

KECK-164

JAMES J. ARRAJ

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LEBANON, 1920

AGE 8

PASSAGE ON "THE LAFAYETTE"

GUMB: This is Dana Gumb and I'm speaking with Mr. James Arraj on the 28th day of May, 1986. We're beginning this interview at 12:40 and we're about to interview Mr. Arraj about his immigration from Lebanon in the year 1920. Okay, if we could begin with where and when you were born?

ARRAJ: I was born in Lebanon, in 1911, October 14, 1911.

GUMB: Okay, where in Lebanon?

ARRAJ: A little town by the name of Mashgara, M-A-S-H-G-A-R-A,

Mashgara.

GUMB: What do you remember of that town?

ARRAJ: Oh, I remember quite a few things. My grandfather had a little store in the center of town, and a little canal ran through there and I used to come down to visit with him. And my grandmother, who was very generous, she would be out waiting on the people, customers, whatever, and she'd dig into her apron, you know, and give me coins. We lived on the first, in the first house coming in from a town named Jezzín, and it seemed the mailman stopped there the first place and it was sort of isolated. But a very nice little home, near some hills. And it was a little frightening at night sometimes when you'd hear the wild animals howling up there.

GUMB: Could you spell that, Jezzín?

ARRAJ: J-E-Z-Z-I-N-, that's been in the news lately.

GUMB: What did your father do?

ARRAJ: My father worked in a tanning factory. They took hides there and cured them, and made leather. Small operation in a little town. And he left in 1912, I was one

year old, and came to America, came to western Massachusetts. We had relatives there, his brothers. And he said he would make enough money and send for my brother, my mother and myself, but World War I intervened so we didn't get together until 1920. So I was a little over eight years of age before we got money to come. And when we got money, my mother gave notice to the town crier and he gets up on the high roof and centrally located, and he would tell everybody. That was their means of communication, that we were going to America and we had belongings to sell. So we sold our belongings and we started on our trip, and to go from Mashgara to Jezzin was no wheels of any kind, you had to go out on animal back, whether a horse or mule, ours was mule. When you got to Jezzin, you got a carriage to take you to Sidon and there you have an automobile to take you to Beirut. And incidentally, our Lord Jesus, he made a visit there one time. Okay, so we got to beirut, and a friend of the family met us there and arranged our passage on a Greek ship. We were in beirut two weeks. We first, this Greek ship went to Marseilles, France. When we got to Marseilles, evidently the money that we had couldn't get us all the way to America, what we had left. So as luck would have it a relative of my mother, stopped in Marseilles, he was on his

way to Lebanon, the reason for him stopping there was to see someone who was traveling in that group. So we told him about our problem and he loaned us the money. We were there about two weeks, in Marseilles.

GUMB: How did they get connected? How did your mother--

ARRAJ: He knew when they were arriving on that ship and he found out where we were. Well, Marseilles was another couple of weeks, we were there about two weeks, we stayed in a little hotel. So one day I decided, I'll go across the street and wave to my mother. Down the steps I went, she must have been about the third story, and started to cross the street, and I was hit by a car. So my mother, looking, saw the scene, but she didn't know who was underneath the car. Suddenly she saw this hat roll out, it was my hat, and she became hysterical, and she came down, and by the time she got down there, they were pulling me out from underneath the automobile. And all I got out of it was a broken nose, luckily. So we got everything straightened out and took a train to Paris. From Paris, we went to Le Harve, that's the French port, and we sailed on the Lafayette, a French ship, to come to New York. Well, that was a stormy trip, seasick

part of the way. On a calm day we'd go on deck. We were on the lower quarters, I guess the shortage of money didn't help. And people up in the cabins were very nice to us, they'd give us chocolate bars. Little kids, you know, running around on this beautiful boat. Well, we finally got to New York, and we came into the Harbor, it was, I remember it was a clear day, and it was in the morning, and everybody was excited. I don't remember how we got onto the Island, Ellis Island, but it must have been some boat, small boat that took us over there, and we got on the Island and went through the routine of being processed. And they said my brother, my eldest brother had something wrong with his eyes, so they held us there three days. Well, they were three good says there because we were getting our meals, a bed, and, uh, I think it was two or three times they took us before this administrative judge, I would call him, and he would listen to the Arabic interpreter, because we spoke Arabic, we didn't know what was going on. Finally, we were released and I imagine the man took us to the mainland, to the Battery, was part of the administration there. And we went over there on a small boat, got off, and took the subway to Grand central. Of course, later on I knew that was the IRT. We got to Grand Central, and they had tags on

us, identifying us, saying who we are and where we're going.

Of course, there was no way we could communicate, we didn't know the language, English. We were told to stand near a gate there and wait and somebody came and told us to come down to the platform, and how many good Samaritans were in that station, and on the platform, on the train. You know, you lose count of them all. You know, here you are in a strange land and everybody's taking care of you. It was really great. And we got on the train and several hours later the train came to Worcester, Massachusetts, and it must have been real early in the morning, so we ran, we gave the address to some man in the station, another good Samaritan. He walked us to my uncle's home, and that was not too far from the railroad station. It was real early and we had to get everybody out of bed (he laughs).

GUMB: Well, maybe going back and filling in some of the details. You said your father left in 1912?

ARRAJ: Nineteen twelve.

GUMB: Well, why did he leave?

ARRAJ: Uh, opportunity in America to--well, these little towns don't have too much resources. So he decided he would come to America, like all people, to better themselves, right? So that's what he did.

GUMB: Was there hardship, do you remember life being difficult?

ARRAJ: Life was always difficult. During World War I we had very little to eat and practically nothing to eat. We were fortunate, more fortunate than others because my mother was able to borrow money from relatives and friends who had more than we had, to buy food. And she did some sewing for the wealthier people in the town, she was a good dressmaker. And that's how we existed for, since 1914 to 1920. I don't think my father sent any money. I guess you couldn't send any money through at that time.

GUMB: Did you get any kind of letters from your father?

ARRAJ: My father did not communicate too much with her. He'd have somebody else write the letters. That was another problem, he was more or less illiterate so he wouldn't communicate directly. My mother could read and write, she went to school. But he couldn't. So he's have to have somebody to write for him, and that made it difficult.

GUMB: Did you go to school there?

ARRAJ: I went to school, a little schoolhouse where you brought a piece of wood for the fire. The winters weren't too bad there, you get mostly rain, but it gets chilly enough that you have to have a little fire during the winter. I was good in school, scholastically good.

GUMB: Everybody had to bring a piece of wood?

ARRAJ: A piece of wood so they could use it for the little stove they had in this one-room schoolhouse.

GUMB: Well, during the War, do you remember any kind of fighting that took place?

ARRAJ: There was no fighting in the town itself, but I do remember planes going overhead. Now I never saw an automobile or anything with wheels on it but the first thing motorized was the plane that I saw. That was unique in itself.

GUMB: Who was ruling Lebanon at that time?

ARRAJ: Uh, Lebanon in 1920 was under the French mandate. World War I ended in 1918 and they had the League of Nations and they gave Syria and Lebanon to France as a mandate. Prior to that, Lebanon, Syria was all part of the Turkish Empire. You see the Turks lost the War because they were with Germany, yeah.

GUMB: While you were there, or say in school, what sort of things did you hear about America?

ARRAJ: Always got the impression that the streets in America were "paved with gold," and they all were well-off and it was a great, wealthy country, and everybody wanted to go there, because of their poverty. One time they had nothing to eat for two or three days, and I remember this woman bringing back the bread she had borrowed from my mother, I think it was about three loaves. And nobody was home but myself and I'm going to plead guilty to eating three loaves because I had nothing to eat.

GUMB: Do you remember talking to anyone or the family talking to anyone who had been to America and come back?

ARRAJ: They must have but I personally didn't speak to anybody. I

was too young to be that involved with anyone traveling, of course, if they travel, they're adults and, you know, a boy eight years old wouldn't be having a conversation.

GUMB: I'm wondering about what, did you have some kind of image of your father or did--

ARRAJ: I had no image of him. and I wasn't too curious about him either, because I had never seen him, one year old, so the whole, no my whole world was dominated by my mother who was taking care of us. Of course that changed when we came to America.

GUMB: You've mentioned a little bit about the town crier.

ARRAJ: Oh yes, the town crier. They had no newspaper, or of course, there was no, any kind of radio, that was before the days of radio or any news media. So the only way they can get a message quickly to the townspeople was have this town crier. I think he was paid for getting up there and I must say he had a loud voice, you could hear him all over.

GUMB: Do you remember any other kind of procedures, that had to, once you decided to come, what other kind of procedures were necessary in Lebanon to go through, what sort of papers had to be gotten?

ARRAJ: The papers were all taken care of by my mother and this friend of the family, in Beirut. You didn't need anything to get out of Mashgara. In Marseilles we had a little problem there too with papers and so forth and booking the passage. But we finally made it. The good Samaritans again.

GUMB: So how many people were traveling together?

ARRAJ: I think in our group there must have been about ten or twelve people from that same town. One group had a mother and a son, two sons and a mother, and they were coming to America, their father also was here. But they had, the father was prosperous. He had a textile business on Fourth Avenue here in New York City. This is the reason why the gentleman I told you, stopped in Marseilles. He stopped to see them because he was in the textile business also, but he was related to my mother, but more closely related to that--they still have that textile business they

had, today.

GUMB: What about your family, how many people in your family group?

ARRAJ: Now?

GUMB: No, no. Traveling.

ARRAJ: Oh traveling. My mother, my brother and myself, yeah, the three of us.

GUMB: In this group of ten, they stayed together?

ARRAJ: They stayed together but we were all separated. Of course, they didn't have any problem when they got to Ellis Island, and they had somebody meet them. As a matter of fact, nobody met us, it was just one of those trips, that you just were, you were on your own.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about, you were talking about the town crier, selling things. Do you remember anything about what was sold and what was kept, what your mother felt you really had to keep versus what was

sold?

ARRAJ: Well. she didn't keep too much because it's a question of carrying. Personal belongings, clothing, that's about all.

GUMB: Do you remember any special items that she really wanted to hold onto, heirlooms or anything like that?

ARRAJ: She did have a gold bracelet that she held onto, she didn't want to sell that.

GUMB: Yeah, going back a step, I'm wondering how your father finally communicated, or how he finally got word to come?

ARRAJ: You mean to meet us in New York?

GUMB: Yeah, to finally come to this country.

ARRAJ: No he never came to New York to meet us.

GUMB: No actually I meant, when you were still back in Lebanon, and how did he get word that you could come now?

ARRAJ: Oh, he had somebody write a letter, and he had a big family in Lebanon, my father, a very nice family. His brother was a priest, his other sister as a school teacher. But he didn't have the education.

GUMB: So this was after the War, letters came through.

ARRAJ: Yes, after the War he sent the money, the funds, and we used that money, but we didn't make it all the way, we had to borrow some. When we did come to Worcester, Massachusetts, he paid everybody that he owed. The money that my mother borrowed during the War, you know, the loans she had made, he paid those. He paid the man that gave us the money, part of the money to come from Marseilles, and he straightened all that out.

GUMB: As you were leaving the town, did you feel like you would ever return?

ARRAJ: Well, it was a very sad thing because all of the kids that I went to school with came to say goodbye and they were crying and they knew they probably wouldn't see you again. People didn't think they would be back, and they

were right, I was never back.

GUMB: Okay, you went through the progression of several weeks in Beirut and--

ARRAJ: Several weeks in Marseilles, yes.

GUMB: Starting with Beirut, how did you occupy that time?

ARRAJ: Oh. there's always something to do. Little hotels that you get up and you have your meal, and you take a walk with your mother, or some of your friends there. Of course, in Beirut you spoke the language so it was no problem. We walked around, did a little sightseeing, and we were going somewhere, it was exciting, and time didn't hang heavily on your hands because you were always, that expectation that you were going somewhere, you know, America.

GUMB: Do you remember how your mother was reacting to the situation?

ARRAJ: Yeah, she was very happy that she was coming here. So we,

when we came to Worcester we were two brothers and our family wound up four brothers and a sister, so there was five of us.

GUMB: Oh, children were born here?

ARRAJ: The children, three children, and William, the first one that was born here was lost in World War II.

GUMB: Okay, you were talking a little bit about the voyage coming over from Marseilles. Do you remember anything about the food on the ship?

ARRAJ: The food, I don't remember too much but I don't think I ate too much because most of the time I was seasick. A very stormy passage, and it was in June and usually don't get storms in the Atlantic like that, but i guess too much.

GUMB: Do you remember how long the voyage took?

ARRAJ: I don't remember, but it took a long time. Over a week or so, at least.

GUMB: What about the accommodations on board, do you remember what

they were?

ARRAJ: Yes, we were down below and we slept like in hammocks. I think that's due to the fact that we didn't have enough funds to be in better quarters.

GUMB: What were the other people like on the ship, any recollection?

ARRAJ: Well, not too much. I don't recollect too much of it, but you'd go walk around and a little child's interest is limited to what he can see, what will interest him, he will see.

GUMB: Was it crowded?

ARRAJ: Yes, yes, very crowded. And that boat, the Greek ship, coming from Beirut to Marseilles was so crowded, I think that's why it cost us so much money, they made accommodations. I think they gave us the quarters of the crewmen. We had just, in order to make that passage over on time, that's what happened.

GUMB: You were in the seamen's quarters?

ARRAJ: Yes, from Beirut to Marseilles, and I think she paid a premium price, that's why she ran short of money there. Once she got to Marseilles she didn't have enough.

GUMB: Do you have any idea why it was so crowded?

ARRAJ: Well, at that particular time, the heavy migration, everybody wanted to come to America.

GUMB: They were people, Lebanese, coming to America?

ARRAJ: The War was over, starvation in the Near East at that time, and people wanted to get out of there and make a life somewhere else.

GUMB: This is the end of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GUMB: The accommodations on board, was it dirty?

ARRAJ: I can't say it was dirty, no, that's one thing I wouldn't say.

GUMB: As you were approaching New York Harbor and land, do you remember your first impressions?

ARRAJ: Just excitement, that here it is, the land they were talking about, that beautiful world paved with gold. It's really wonderful to have come back to New York City later in life and become a civil servant. I work for the City of New York, the Office of the Comptroller, and a lot of my assignments took me to Staten Island, and I'd ride the ferry, and say, "There it is, Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty."

GUMB: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty at first?

ARRAJ: Yes, yes, that's right there in the Harbor, that's where we came.

GUMB: Had you heard about the Statue of Liberty?

ARRAJ: No, no, Statue of Liberty didn't mean anything to me until I became, you know, organized, and in school, started reading about it. But I think the Statue of Liberty means, has meant more to me since I lived in New York City here, and I understand the reason for it, and who gave it to America. These French liberals who were dissatisfied with their, that monarchy they had in France. Bartholdi. Bartholdi, he was the designer. Eiffel, of the Eiffel Tower, he was the engineer on this project. But the man behind the idea was a jurist, a French jurist who considered Lincoln as his hero, and he was very unhappy with Napoleon III, I think. And he got this idea going, and they were an intellectual group in France at the time and he was the leader, this jurist.

GUMB: So when you saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time, you didn't know what it was?

ARRAJ: I didn't know what it was, it had no meaning to me, but today it does (he laughs).

GUMB: You said, you don't remember how you got to Ellis Island?

ARRAJ: I have no recollection how we got on the Island but--

GUMB: Do you have a memory of what's the first thing that happened once you were on Ellis Island?

ARRAJ: Yes, we went into this very big hall there, and so much confusion and people there. I do remember the hall with all the people milling about. The thing I remember the most, I mentioned before, is standing in front of this administrative judge, or whatever he was, and he sat up high and we were down there and the interpreter was telling him about us, and he had the records in front of him, and I guess he was deciding what to do with us.

GUMB: Do you remember what he looked like?

ARRAJ: The judge?

GUMB: The judge.

ARRAJ: No, I don't remember.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about his attitude or--

ARRAJ: Well, I would say that people then and everywhere were sympathetic. There were these people coming and they needed help, and we got it, really, yeah.

GUMB: He didn't seem in a hurry or--

ARRAJ: Not that I remember, no.

GUMB: Where did that proceeding with the judge, do you have any idea where that took place?

ARRAJ: I think it was more or less in the big hall there, because there was several places where these judges stood, and you stood in line to speak to them.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about the interpreter?

ARRAJ: The interpreter must have been from the Near east and he spoke Arabic to us and he was good, he was very kind.

GUMB: Was he in uniform?

ARRAJ: No, he was not, not that I remember.

GUMB: How about the judge, how was he dressed?

ARRAJ: I don't remember.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about the medical exams?

ARRAJ: I remember the doctor examined me, and I don't remember what he did to my brother, but the story was his eyes, something wrong with his eyes.

GUMB: Do you remember how he examined you, what he looked at?

ARRAJ: Not really, no, I can't make that up.

GUMB: Do you remember, how fast was it, do you have any memory of how fast the medical exam was, how--

ARRAJ: It was just like you would visit a doctor today. He would talk to you or whatever, and examine you and put the stethoscope on you and that's it. Look at your eyes. I don't know, they were concerned a lot about your eyes for some reason. Matter of fact one of the pictures I saw, was they were looking at the eyes.

GUMB: Do you remember how he looked at the eyes?

ARRAJ: No, no. Because he wasn't examining my eyes, he was examining my brother's.

GUMB: Did you ever find out what was wrong with your brother's eyes?

ARRAJ: No, no, they just said, as a matter of fact, he does not have to wear glasses even today (he laughs) so whatever it was, he outgrew, had no problem with his eyes, never wore glasses.

GUMB: So you were kept on the Island there for three nights?

ARRAJ: Three days, yes. Finally they said, okay we could go, and we were taken over to--oh, one thing in Grand Central, it was a mystery to me. While we were waiting for the train, I knew what candy was, and of course, in Lebanon you never had candy that was wrapped up, it was all loose like. And my mother would give me a small coin and I'd go and give it to the person who was working on the stand there,

and I get a big chocolate bar and she gave me a bigger coin which I later found out was a nickel. I'd get a smaller bar, I couldn't understand that, you see it was dime first and a nickel afterwards. (He laughs.)

GUMB: So you had to stay on Ellis Island for three days?

ARRAJ: Three days.

GUMB: Where did they put you to sleep?

ARRAJ: I think they were dormitory type of beds at that time.

GUMB: Were you with your mother?

ARRAJ: Uh, no, I don't remember that she was with us. My brother
and I were together.

GUMB: How many other people were in this room?

ARRAJ: Quite a few, quite a few, dorms like.

GUMB: Do you remember being scared because your mother was

separated from you?

ARRAJ: Well, I was a little worried and apprehensive about, "Are we going to be passed or rejected and sent back, or what?" But it worked out.

GUMB: How old was your brother?

ARRAJ: he was two years older, ten.

GUMB: Do you remember what they gave you to sleep on?

ARRAJ: I remember cots there, that's all.

guarded GUMB: Do you remember a sense of being closed in, like in a area?

ARRAJ: No, you didn't get that feeling, at least I didn't.

GUMB: How about food? What did they give you to eat?

ARRAJ: I think we had eggs in the morning, and whatever food they gave us was all strange. But when your hungry you'll eat, so we must have

eaten what they gave us.

GUMB: How was it strange?

ARRAJ: Well, our food is different. Near East food is much different. Here you come and you're going to be given a meal, say, bologna sandwich or a frankfurter, or whatever, what is this? (He laughs.)

GUMB: Okay, as opposed to what in the Near East, what would you get rather than a bologna sandwich?

ARRAJ: Well, the Near East they ate lamb mostly because they had sheep there, so lamb was the meat that you got. And the butcher would slaughter the lamb, no refrigeration, so you bought it the same day it was slaughtered. And you'd cook it right away because you had no refrigeration too, so you bought what you needed for that day.

GUMB: How about the dining room or dining area? Do you remember what that was like?

ARRAJ: I don't remember that.

GUMB: Do you remember spending any money on Ellis Island?

ARRAJ: No, I don't think that was necessary, I think that was all provided by the good old U.S.A.

GUMB: How about money exchange? Were you involved in that at all, when your mother had to exchange money?

ARRAJ: Well, in France she changed money and there was never too much money to be changed anyway. (They laugh.)

GUMB: So how did you finally, do you remember anything about getting the word that you were passed, that you could go through?

ARRAJ: My mother got the word and she told us, and that was a joyful day, joyful moment.

GUMB: And do you remember how the arrangements were made to get the railroad ticket or where, how was that done?

ARRAJ: I don't remember how that was done. Probably somebody in the administration there on Ellis Island must have helped out with it. Because I know my mother wouldn't know what to do once she got to Grand Central. Perhaps the man

that brought us over helped her to buy the tickets there.

GUMB: That was someone in the administration?

ARRAJ: Yes, yes.

GUMB: Was it a group that he brought over?

ARRAJ: Just the three of us, that was his--it was in the afternoon
and he left us there, it was late evening when we
got started to come to, go up to Worcester, Massachusetts.

GUMB: He left you at Grand Central with the tags?

ARRAJ: With the tags, saying we were going, with our belongings.

GUMB: What kind of suitcases did you have?

ARRAJ: I don't know whether they were suitcases or roll-up, rolls
or whatever. I don't remember those, having fancy suitcases.

GUMB: How were you dressed? Did you have any--

ARRAJ: My mother had bought me a little suit in France, that's what I had on, and a little straw hat. That's the one that rolled out when I got hit by that car in Marseilles.

GUMB: Do you have any memory whether or not you felt conspicuous, did you feel like you were standing out?

ARRAJ: No, no, just--no, I would say no. It could work the other way. These people I was looking at seemed kind of strange to me (he laughs).

GUMB: What was strange about them?

ARRAJ: The way they were dressed and, uh, of course, they looked prosperous, people going through Grand central there. But I had no complex about feeling the poor immigrant.

GUMB: How about the subway ride?

ARRAJ: The subway ride was no different than today. It was down in the hole and this train just kept going. Now that I recall, you come up from Bowling Green, that's where we took the subway, and there's only three or four stops and you're at Grand central, 'cause that runs express.

GUMB: Right, so once you were in Worcester, what do you remember about your first impression of this new home?

ARRAJ: Our first impression was, "Gee, the streets aren't paved with gold, some of them are dirty." I wasn't really happy about this. What's happening with all these promises that they made? A little boy coming. It was only a few days before the Fourth of July, and it seemed at that time that the boys and girls up there had big bonfires, and that was a frightening thing to see that whole square there. We'd lived in like a ghetto. By that I mean, all the people from Lebanon lived together there, and we were there with all these Lebanese people and they were behaving something (he laughs)--they were burning firecrackers. It was an amazing thing. I didn't know anything about Fourth of July, Independence Day. When I did find out what Independence Day stood for, then I thought it was a great idea celebrating.

GUMB: Do you remember seeing your father for the first time?

ARRAJ: Yes, he came over and hugged me and kissed me. And it too awhile to sink in, now who was this, you know, your dad,

having sen him the first time?

GUMB: Why didn't he come to New York?

ARRAJ: Uh, he probably didn't know, because of hid illiteracy, he probably couldn't write or communicate and he had to depend on other people, he probably didn't know, because of all the delays we had, when we were going to get here. Of course, those days, you don't just pick up a telephone, they had no phones. Nobody had a phone in those days, at least in that neighborhood, so you just couldn't pick up a phone and say, " We're here."
(He laughs.)

GUMB: So, in your new home, what did you start doing? Did you go to school?

ARRAJ: When the fall came we went to Dartmouth Street School and they put us in the special grade and they had a young girl there who spoke Arabic, help us out, interpret for us. Well, after four years, I was with my peers.

GUMB: It took four years?

ARRAJ: It took about four years. I caught on to English very

nicely. I had no problem with it, and I was skipping grades, like I was in the first grade, and then went into the second for a few months, went into the third, and about the fourth or the fifth, I was in with my age group.

GUMB: Did you have feelings of being a greenhorn?

ARRAJ: You don't get a feeling of being a greenhorn, especially when you live in a neighborhood of your own people.

But I remember kids in school making remarks, but after a while they were very nice because they respected you because you came into that school, didn't speak a word of English, all of a sudden you're in their class. And we became--I had a lot of good friends there. Matter of fact I remember those, the names of those girls and boys in the elementary school very vividly, yeah.

GUMB: How about your mother? Did you remember her having troubles adjusting?

ARRAJ: Yeah, she had trouble adjusting, I mean it was difficult. A new environment altogether. You had running water

and you had a gas stove. I guess it was all an improvement for her. But, new people--

GUMB: How about the first winter?

ARRAJ: The first winter in New England was a disaster. It was cold, cold, I couldn't understand why it was so cold. And Dartmouth Street School was maybe a half a mile or three quarters of a mile from where we lived, and we went home for lunch. But I got warm clothing so I survived it all, but it was bitter cold.

GUMB: Do you have any idea of what life would have been like if you'd stayed in Lebanon?

ARRAJ: I don't think it would have been too exciting to have stayed there, given the opportunities. I'd like to say that coming to America was the best thing that ever happened. I love this country.

GUMB: How did your expectations of this country compare to what you found here?

ARRAJ: Do you mean then or now?

GUMB: Yeah, your expectations in Lebanon, you know, what you were expecting?

ARRAJ: Oh, well, it was totally disappointing, 'cause of the circumstances. Here I heard all the stories about the fabulous wealth here and everything else, and people had to work, it was no easy street.

GUMB: How about, how long did it take to become a citizen?

ARRAJ: My father never became a citizen so I had to wait 'til I was old enough to become one on my own.

GUMB: When was that?

ARRAJ: I think I was twenty-three.

GUMB: Why didn't your father become a citizen?

ARRAJ: I don't think he could pass the test because of his illiteracy.

GUMB: Did it feel any different becoming a citizen? Was there any--

ARRAJ: Oh yes, I felt very proud to be an American, yeah, it was great.

GUMB: Okay, very good. This is the end of the interview with Mr. James Arraj.