing up in

Troy, New York. It was beautiful. And, we had Armenian grocery stores on every corner, sometimes two of them on one corner. The whole area there was, this is an Armenian ghetto. So that's why we didn't learn the English right away, see, just like nowadays when people come over they have that problem. But the story of the, what happened way back, my father never talked too much about that. They didn't want it. They didn't want to discuss that too much. I know you're interested in that part.

SIGRIST: Well, I, no, I want to know how you feel about it. I'm wondering how you, now, at seventy three, when you look back and you want to tell your grandchild, you're unable to do it because...

JERMAKIAN: We want them to appreciate the fact they do have grandparents, you know. They want, we want them to know a little bit of the Genocide history. Not, not to have them hate this country or that country, not that. It just happened by certain people over there that committed that atrocity. I think, personally I think they have to get friends with the Armenians some time or other. They'd better make some friendship before Armenians get involved again into another war. But I grew up as being, you know, knowing my culture that, my father instilled that in us, that we have to know about the Genocide. He made sure we knew about the Genocide, about all his parents being killed. That's why he had no grandparents. He was stern, and he was well educated. He wanted us to make sure we don't forget and I never did forget. I'm seventy three years old and I never forgot. I looked up quite a bit. I went back to Armenia twice, made two trips there. It was during the Communist regime but I went twice. And it was, I went to, he had distant relatives that he had, the cousins, no, no I said he didn't have any, his immediate family was wiped out. But he had a couple of cousins, Jermakians in Armenia which, when he died I didn't even know that. He corresponded with them all the time but I didn't know that until he died and I got the letters, all his letters he had kept. And I saw these addresses on these letters. So I started thinking I'll take a trip to Armenia and see if I can look these people up. So I did. That's when I went to Armenia and I looked them up. And they knew all about me. They knew my wife's name, they knew everything, and I didn't know anything about them. I didn't know they existed but they knew everything because my father corresponded. But he never told me that. Only when he died I got all these letters because they were all in Armenian. I couldn't even read them but I took the addresses.

SIGRIST: Let's get back to your childhood.

JERMAKIAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: All right. So your parents came over. You were born at Ellis Island. We know the story about you being born without a name...

JERMAKIAN: Right, "No Name."

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever talk about anything else that happened, like do you know long that they were held at Ellis Island for that, for the birth?

JERMAKIAN: I really don't know how long they were held but I know that when they left Ellis Island, I think they went to Troy, New York.

SIGRIST: They went right to Troy.

JERMAKIAN: Right to Troy, New York.

SIGRIST: What's, what's your first memory in Troy?

JERMAKIAN: First memory was that kindergarten.

SIGRIST: That's where your memory kicks in.

JERMAKIAN: Before that I think I remember a little bit, maybe when I was four years old, I see my father coming home with a work pail from Ford Motor Company. And he was, you know, they were dark and they had to come home and take a bath because he would come home always at night.

SIGRIST: Dark from...?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, from work. From the work, whatever he was doing at the, at that Ford Motor Company. And I see him with that lunch pail and everything when they brought home. They used to take their lunch, I guess, and...

SIGRIST: Just a little glimpse of memory.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, that, that part I remember, seeing my father. And I felt sorry for him. And then I used to feel sorry for him when he opened up that laundry because he'd be working fourteen hours a day some days. You know, he'd be working and ironing. I don't know how he stood on his feet because I got bad feet and I can't stand on my feet. But he used to stand on his feet and iron by hand. That time, though, they used to get fifteen cents a shirt.

SIGRIST: How old were you when he opened up the laundry?

JERMAKIAN: When he opened the laundry, I must have been about seven or eight years old. Because then my, originally, when they opened it up, he used to bring the clothes home to be washed at home. My mother used to wash them, and then take it back and package it up. And later on they sent it out to a laundry to be wash and they just ironed it.

SIGRIST: Now, were there other brothers and sisters in this family?

JERMAKIAN: Later on I had a sister, four years later.

SIGRIST: Well,...

JERMAKIAN: I had a sister! Okay? Four years later. I'm four years older than her.

SIGRIST: Right. You were born in '23.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So she must have been born in '27?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. And what was her name?

JERMAKIAN: My, Armena (he pronounces the name "Armen-ay"), just add an "A" onto mine. That's what they named her. Armen and Armena. Of course, when she started school, I told her change it. I says, "You don't want (he laughs) to go around with Armena as a name in the public schools." So she used Armena, or rather Irene Armena. Irene I call her.

SIGRIST: So that would be A-R-M-E-N-A ?

JERMAKIAN: "A," just add an "A" on. So everybody used to go in church, you know, my father would introduce us as Armen and Armena, you know. Oh, everybody was so proud, "What a proud Armenian family, you know, you got, your son is Armen and your daughter is Armena," you know, and all these immigrants that were in the, we flocked in that Armenian church. It was crowded. There was three thousand Armenians there in Troy at that time.

SIGRIST: Well, that's what I want to ask you next. I really want you to talk...

JERMAKIAN: I remember that.

SIGRIST: ...in depth about the Armenian community.

JERMAKIAN: Three thousand Armenians within a, well, there was, Troy is all hills, if you know. If you've been to Troy, you went to Troy to interview, right?

SIGRIST: Oh, every year I go.

JERMAKIAN: All right, there's streets; Eighth Street, Ninth Street, Tenth Street, Eleven, all the way up to Fifteen. Well, there were three thousand Armenians located between Ninth and Fifteenth Street. They were crowded right in there, within about six block wide area and about all those streets up, mostly all Armenian.

SIGRIST: Now, you mentioned there were two Armenian grocery stores that you can remember...

JERMAKIAN: No, no, in each corner I said. There was, maybe, fifty in the city.

SIGRIST: And what were some of the other...

JERMAKIAN: I lived on Ninth Street. On Ninth Street there was eight of them. Two on each, sometimes horizontal, across the street, they were all Armenian stores. We used to buy all our meat. My mother used to send me over there to get lamb, get a forequarter lamb, have them chop, slice, get all the chops you can and then grind all the rest. And bring the fat home. Go over there, sometimes send me over to get the scrap fat, which they used to melt and make soap.

SIGRIST: Did your mother make soap?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the process?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, they got all that fat...

SIGRIST: That's beef fat? What kind, what animal is that? Does it matter?

JERMAKIAN: Beef, beef fat.

SIGRIST: Uh huh.

JERMAKIAN: They used to melt it, I guess, and then they, I don't know what else they did to it, just, that comes out to be a bar of soap. I think it was beef fat. Anyhow, he, the grocers knew what to give to my mother, and just go.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other Armenian businesses in that neighborhood that you can recall?

JERMAKIAN: Most of the women worked at Cluett and Peabody. They used to bring collars home, individual collars. Troy, New York, made ninety percent of the collars of the world.

SIGRIST: Because of the...

JERMAKIAN: Everybody had individual collars. Collars were not attached to shirts. I remember that when I was a kid, you had to have a separate collar. That's what my father's business was, mostly doing collars and shirts. But later on they, Cluett and Peabody put the collar on, so that affected their businesses, too.

SIGRIST: Did most married Armenian women work outside the home?

JERMAKIAN: They all, well, almost all of them had to. When their children were going to school, they brought their work home, you know. Cluett and Peabody had a system where they gave them the work. They brought it home and they did, I don't know, ties. Ties they used to do at home, too, not just shirts. They used to bring the ties home, now that I think of it. My mother used to bring ties home, too.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how your mother was paid? Was it paid by the piece or was it paid hourly wages?

JERMAKIAN: Paid by the piece.

SIGRIST: Uh huh. Do you remember...

JERMAKIAN: Because they brought it home. I don't remember how much they'd get but she used to make maybe ten, fifteen dollars a week that way. For that time it was pretty good money.

SIGRIST: So the women are working outside and, of course, Cluett and Peabody was a big factory.

JERMAKIAN: That was a big, big factory there.

SIGRIST: Hired a lot of people.

JERMAKIAN: Right.

SIGRIST: What were some of the...

JERMAKIAN: Some of the other businesses the Armenians went into was the dry cleaning, meat market, meat markets, big meat markets. The first supermarket in Albany was an Armenian. They went into the meat market business and then they went into the, the dry cleaning business. A lot of those businesses are still there. They're owned by Armenians.

SIGRIST: I'm just trying to get a, you know...

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...a look at the neighborhood.

JERMAKIAN: Most of them were, most of them were entrepreneurs, I mean, they were doing their own businesses. Very few of them worked in the factories. Once they learned the language, they opened up their own businesses. Either a small tailor shops, barber shops, a lot of barbers, Armenian barbers were there. I used to go to an Armenian barber. My father used to take me there and, yeah, those were the primary businesses. Meat markets, grocery stores, and dry cleaning.

SIGRIST: Did your family ever do business with non-Armenian service people or merchants that you can remember?

JERMAKIAN: They used to have an Armenian come around with vegetables, the Tamanian brothers, they used to go door to door. Milkman was Armenian, delivered the milk.

SIGRIST: You said a name.

JERMAKIAN: Tamanian.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

JERMAKIAN: T-A-M-A-N-I-A-N, I guess their name was, the Tamanians. There were wholesalers. They went house to house with their truck, you know, and delivered their vegetables.

SIGRIST: So it sounds to me like the Armenian community was very...

JERMAKIAN: The milkman was Armenian. The bread man would be Armenian.

SIGRIST: ...very self-contained.

JERMAKIAN: It was. That area was really a, until we went to school and I learned the language and everything and then, and I changed the "G" to a "J" because I said, "You know, my small brain thought that G-E-R, they're going to say 'Germakian,' you know, germ, germ, they'll call me 'germ' or something." So I said, I used "J." So my father, up 'til the time he died, he used "G" and I used "J." My sister used "J," J-E-R-M-A-K, but the (boat?). Well, here's where I started having trouble. Well, well I went, R.P.I. [Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute] is in Troy, New York. Well, my mother got divorced. It was because of this other fellow that (zapper?) Armenian guy, had a big job. He was a chef, and so forth. And they got married. They had a couple years good but after that was a lot of trouble. And I used to go to my father, you know, they were all in the same community. I lived with my mother but my father was in town, too, so I used to go there every day after school. He put me into R.P.I., he wanted me to go to school and I went into R.P.I. until the war came. So, I was drafted from R.P.I., you know, when the war came. They gave me a deferment but I refused it. I wanted to go. I wanted to get out because there were problems in my family,...

SIGRIST: This is the Second World War?

JERMAKIAN: ...although I felt sorry, yeah, felt sorry for my sister because that other fellow was getting a nervous break down, that step-father. And he was, a lot of turmoil. Anyhow, the reason I said that my father loved my mother and my mother, I thought, loved my mother right to the end because that other marriage didn't work out. And she always, I think near the end she was, she went back to him but it didn't work out. Anyhow, I went to R.P.I. and then a friend from Springfield called me up and said there's a dry cleaning store for sale here and come over here. And I, I wanted to get out of school, and I left R.P.I. I told my father, "This fellow wants to sell me this dry cleaning, a small dry cleaning place here in Springfield. Will you come and take a look at it with me?" because I didn't have any money. And we looked at it. And he says, "Is that what you want to do?" "Yeah," I said, "I don't want to go to school any more. I want to, I want this little business down here on Columbus Avenue in Springfield." It looked like a thriving business...

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

JERMAKIAN: ...but, anyhow, it didn't work out. And I don't want to go into my life up there. You want, you want their life.

SIGRIST: Well, I'm, no, I'm primarily...

JERMAKIAN: Right.

SIGRIST: ...interested in your childhood.

JERMAKIAN: But what I'm getting to is, uh, I tried two businesses. They didn't work out. And I went back to school, got a teaching, I wanted to become a math teacher and I got my degrees. Then I was going to look for a job in Springfield because I went to U. of M. [University of Massachusetts] and they said you need two years experience. So I went back to Troy, New York and I asked, my chemistry, high school chemistry teacher was a superintendent. I went and saw him. He gave me a job right away.

SIGRIST: The U. of M. being the University of Michigan?

JERMAKIAN: Mass.

SIGRIST: Oh, Massachusetts.

JERMAKIAN: Well, I went to University of Michigan during the war, too, but I, I skipped all that part.

SIGRIST: The University of Massachusetts.

JERMAKIAN: I got the job in Troy. I was teaching in Troy four years. My mother moved to Springfield, left the other guy. I came back because I heard that she was getting, had leukemia. She had a couple of years to live, so I moved back to Springfield and I got a job here. But, when they were, when I was interviewing in Springfield for a job, they wanted my birth certificate. Now, up to now, I went through public schools in Troy, went into the army, got a job in Troy, nobody ever asked me. I never had a birth certificate. Nobody ever asked me for it. Springfield asked me for a birth certificate. "You've got to come up with a birth certificate." So, what am I going to do? I wrote to Ellis Island. Ellis Island was closed. When I wrote to Ellis Island, there was no, you know, the island was closed that time for a short period, you know, before you took that job it was closed. They closed Ellis Island up. So I wrote to New York. Didn't get any. They said, "Go to Washington D.C." I wrote to Washington D.C., they told me to write back to Manhattan, some place in Manhattan. Anyhow, I ended up with a birth certificate, after a lot of trouble, with that "No Name" on it. And I had to correct it. I put a name on it, you know. And they had it spelled with a "G." I spelled it with a "J." There was a lot of, that's probably why

they had trouble finding it, too. And on top of all that, I think my father put a capital, you know in French you used a capital "D" and an apostrophe, which means "of," just like the "ian" in Armenian? There's a lot of French words like "D," capital "D" apostrophe and then their name. That means "of the family." So he had put a "D," I think, in front of the "Germakian." It caused all this problem. That's where this birth certificate comes up. So, I finally got that straightened out and, anyhow, I started working in Springfield.

SIGRIST: Let's...

JERMAKIAN: Now, now (he laughs), all right, I was just going to say...

SIGRIST: Go ahead and finish.

JERMAKIAN: I was just going to finish this part.

SIGRIST: All right.

JERMAKIAN: In the meantime, that Carnig Vahradian I was talking about, wanted to learn the dry clean-- the laundry business, how to iron shirts, from my father. And he worked with him for a short while. And then he took his family, because his wife was getting mad because he was going to the club all the time playing cards with my father. That was one of the reasons why the women, she said, "I'm going to yank him out of here." So, she took him out and they went to, they went back to Armenia. Worst time, 1933. They went back to Armenia when Armenia was independent but impoverished. They had a short period of independence them before the Turks invade them in 19-- and it was, they had, they were impoverished. I guess it was under Communist rule at the time but it was impoverished. Anyhow, they had left there, came back to Long Island. They went to Southampton. They opened up a cleaning a cleaning business in Southampton, Long Island, and the business started thriving. Down there he had two boys. One was that Michael that was born in Bulgaria, my, you know, the first one that they had. And they were starting to date. There's no Armenians in Southampton, no Armenians at all. So they got concerned because now they're going, went to high school and they're starting to go out with girls. They want them to many an Armenian girl. So now this is, they want to go back to Troy and find out what happened to us. We weren't in Troy anymore. So after a lot of research, they found us. I was going to get married. I had just, this was in 1948, I guess. I was going to get married. They visited my house. My mother was so surprised to see them, you know, Mr. and Mrs. Vahradian, they had been very successful in Southampton. And they told a story about their son. They wanted him to meet somebody. My sister was it. I said, "Well, what does he want? Does he want to come and meet, be part of my wedding party?" I haven't met him all these years, you know, he was four, five years old when they left Troy and they moved out. And I haven't seen him since then. But I said, "Why don't you come and be a part of our wedding party?" So he did come and he met my sister, kept, make a long story short, they fell in love with each other and she moved to

Southampton. When I came back from our honeymoon, they were already dating back and forth. So it did happen. So, they said that, you know, not to be each other's godfather paid off. So he died about two years ago, though.

SIGRIST: Uh, let's...

JERMAKIAN: So my sister was married forty some odd years with him. I'm married forty eight [years]. She was married forty four [years], I guess, there's four years since he died.

SIGRIST: Let's go back to Troy, to when you were a kid.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, I know, okay.

SIGRIST: That's okay. Actually, that was a very interesting story. It...

JERMAKIAN: Well, that's why I said I would like to write a book. That's only part of all the things I've gone through.

SIGRIST: Right, right. Let me, let me ask you a little bit about some of the ways, when you were a young kid before your parents divorced, say, you know, when they were freshly in this country for a while...

JERMAKIAN: What I remember?

SIGRIST: Well, I, some of the ways that they maintained their Armenian culture in the home.

JERMAKIAN: Well, all our food was Armenian.

SIGRIST: All right. Can you talk about that?

JERMAKIAN: Oh, yeah. We have beautiful food. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Talk about what you...

JERMAKIAN: My mother was a good cook.

SIGRIST: ...ate when you were a kid, though, not what you eat now necessarily, but...

JERMAKIAN: Well, we all loved the, the, we all have pilaf, of course. That's the Armenian...

SIGRIST: And what is that?

JERMAKIAN: Pilaf? You don't...

SIGRIST: For someone who has never heard what that is, describe it.

JERMAKIAN: Rice, they use either or they use, uh, wheat, rice or wheat. They bake it and, it's a side dish, like, you know, it's not the main dish. It's just a side dish. Like rice pilaf, the

Chinese eat it. Rice pilaf, that's what they eat, you know.
Pilaf is made differently in Armenian style. They use it
with butter and everything. Pilaf, and then they make, you
know, shish kebab. You know that. And lamb.

SIGRIST: But describe it for someone who has never...

JERMAKIAN: Lamb is our...

SIGRIST: ...heard any of this.

JERMAKIAN: Well, like a forequarter lamb. The stores used to
sell forequarter lamb, all right. They don't sell it anymore like
that, but you buy the whole forequarter. (Mrs. Jermakian comes
through the front door of the house carrying bags of groceries)
And they...

MRS. JERMAKIAN: Hi.

JERMAKIAN: ...and they, they say, "Take all the lamb chops,
shoulder lamb chops you can get out of it." And you cook the
shoulder lamb chops on that, they're going to cook that. Then they
take the bones. They want the bones. The rest they want to grind
out. And when they grind it out, they make, use that for making
lehmedjoon, they call it.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

JERMAKIAN: Lehmedjoon. (to Mrs. Jermakian) Sally, how do you
spell lehmedjoon? I, my wife... (he laughs)

SIGRIST: She's outside right now.

JERMAKIAN: Oh, she went out? Lehmedjoon is L-E-H-, it's like a,
it's a meat pie, if you ever ate it. I don't know. Usually, if
you go to any Armenian...

SIGRIST: Just pretend I know nothing about...

JERMAKIAN: Lehmedjoon, L-E-H-M-E-D-J-O-O-N, I guess. That would,
lehmedjoon. That's like a meat pie, like a pizza. They rolled
the dough flat and then put on it lamb. And they passed on their
cooking style. My wife is a terrific cook.

SIGRIST: I know, but I'm, I'm asking about when you were a
child.

JERMAKIAN: When I was a child?

SIGRIST: What do you remember your mother cooking in the house
that was uniquely Armenian?

JERMAKIAN: All right, most of the things were done with yogurt.
Yogurt soup with round meat balls in it. They made round balls
and they put it with the yogurt soup. All right?

SIGRIST: Did your family make their yogurt?

JERMAKIAN: They made it. She made it. There was no, they didn't sell it in the stores then. There was no yogurt on the market.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how it was made?

JERMAKIAN: How?

SIGRIST: How they did that?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah. They have a...(he looks in the direction of Mrs. Jermakian, who is nearby in the kitchen unpacking the bags of groceries)

SIGRIST: And pretend your wife isn't here so you won't ask her.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, I know, but I'm trying to think of the word they use. The ingredient that, it has to go from one package. If you have a jar of yogurt here, you got to keep a little bit of it, it's like a starter, for the next batch, you know. What do you call that? (he pauses) Because you're going to ask me which, who started the first batch. (they laugh) I don't know, you know what I mean?

SIGRIST: I understand. You needed to keep a little...

JERMAKIAN: You have to keep a little bit to keep going to make a new one, a new batch. It's, so that's, that was a main staple that they all made. They made their own yogurt, okay? And that became popular because an Armenian guy, Columbo is Armenian.

SIGRIST: Columbo Yogurt.

JERMAKIAN: Columbo Yogurt. He made it so that it always comes out the same and he manufactured it and he became a millionaire. But we used to make it in each home. They used to make yogurt.

SIGRIST: And was...(a car alarm can be heard in the background)

JERMAKIAN: We didn't call it yogurt, by the way.

SIGRIST: What did you call it?

JERMAKIAN: That's more like a Jewish thing. It was madzoon, M-A-D-Z-O-O-N. Madzoon is what we called it. It's the same thing as yogurt, though.

SIGRIST: What, what about bread? Was there a special kind of bread that you...

JERMAKIAN: Bread, yeah. Armenian bread. It was round, it was usually round. They had both, all shapes, but the primary Armenian bread was a round bread like they sell right now. Pita bread, the pita bread they sell now?

SIGRIST: (distracted by the noise created by Mrs. Jermakian unpacking bags of groceries in the nearby kitchen) May I shut this door, please?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah. (he begins to get up to shut the door)

SIGRIST: No, don't. (referring to Mr. Jermakian's microphone) You're all wired up. Don't move.

JERMAKIAN: Oh, okay.

SIGRIST: I'll do it. (he shuts the kitchen door)

JERMAKIAN: And let's see, what else?

SIGRIST: Where did the bread come from?

JERMAKIAN: They, Armenian bakeries.

SIGRIST: Okay, so your mother didn't bake the bread.

JERMAKIAN: Armenian bakeries. You could get the lehmedjoon from the Armenian bakery, too. Some of them did, yeah. A lot of them did. My mother-in-law used to make, bake her own bread. They baked their own bread, too.

SIGRIST: But in your household in Troy...

JERMAKIAN: My mother usually purchased it.

SIGRIST: Yeah, purchased. What about for a special occasion? For instance, for a holiday celebration, was there a special food that was served that you remember?

JERMAKIAN: Shish kebab was a big thing then they served for a lot, all of, most of the big events that Armenians gathered they served shish kebab. You know, that's lamb, cubed lamb. They put it on, a thing, uh...

SIGRIST: Like a stick.

JERMAKIAN: A shish, a shish they call it. They put it on that and they put it over fire and they cook it. We used to go on picnics like that all the time. Kuftay [ph] is a round ball that they stuff inside it with lamb and then they boil that in water and they eat that. That's kuftay [ph].

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that your wife has come in and, because it will pick up all the sounds, which is all right but I just want someone listening to the tape to know that there are groceries being unpacked in the background.

JERMAKIAN: Okay, you want to just tell her to keep a little quiet?

SIGRIST: It's okay. It won't be too bad.

JERMAKIAN: You want me to tell her?

SIGRIST: No, it's all right. I also would like to talk about, you said that there was a large church...

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, Armenian church, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...that you went to (?). And this an Armenian Orthodox...

JERMAKIAN: Right.

SIGRIST: Apostolic?

JERMAKIAN: Apostolic.

SIGRIST: Church. Can you talk to me a little bit about how your family practiced their religion at home?

JERMAKIAN: Well, we, we were supposed to say our prayers before we eat, you know, at dinner time. Everybody has to say a prayer. And we had to go to Armenian school as well as Sunday school. Every Sunday I had to go to Sunday school. And then we used to have to go to Armenian school, too.

SIGRIST: Is there, do you remember the prayer that your family said at the dinner table?

JERMAKIAN: Well, we used to say the Lord's Prayer, is what we say in Armenian.

SIGRIST: And could you...

JERMAKIAN: In Armenian.

SIGRIST: Can you do that now?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Would you do it, please?

JERMAKIAN: (he recites the Lord's Prayer in Armenian)

SIGRIST: Thank you. It's interesting that you speak so loudly when you're talking (they laugh) but when you pray, you hold way back and you're much less distinct.

JERMAKIAN: Again, see, I did quite a bit of talking at this funeral yesterday. (he clears is throat) At the wake, we had the wake and the funeral and I had a lot of...

SIGRIST: What, what were the major holidays in the church calendar that your family celebrated in your childhood?

JERMAKIAN: Martyr's Day is the main holiday. And then we have Vartanes [ph] Day...

SIGRIST: Vartan?

JERMAKIAN: Vartan, Vartanes [ph] they call it, Vartanes [ph], that's the General Vartan. He was a hero that fought the Arabs and, uh, (?) the way in 413 or something like that, you know, right after he became Christian, right after he became Christian.

SIGRIST: Were there special ways that you celebrated these holidays? What did...

JERMAKIAN: Usually at the church. There was a festival day at the church and we used to go to the church. Most of the occasions was at church.

SIGRIST: And what would happen? What, what, you went...

JERMAKIAN: Well, they'd have either a play. They'd call it a stage, they'd put on a play with all these costumes and things and then you'd have a special service in church and then they'd have a play or something downstairs in the auditorium. (he coughs)

SIGRIST: What about Christmas? Was there...

JERMAKIAN: Christmas is January 6th. It's always been January 6th and we still do it January 6th.

SIGRIST: And how, how is it celebrated? Or how was it celebrated when you were...

JERMAKIAN: Saturday, the night before, the Christmas Eve celebration, we have January 5th, starts the night before. They have a full service which we call Badarak.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

JERMAKIAN: B-A-D-A-R-A-K.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

JERMAKIAN: And that's in evening, and then in the morning of Christmas, it's January 6th, we have a full, used to be five, six hour service. They've cut it down now to about three. But the services were long. When I was growing up we wouldn't get through with, church would start at 9:00 and we wouldn't get through 'til 2:00, 2:00, 3:00 in the afternoon.

SIGRIST: And what language would...

JERMAKIAN: Armenian, everything was Armenian.

SIGRIST: Never English?

JERMAKIAN: Never. Now it is, now, now, still Armenian except the sermon is in English. It's still an Armenian service.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, as a child in Troy, any kind of organized schooling for adults for teaching English or anything like that?

JERMAKIAN: They went to, they went to school, yeah, they went to public, they went to some public schools to learn English. Nights, night school like, I guess it was.

SIGRIST: You said your father spoke a little English.

JERMAKIAN: My, spoke, my father was here a few years earlier and he started working so he started learning the language.

SIGRIST: But your mother?

JERMAKIAN: He could read and write English and everything. He went to school over here but not graduating from any school. But he did one of these special classes, you know, for immigrants, they learned. He would go, and then he associated with customers and everything. He picked up the language very good.

SIGRIST: But what about your mother?

JERMAKIAN: Oh, she learned afterwards, too. Then she started working and everything. She, she, she spoke good English. (background kitchen noise can be heard) Later on in life they both spoke very good English. She could read and write. She went to school, too. She learned. She was young when she came so she was able to learn.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of that process of your mother going to school and...

JERMAKIAN: I think they went at, more at night. I can't remember that part too well. She must have done a lot of it while I was growing up, you know, at a small age.

SIGRIST: Now you mentioned, of course, you went to kindergarten and, and...

JERMAKIAN: Cried and went home.

SIGRIST: Cried and, you know, and had to be taken out.

JERMAKIAN: Went home, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about how you learned English?

JERMAKIAN: It wasn't very difficult for me to learn because once we, the second day once I went in there and I started staying and I, I learned pretty rapidly. We had good teachers there and the classes were small and I learn fast. And I liked school so, and associating with my neighbor, too. We owned a two family house. My tenant was Irish, so they were, we got friends with them. And you learn by playing with those kids and playing ball and so forth.

SIGRIST: I see.

JERMAKIAN: I didn't have any trouble learning English, once I started I...

SIGRIST: I'm curious about your sister, because she's that much younger.

JERMAKIAN: Four years.

SIGRIST: Right. Did she, uh, what about your sister? Did she learn Armenian and had the same problem when she went to school? Or because she was so much younger did...?

JERMAKIAN: She didn't have as much problem as I did, no, because she already knew English when I, because I was, I was already four years ahead of her and I knew the language and everything and she, she learned. She didn't have the problem I did.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up, were there any conflicts between your old world parents and their ideas and your ideas?

JERMAKIAN: There was a conflict in this respect: my mother used to love to play the music. It was Armenian and Turkish music that they played. And in the summertime the windows would be opened. And my playmates now were both Armenian and non-Armenian. And they'd hear that music coming out, you know, they'd call us "foreigners" and things like that because of that music. And I used to go home and tell my mother, "Shut it off," or "Stop that music. Everybody thinks we're..." and that I distinctly remember because we didn't want to, and I love that music now myself but at that time, you know, they always think you're, they always looked upon you as being not native, you know. They looked down on you, they did. At the beginning they did look down on you.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little more about that? Do you remember any other instances of that happening?

JERMAKIAN: (he pauses) I'm trying to think what might have happened in school. One thing we always had a problem with was teacher's would mispronounce our names, you know. It was very, it's not, you just pronounce it the way it's spelled but they'd always say, you know, "Jermakaroonian" or they, as though they couldn't understand it, you know, especially if you had a difficult first name which wasn't like Dick or George or Tom. if you said, like my sister Armena[ooey, ph], you know, Jermakian, you know, they'd have an awful hard time pronouncing those names. That was one thing, names. And what else? I didn't have any problem myself because I could mix in with people and my sister might have had a little more trouble.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little more about the Armenian music? When you say your mother played Armenian music, is that...

JERMAKIAN: Well, when we say Armenian music, now, when we say Armenian music at that time, these people are all from Turkey, you know, their culture was Turkish. The food was Turkish, really. And although Armenians was, they had a certain section of Turkey which was where all the Armenians were, where all the massacres took, they were the majority of the people there. They still had all the Turkish foods and the music, together with the Armenian music. But the Turkish music was more prevalent. The records that came over here were all Turkish, so she used to love to play those. And she knew how to speak Turkish and everything. So did my father. They knew it because they grew up there and they had to learn turkish as well as Armenian. And they used to play that music and it sounded foreign to the kids. That, mostly the neighborhood I was in, besides Armenians, was Irish, right?

SIGRIST: I was just curious if this was on the radio or this was on disc...

JERMAKIAN: No, it was on...

SIGRIST: Records.

JERMAKIAN: Records, those...

SIGRIST: Where did you, where did they buy these records?

JERMAKIAN: New York. We used to go to New York and, i think it was Third Avenue in New York they had these stores where they sold that they sold these records, foreign records, all right? You could by Turkish or Polish or, and they had one that sold all Armenian and Turkish, and Greek. They usually, those three went together. So I remember going to New York with my mother because, like I said, because she found one of her classmates in New York. Washington Heights, she's still there. She's still living. And we went there to buy records, besides special food, too. Cheese, there's a braided cheese. That's an Armenian, they go for that braided cheese. And they go for pasterma which is, pasterma is when you dry bee. It's not cooked. It's dried beef. And they sell that for nine dollars a pound, ten dollars a pound now.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

JERMAKIAN: P-A-S-T-E-R-M-A, pasterma.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, now, any of those songs in Armenian that you could sing, (Mr. Jermakian laughs heartily), sing one on tape for us that maybe your mother listened to...?

JERMAKIAN: Well, what my mother listened to, it was Turkish, though. I hate to do any, too much in Turkish but I remember that song.

SIGRIST: Could you sing it?

JERMAKIAN: (he sings a few lines of the song in Turkish) I remember that because that means nice, (Turkish) "what a wonderful

boy" in Turkish. (Turkish) She used to play that record. (he
pauses) So, different culture, different life, I mean.

SIGRIST: This is all very interesting information. What about
making music? Did your family play instruments or sing or get
together with...

JERMAKIAN: They were, they weren't very instrumental. They tried to
get me to be. They made me take lessons, clarinet lessons, violin
lessons to start with. All the Armenian kids as young boys
at that age had to start off with violin lessons, which I did.
And we had a violin Armenian instructor, who was very good. And
I was taking lessons and then, uh, if you squeaked, this
guy had a particular bad habit, I think, that if a person was
squeaking with his violin a little bit once in a while he would put
pepper in your mouth. He said, "If you squeak again, I'm going
to put pepper in your mouth," and he did it. When I went home, I
said, "I'm not going to take any more lessons. I quit."
That was it. That was my, the violin for me, this one Armenian. I
went into clarinet.

SIGRIST: Who pushed that in the family more, Mom or Dad?

JERMAKIAN: Father, father.

SIGRIST: Father.

JERMAKIAN: (imitating his father) "You got to get music. You got to
learn some instrument, any instrument."

SIGRIST: Was he musical in some way?

JERMAKIAN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

JERMAKIAN: No.

SIGRIST: Did he listen to the records...

JERMAKIAN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: with your...

JERMAKIAN: Oh, yeah. But my mother more listened to the records.
But the instrument that they used on those records is the oud, O-U-
D.

SIGRIST: And can you describe what that is?

JERMAKIAN: That's like a mandolin except a little larger than a
mandolin. But you play it with a pick and everything and it's a
beautiful instrument. That's what they used, and even today
they use it in all the Armenian bands and everything. That's the
key instrument that they played, the oud.

SIGRIST: Good, well, we're just about out of time but I have a couple final questions I want to ask you.

JERMAKIAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: This has been very interesting about, you know...

JERMAKIAN: I know, I know it's not exactly what you're looking for but...

SIGRIST: No, it is. It's, it's a whole different angle to these interviews, because it is important to know how the immigrants held on to their... the

JERMAKIAN: They did.

SIGRIST: ...traditions once they got here.

JERMAKIAN: They did.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about how you think of yourself in terms of nationality.

JERMAKIAN: Well, I've always, uh, you know, I've always have a lot of respect for my background. I never forgot it and I, I'm really ethnically inclined. I'm an Armenian-American, (a ringing sound can be heard in the background) you know what I mean?

SIGRIST: But what does it mean to be an Armenian-American, as opposed to an Armenian or an American? How is that different?

JERMAKIAN: See, the Armenians have to try to maintain, they're scattered all over the world. We have to try to fight to maintain our identity, you know. And the only way we could do it, that's why we were instilled like that, that's why my father was insistent that I learn the Armenian language. I learned how to talk but I can't read or write. I wish I did because when I went to Armenia that was missing. I could understand them but I couldn't read the signs or anything. And the faith, we had to keep the religious faith because that's what kept us throughout the centuries. I mean, the Armenians have been the first Christian nation, you know, you've heard that over and over again. But in order to maintain it, we're having more trouble here maintaining it than they did in Turkey when the Mohammedans were, you know, there was a religious war over there. And they maintained it better over there because of that threat than we are here with the freedom. The freedom was the biggest enemy, I think, because now they're losing every, the inter-marriages now are very common. Before it was rare, marrying outside the Armenian.

SIGRIST: Armenians chose to marry Armenians.

JERMAKIAN: They, families insisted that they marry Armenians. Just like I told you, that Vahradian family wanted to marry an Armenian. They came all the way and looked at, they insisted at

that time they have to find it because we've got to maintain this Armenian, and Armenian itself was in Communist hands. there was no Armenia if you want, it could be dissolved any time. So we figured we had to maintain the identity. And we tried to as much as we can, you know.

SIGRIST: Did your parents become citizens?

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, both of them.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about that process, when they became citizens?

JERMAKIAN: I remember when my, my father came earlier, I think, because he was here five years and I guess he got the green papers and so forth and became a citizen. I remember my mother going to school to learn how to read and write and everything and go there to court and to answer the questions.

SIGRIST: How did she feel when she became a citizen? Did it mean anything...

JERMAKIAN: Oh, great. My mother, oh, she was, I told you, she was, she was one of the first women to drive a car. She was driving a car and she was having her nails done and she was...

SIGRIST: She was lively.

JERMAKIAN: She was lively. (Mr. Sigrist laughs) She loved music. She loved to go dancing and things. And my father was too busy working. That was our problem.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different had you been born in 1923 in Turkey?

JERMAKIAN: If I was born there?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

JERMAKIAN: Probably wouldn't be around. If I were born there I don't think I'd be around, because that's where they were, they were all, you know, they're all gone. Except from the city, like I said, in that Istanbul they call it now, there used to be about two hundred thousands Armenians there. They only got about twenty five thousand there now. Even the ones that were in that big showcase of a city that Turkey has, they've moved. The ones that are there are wealthy. Some are traveling over here and they got, you know, they're smart. Turkey fell behind when they massacred all those Armenians because they were the brains in the country.

SIGRIST: Education being very important in Armenian culture.

JERMAKIAN: Education, they, commercial, they are all commercial. Like I say, when they come over here you look at them all now. They're artists, they're painters, their novelists, Saroyan, you know..

SIGRIST: Historians...

JERMAKIAN: Concerts, uh, Lucina Amara [ph], there's Lilly Chookasian, the Armenians go in the arts and then they're also in business, like Masco [ph] Corporation, Alec Manoogian [ph] who just died, owned all the Masco [ph] Corporation and they went into all sorts of enterprises. Look at Kirk Kirkorian [ph], made billions.

SIGRIST: Making significant contributions...

JERMAKIAN: And now he is, nobody knew he did it, he was never interested before in Armenian causes. (Mrs. Jermakian can be heard in the background) They used to criticize him. Now, he's making all kinds of contributions because of, the earthquake woke a lot of people up. Cher, Cher...

SIGRIST: The performer.

JERMAKIAN: Yeah, she went to Armenia after the earthquake. She never did anything with Armenians but they, you know, all of a sudden they awoke after that earthquake, that they were in danger because all of a sudden twenty five thousand were wiped out in a small country.

SIGRIST: Right. Well, this is a good place for us to end. I want to...

JERMAKIAN: Very good.

SIGRIST: ...thank you very much...

JERMAKIAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: ...Mr. Jermakian. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Armen Jermakian on Thursday, September 26th, 1996. Thank you, sir.

JERMAKIAN: Okay.
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