

KECK-54

DR. CHARLES MAHJOUBIAN

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INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT

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AGE 15

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DALLETT: This is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Charles Mahjoubian on Tuesday, October 22, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 10:05 AM and we are about to interview Dr. Mahjoubian about his immigration experience from Armenia in October of 1923 and we are beginning cassette number one, side one of interview number 054. Let's start back at the beginning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

MAHJOUBIAN: I was born in the city of Konia. It is mentioned in the Bible Iconium, or Iconium, as it may be pronounced, and the date exactly is not right, November, 1907.

DALLETT: Can you spell that? Konia.

MAHJOUBIAN: Huh?

DALLETT: Can you spell that?

MAHJOUBIAN: Konia?

DALLETT: The city, yeah.

MAHJOUBIAN: Uh, K-O-N-I-A or I, uh, Iconium is I-C-O-N-I-U-M, Icon N-I-U-M.

DALLETT: Okay.

MAHJOUBIAN: Uh, I was born there because my parents had their home burned down in Armenia, which is Salitian Armenia. Armenia was a mobile kingdom because of the currents of powers, the Greeks, the Persians and everybody going over this isthmus between Asia and Asia Minor to conquer the world. But Armenia, the city, where the town that my grandfather lived in was in Salitian Armenia, but Konia is the first area which the Selgic Turks settled in eleventh century. So my grandfather, after the 1896 massacres where his house burned down, he thought he would go into the heart of Islam and find safety because of the nature of the religion of Islam where they could be merciful or they could be brutal according to how they felt about it and how politically they were motivated. So he came to Konia and we lived there, and I left about twenty years, 1897 or 8 to 19, uh, '23, '22. I left in 1922.

DALLETT: When he, when he moved there in 1896 . . .

MAHJOUBIAN: Yeah.

DALLETT: Who, who were massacring Armenians at that point?

MAHJOUBIAN: The Turks . . .

DALLETT: The Turks at that point.

MAHJOUBIAN: . . . were massacring the Armenians. And Armenians throughout the Ottoman history were disarmed peaceful people because when

they conquered in the incident of a war they would massacre or do whatever they did at that time, but afterwards in peacetime this massacre was going on because of religious differences. And the Ottoman Empire maintained what they called Miletts, Miletts meaning, if depending on the context, nation, denomination, and there were Moslem denominations which the, uh, Turkish denomination was hateful of, so that there was brutality against their own religions as against the Christians. And other Christians, Assyrians, Greeks and so on were suffering just the same from the Mohammeden Moslem mistreatment. In Konia, uh, they established, my folks established a business. It was very interesting. It was a business of buying old shoes and manufacturing into new ones.

This was a very interesting purpose because Konia is a flatland, uh, four thousand feet elevation, and when the rains came the whole countryside turned into a soupy condition and the farmers could not wear normal shoes, new shoes, because new shoes in the soupy condition the leather will soften. And they used to use wooden tacks to sew the soles to the, attach, attach to the sole of the shoes, and the leather, the sole would drop off the shoe. Uh, our folks manufactured the shoes with steel nails and using old leather where it was possible and new leather where it was necessary. And they had a big wholesale and retail manufacturing business. Uh, farmers used to come in a group like the priests, you see, the Moslem priests at that time were the leaders, econo-political social leaders. Every, the whole life of a Moslem was controlled by him and they would not do anything. Because of subsequent, uh, massacre period during the World War, we had, we had no school. Uh, it was closed and I was helping in the store as

an errand boy and I used to watch these old peasants. village by village, come squat outside in front of our store and the priest would haggle for the price of his family shoes. And once he set the price that was the price for the whole group so it's like a wholesale.

DALLETT: For the whole village?

MAHJOUBIAN: Whole village, yes. So squat after squad would come and I would go order tea or coffee, whatever they wanted from across the street, and that was the deal. And my grandfather was an expert salesman and he knew that when these shoes were nailed with steel nails and folded over and hooked up nicely and nothing would happen to them he'd bend the shoes on the ground and say, "This will, you can use, chop wood with." And so on and make the deal. So this, uh, kind of a business was established. Of course, there was, the interesting thing for me, uh, the American hospital mission. American hospital had a big establishment and, uh, of course, uh, because of the American and other foreign missions, the Armenian millet [ph], nation or religion of denomination, was split into three denominations, three millet [ph]. That is the Catholics and Protestants. European Catholic missions had established Catholic churches in schools, and American and English and other Protestant nations had established their own German Lutheran missions. But the most significant had become the American missions which had a large, uh, about ten colleges, in my time, and, uh, three hundred and fifty some secondary, primary and secondary schools and one thousand village schools. Of course, it was trained with, insofar as the Moslem people were concerned, with Christian ideas and the

priests would not allowed the Turks to be educated. This became a cause for the Turks to be hateful, and the government used their hatefulness against the Armenians. Uh, and if the priest found that the farmer had some, Turkish farmer had some trouble with his crop or something he would say, "These gowers, these infidels are the cause of this." And they would come, the villagers would come to buy things, arms, you see, and when Armenians, as it happened in my grandfather's town, uh, saw this, these people would come armed, would take things and wouldn't pay for it. So the first Armenian who saw this happen, he would drop everything and run home or run to a sanctuary which was the Armenian church. You see, because the government, uh, I have to take my telephone call.

DALLETT: Okay.

MAHJOUBIAN: This would happen in such a way that Armenians would go into the section ghetto which, as they ran, uh, atrocities would happen. They would be killed. My father was stopped on his way home by a Moslem priest and he was trying to slow him down. He wasn't hurting him but he was trying to slow him down by questioning him. He was, "Son, why are you running?" And, of course, when he did that he and my father suddenly came to and found that he still had his shoemaker's hammer in his hand. (she laughs) He had left his bench so fast to run home, uh, and, as I said, their home was burned down. But on my mother's side, her mother, my grandmother, their house was in such a location that it was like a bottleneck into the Armenian section. And they had a, quite a large estate, and the second floor overlooked this entrance to the street. And it happened to be the fall of the season, which meant that the

Armenians would be processing beef for spiced beef for the winter. And she had bags of hot peppers, dried powders and that was her weapon. And when she saw Armenians coming she would wave them on to go in. And when Turks came she got a handful of peppers and threw in their face. That was her weapon to stop them going in the Armenian section. However, this whole thing was so scheduled that one way or another the government would stop it at certain times. And when the order came to stop it, it really stopped, so that it was obvious that it was government promoted. And when it stopped, as I mentioned, my grandfather at, at the town in Armenia, it's Everag, and he used the word Avarag. Everag is the name of the town. Avarag means ruins, so it's as Everag became an Avarag for me. And he left it and came and found security in Konia. Now, as I said, uh, it was a very secure place because Konia was the residence of the Mevlevi Dervishes, the spiritual leaders of the sect. and they had inherited the Selgic Mosalium and all the religious establishments, and the successor of the Saint was dominating the religious concepts of the Islamic people. And their concept was, in their own way, a kind of purity to achieve access to heaven. But their religious conquest starts with Mohammed, who was a teacher in Mecca. People were idealtrous at that time. But he had learned about Christianity and Judaism. He combined all those and made it into the MOhammaden religion and he himself the last prophet. Now in Armenian history the patriarch, patriarchs used to dominate the churches in different countries. Armenian patriarchs at that time were in Armenia, which is in the souther Caucasus area, ets Meitzin, which means the spot where the holy begotten descendent, ets

meitzin. Uh, but in Jerusalem, from the time the third century, the fourth century on, Armenian were dominant because they were the local Christian power. And when Mohammed came, the Armenian patriarch of Jerusalem, his name was Abraham, he travelled to Mecca. See Mecca, Mohammed conquered Mecca with an army and that was the, the reason he went with a forty dignitaries and said, "We accept your rule. Give us a charter of safety of life and property." So he did. In his charter he gave authority for the Armenian priests to travel throughout his, his realm and also safety of churches and holy places. And in that he mentioned all the churches of Jerusalem and Bethlehem that should be under Armenian church control. Unfortunately in the Fifth Century when Armenians were defending their religion, when they were under Persian rule in 451, the Christian churches had a, had an Ecumenical council that in Chalcedony. There someone had raised, had written a religious cleric or seminarian, written an article that Jesus was God descended, the incarnate word of God. That became the subject of discussions and there they decided that they would use the expression that Jesus was God and men in complete harmony. Uh, while the Armenians were fighting the Egyptian Christians, the Coptics, were presently and ultimately they rejected that idea. They said the scripture's expression is adequate and the Armenians, after they recovered from this thirty-three years war, which ended in the Shah of Persia, declaring the Edict of Tolerance in 484, which gave every religion the right to worship as they pleased in the empire. Now I'm mentioning that because it's important when the Protestants, Catholic missionaries, came and created this three identity for the Armenians. So when, I'm writing my

biography now and history, background, historic background turning points of Armenian history, I have to deal with that because when I say "Armenians" at one point it means all three denominations and when it applies only to the Protestants I have to use the term Protestant or if it's only Catholics I have to use the term Catholic. Now, with that situation, my grandfather came to, brought his family to Konia, and we had a very, very good Protestant church we were attending. Because where he was in Everag he was converted to Protestantism. He would say that Protestantism educated us because for one thousand years the Turks or in Armenia proper and four hundred years in Celerion Armenia, they were making, trying to make the Armenians and Christians other Christians, those who lived to survive the massacres, they were staging, to be almost like Turks, become Mohammedans or be, be servants or sub-Mohammedan individuals. But because of Christianity, Armenians were always progressive, uh, permitting the individual to make their own decisions, uh, whereas the Moslems were dominated by their own rulers, which is still unfortunately going on in Moslem countries, and that's what we are suffering right now from, that kind of idea. However, after during this period where I was in the store helping my folks, uh, first the orders came out for Armenian leaders to be arrested and sent to camps. Now this, at that time as Ambassador Morgenthau has written in his book, Turkey had a party government and, uh, Sultan's government. Sultan's government controlled the country officially but those who followed the party policies would obey the party central committee orders. So the central committee was sending secret orders to the party members or all of them and who didn't obey their orders, of course, they

were being threatened or punished. I, being in the marketplace, I could see the whole thing happening. And we had, Armenians had, in certain areas, either legally permitted autonomy or de facto autonomy, which nobody could get into these mountainous regions. And one of these regions, which was legally established by the Sultans because they could not conquer it, it was a valley surrounded by, by high wooded mountains, they never could get in. And they were, these people were the town. Their valley was called Zeytoon. There may be different spelling, but Z-E-Y-T-O-O-N, Zeytoon would be one. And they defended themselves, number of times I saw in that period the Turkish document stating that it had been attacked fifty-five times and had not been penetrated. But now, you see, in 1908, the young Turks established Parliamentary government. And when this announcement went out to arrest the leaders the first place that this happened was in Constantinople. And Armenian members of the Parliament or Assembly, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, all who were in a sense not Turkified Armenians, uh, that they could not tolerate, they arrested. Now the difference was this. In places where the religious mercy of Islam was predominant, the execution of the orders was not carried out at all or completely. So in Constantinople and many other places the execution was to take them to an unknown place, quiet place. And you must realize that Turkey was an extensive empire at that time. West of it extended as far as the Caucasus and the Egypt. So there were many wide open wild places. And Turkey itself was not really controlled by the Federal or Sultan's government. These tribes had their own dominant rule and they could be merciful bandits or brutal bandits. So that there were always people

available to be brutal to the Armenians. I, uh, this is, became important in our case because at the time these orders came the governor general of the state of Konia was not only a righteous person, but humane, just and merciful as well. This became obvious from the fact that my grandfather was arrested as one of the leaders. Hundreds men in Konia, where there were not many Armenians to begin with, probably couple thousand. He was sent to, uh, a swampy region, this group was sent there. And after he was sent the young men from, from Zeytoon were parading, paraded through our streets and I, I saw this. These were sinuous, brave and courageous men, with their head up, proud, going through, but they were under armed guard, you see. In other words, when this Turkish young, Turkish government was established they wanted to still make everybody Turks, uh, Moslem Turks. They could not digest the fact that Christians were not Turks or Turkish citizens. They would mistreat them and yet they expect them to be faithful to the country or whatever. Uh, so this, uh, the Armenian political parties had joined the Turkish parties, not officially, but in cooperation, to cut the Sultan's power down. This, of course, became a factor when the orders went out. Once these leaders in certain places were killed, the attitude of the government changed. And Armenians, as I said, always being mistreated, massacred, they suspected and some of the Turks, friendly Turks, told them that it may happen, and the religious leaders and the political leaders told the people, and these Zeytoon people, Zeytooncies, to obey the law, the orders. Of course, later on when it became that really the purpose was extermination some places like Von, ORga, (?), and other areas, they defended themselves with

whatever weapons they had. And one of the most famous was eaten up by Franz Warfel, a German Russian Jew, who wanted to warn the Jews of what happened to the Armenians. He wrote the story of the forty days of Mussadagh. Mussadagh, D-A-G-H, which means the mountains of Moses where a group of villages at the foot of this mountain learned about this extermination and went up into the mountain and defended themselves for a certain weeks, number of weeks and, of course, they made signs along the coastline. This was right on the border of the Mediterranean. They made red cross flags, big ones to show that ally ships, warships would spot them and they did. French warships came and saved them, took them to Egypt. Uh, but getting back to Konia, this can continue. I saw this because first our schools were closed. When our schools were closed it became a question, why would Armenian schools be closed but the Turkish schools, Moslem schools, were not closed? So not only my grandfather had moved to a more secure Moslem area, town, but he must have planned it very well. He bought it in a Turkish streets rather than in the Armenian section. And he found somehow, accidentally or on purpose, he, we had very powerful neighbors, Turkish neighbors. ON the one side was the chief of the gendarmes, on the other side was the grain tax collector of the whole state. He was very powerful. Well, he, my grandfather, this was before he was deported, you see. The schools were closed, that's why I was in the marketplace. Uh, my grandfather depended on him for information. He went to him and he said, "I cannot tell you what we are going to do with your people, but I can tell you that it is going to be horrible." And he said, uh, "But I can tell you how to save yourselves." He said, "They will let you

get out of your house to go somewhere. Don't go until they force you to go." And he said, "If they take you, they'll take you through the countryside." Of course, grandfather knew, because when you travelled, Armenians travelled for business or anything they either have to have government police protection as they travelled or hire private guards who would be local bandits related who would protect you, gunmen.

DALLETT: What year was this that your grandmother, your grandfather had this conversation with this, his neighbor?

MAHJOUBIAN: Uh, well, in 1897.

DALLETT: Oh, this was then. Okay.

MAHJOUBIAN: You see, we have lived there twenty years.

DALLETT: Right. Okay.

MAHJOUBIAN: And this man told, told my, told him that, "When you are out in the country have, take break away if you can, escape and go to a Moslem home. And," he said, "they'll help you." Well, that we knew that, if you could do that. And also he said every member of your family should have a money belt, and I had a money belt. I was eight years old but I had this silver belt, uh, money filled in a money belt, and I was carrying it all the time.

DALLETT: Uh, this is the end of side one of interview number 054.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview number 054.

Okay.

MAHJOURIAN: In the interim, my, our connection with the American hospital had, uh, led us to be interested in America and, uh, my uncle . . .

DALLETT: Did you go to one of these schools, these American mission schools?

MAHJOURIAN: Armenian school, which was American-supported indirectly. My two uncles came to the United States. One was permitted to enter, the other one because he had some eye trouble, traumcoma, he was rejected. Now after the massacres, because we were in Konia, it became after the victory of the allies, it became a tempting situation to stay and make more money or migrate to America. My grandfather established his record that he would, this was no longer a country for use to live in. so he was anxious to go. But because my uncle was rejected for the traumcoma he felt that we should stay and do good business and my father and grandfather would live in Constantinople, which is a safer place and leave if necessary. Anyhow, this, uh, then the Kemalst movement came and we were trapped in Konia while my father's parents were in Constantinople. After, uh, from that is from 1919 to 1922 I was in Konia with my uncle's family, but unfortunately my uncle, because of this political turmoil, was worried and so on. HE became sick and he died before, uh, in 191. So now by 1922 it became obvious that new Turks, the Kemalists, who also were persecuting and mistreating the Armenians, in fact, they would not accept Armenian soldiers in into the army, and they deported, and they deported the males and I escaped being

deported because of my borderline age. And so when the Greeks were expelled from Turkey at that time the news was so secret we didn't know what had happened in Smyrna. Smyrna had been burned down three quarters of the town, the Christian part, and seven hundred thousand or eight hundred thousand Christians were threatened with extermination, one hundred and eighty thousand were saved. So as a boy of fourteen, I, too, decided that I had to get out. So I came as a refugee to Corfu, a Greek Island. And there I wrote letters to my father and uncle, and my uncle sent me an affidavit to come to America. Well, I didn't know what to do by myself so I was waiting on my father. My father kept on writing me letters and hoped that he would get passport to come to America for us. He did manage to get passports. Of course, I had sent him my picture and he got a photographer to mold my picture into the family picture, although I wasn't there (he laughs) for four years. And we had the passports, and after some military incidents like Italians got into arguments with the Greeks and they came and bombarded the Island where I was staying, anyhow I took the chance of catching up with them and I made it. Because the Corinthian Canal was so narrow that the boat was, didn't have good gears to travel in it, and it had to go along the Island of Moorea to get to come to where I was in Patras.

DALLETT: You were by yourself at this time?

MAHJOUBIAN: Yes, oh, yes. Four years at myself. I have cut out all the other troubles that I had to make time for the Ellis Island experience.

DALLETT: Right, right.

MAHJOUBIAN: Uh, so I caught up with them and we were twenty-two days on in the ocean, Mediterranean Ocean. On October 1st we entered the port and, of course, it was misty and we didn't know where we were. We didn't know about the Statue of Liberty or whatever. We were only thinking of landing, uh, and also in 1920 my mother's brother had come and he was living in New York. So . . .

DALLETT: Where was it that you caught up with your parents to take the trip?

MAHJOUBIAN: Patras.

DALLETT: Patras.

MAHJOUBIAN: P-A-T-R-A-S, Patras, uh, near Corinthia, the Corinthian Canal. It was a beautiful place.

DALLETT: And who else was travelling, your mother and father?

MAHJOUBIAN: My father, my mother, my brother and sister, uh, grandmother. They had travelled, I mean they had lived in Constantinople in all kinds of troubles because of the war there. Our business was such that my father was buying things and sending to Konia to the business and every money was cashed in Konia and my aunt was in charge of it, although she sent some money to him. But he was troubled, my family were troubled, because I was there and they knew what troubles were going on. I was behind the lines there. Anyhow we, uh, we braved the storm, had a big hurricane and so on. My mother was just dead all the time, sick of the sea sickness, you know. And, of course,

my uncle brought some food onto the boat and so on and we were, uh, expecting to land. We were in . . .

DALLETT: Did you hear, did you hear from your uncles who were already in this country? Did they write to you?

MAHJOUBIAN: Yeah, he sent me, my Uncle Tom sent me an affidavit to come, you see. Uh, but I didn't know what it meant. Now, I found out since that a very, very capable, uh, officer by the name of Hale, uh, Edward Hale Bierstadt recommended to Congress that relatives of American citizens be given one year to come to the United States. And all this getting the passports was a major project in Constantinople because everyone wanted, at that troubled time, to come to America. So my mother was telling me on the boat that the day she went to the passport with this affidavit that my uncle had sent, he had served in the army in the United States, uh, when he went to the guard to show this affidavit, she was let in just like that and she got the passport immediately, with my picture in it. So I had some experience in the, in getting aboard. The morning that I, the, the boat arrived was just, uh, heavenly experience for me. I saw the boat in the bay there in the dark morning hours lit up. Was upside down in the glassy water there, but it took about three hours for them to come aboard. Because of this Italian bombardment of Corfu, I had received a military wireless message to come to Patras and they didn't expect me to make it . So anyhow I, uh, well, it's nine o'clock, but before that, uh, two, three times I went around the boat, at this time I didn't have much money either. I had that morning about ten drachmas, which is about ten cents in American money. And I gave the first two-and-a-half drachmas,

bargained it, although I didn't know much Greek, I bargained it with a boatman to take me around so that I would see people. He did and there was no word. But later on I found that when the boat docked and time came for people to get on board and get off, the price went up to twenty-five drachmas.

So on the second one, now I don't know these rules, I saw that three gentlemen were getting on this boat to go to the ship. I got on, I said well how much more could it, I mean, twenty-five, I mean two-and-one-half drachmas I said. Three others are going. So just as this boat pulled up out of the pier I saw my mother. I jumped up and hollered "Mother" in Armenian and, of course, this Greek boatman could see all his money (he laughs) he fell in the water. Nothing upset, but he was cursing me all the time. Anyhow, then my father and brother came out, and passports he had not, of course, not being, sure, he had not brought the ticket for me.

DALLETT: Right.

MAHJOUBIAN: So he bought the ticket, uh, and we got on, on board and he paid the twenty-five drachmas per person, seventy-five drachmas, and we came and we travelled after that. Of course, we had a family conference on board once we got on. I brought them up to date and they told me not everything but certain things. And now we are in the New York Harbor and we don't know when we are going to Ellis Island. October first to October fourth that was, of course, joyful waiting, we had no more worries.

DALLETT: You were actually waiting in the harbor?

MAHJOUBIAN: Yeah.

DALLETT: On the boat?

MAHJOUBIAN: On the boat, yeah.

DALLETT: Did you, did you know why you weren't coming in?

MAHJOUBIAN: Well, we were third class. You see, uh, my folks, when they sold everything in Constantinople, which was very depressing, economically depressing situation, uh, they really didn't get much money. They had the fare and just two hundred dollars when we landed in Ellis Island. Of course we got into the ferry that was taking us to the Ellis Island and the Red Cross people served, served us coffee and sandwiches, and very enjoyable. And I, now Ellis Island was arranged with aisles for each section of the world where immigrants would go through. Because my folks had taken the boat at Constantinople, they were in the Turkish section. And because I took the boat in Patras, Greek section, I was in the Greek section. Greek and other, uh, I guess, uh, East West Eastern Europe. So as I, I went up to the clerk lucky enough in our college, in our school which was called college in those days, starting kindergarten and up, uh, were studying languages. Fifth grade we started with French. Of course, the national, school language was Armenian and in the sixth grade we started Armenia and seventh grade we'd start with the Turkish. But the Turkish writing, Arabic writing is very difficult. Armenian writing is easier. So I knew enough English to say that I had my tickets or where I was going, Philadelphia, and so on. The clerks said, "All right. Sit down until your family comes up."

DALLETT: So you were separated from your family, b of the port where you were.

MAHJOUBIAN: Oh, yes, at once, right, right away, Greece here and so on. So as I was awaiting, sitting on the bench, a girl came up who was going to get married to somebody in Canada and she didn't know a word of English and all the clerk wanted to know if she had her fare to go to Canada. So I understood that and explained to her and she said she had, she showed it, and, uh, he said, "All right." And, uh, so that was the really wonderful experience. Now the people who were in the first class were, uh, allowed to go out of the boat right away. We were in the third class and, of course, we had a third class cabin and right in the, near us the, the hold of the third class, wide open hole, which holds maybe thousand or so people who were really third class, who didn't have cabins or anything. It was just a hole on the floor. In Ellis Island my Uncle, my mother's father's brother, came to meet us there and, uh, by the time we went through this was the first, I believe, under the new immigration law, which required listened, uh, quota limits. And as we went through, it took all day. It wasn't until about, uh, I guess nine o'clock or so, uh, that we boarded the ferry to go to the Jersey side to take the Reading train to come to Philadelphia.

DALLETT: Do you remember going through the medical examination?

MAHJOUBIAN: There was no medical. Well, just on the line.

DALLETT: Had that happened on the ship?

MAHJOUBIAN: No, no.

DALLETT: No, not at all.

MAHJOUBIAN: As I went through this line someone looked. Probably they just, it was such a large number of people, there was no actual, uh, any degree of examination. Well, someone, my grandmother, for instance, we old but well, she was old, that's all. She looked healthy and there was, uh, no other . . .

DALLETT: No heartbeat or eye exam or any of that?

MAHJOUBIAN: No. No, there was nothing like that. Oh, thousands of people.

DALLETT: Too many people.

MAHJOUBIAN: Too many. That ship was packed to the gills with people from the hold up. And, uh, and once we, uh, entered, uh, finished the processing and our family got together . . .

DALLETT: How did, how did you reunite with your family with so many people there? How did you find them again?

MAHJOUBIAN: Well, the, of course, there is a hold there where they say you take the boat, the ferry to New Jersey. And, uh, in Jersey my uncle found, uh, found us and, of course, he knew where to go. We had a funny thing happen in Ellis Island. My uncle put a quarter in his telephone machine and, uh, to make a call to Philadelphia that we are taking the train to arrive at a certain time that they should expect us. And whatever happened to the mechanism the whole box emptied out as a welcome. So my uncle had a pile of quarters. (they laugh) Bell Telephone company welcomed us to the United States.

DALLETT: That's great.

MAHJOUBIAN: Pouring quarters in our lap.

DALLETT: That's very unusual, yes.

MAHJOUBIAN: Uh, but, of course, then the train, we took the Reading train, of course, reading in Philadelphia is an elevated station. So we took the elevator to go down into the subway and the subway comes up, surface car, and the surface car brought us to, we were going to 53rd and Gerard Avenue. Uh, we came down from the elevator to the trolley car and went north on 52nd Street and walked up to 53rd Street and we were in the United States.

DALLETT: Were your . . .

MAHJOUBIAN: Philadelphia.

DALLETT: Were your parents, what kind of luggage, how much luggage were they carrying at that time?

MAHJOUBIAN: Yes, we, they, they, we had their own personal rugs and things, bales, and there were, I believe, a rug with two bales of things. Of course, our most valuables were left in Konia. And, uh, leaving Konia was also dramatic experience, too, because we knew that there were some troubles. I had witnessed the Greek troops captured and because the Turks did it for purposes of deceiving the Greek troops or not, the first Greek troops that were captured were, looked like, uh, just recent recruits. And they had attacked this section of the Greek line where it was the weakest, and when these troops came into Konia they were in their underwear, barefeeted, because the Turks had undressed them to dress themselves up as

Greek troops, not to be discovered as attacking forces. I presume this, because after that many thousands and thousand of big troops surrendered. You know, it took two weeks to go five hundred kilometers for the Turkish army. So it was quite an experience.

DALLETT: What about your grandfather? Did he stay in Konia?

MAHJOUBIAN: He died, he died in Constantinople.

DALLETT: Before your parents came to this country?

MAHJOUBIAN: Yes, yes.

DALLETT: So it was just your grandmother that made the trip.

MAHJOUBIAN: Just grandmother survived. And, of course, uh, we were, because of our business throughout the World War when Armenia was being massacred, uh, we were safe. I missed telling you that part because this Governor General, uh, adhered to the law of the land. He was in Aleppo in 1915. Early in February or March when the government ordered Zeytoon to be deported he said, "I am the governor general of Aleppo. I cannot be executioner," because he knew that that was what they were going to do. Because he wouldn't obey this party order he could, he was removed from office and told that he would be, Konia would not be deported. So he made, they made him governor general of Konia. But when the archbishop, Armenian apostolic church archbishop was ordered to get his people ready to be deported, at that incident the Governor General saw him sad. He said, "Why are you sad?" "Well," he said, "we got orders to be deported." And he left Konia to go to Constantinople to clear, clear it up. Why, I was told, you

know, that kind of a thing. And when he was there the party and the government, acting Governor general, ordered us to be deported. And my grandmother turned out to be the heroine of the situation. She had to defend the home not to be deported. So he told all the men, my brother, my uncle, father, "Hurry now, have your breakfast and go out into the marketplace," and I was the only one there. She made all the excuses possible that we shouldn't be deported. "We can't go yet." You know, this kind of a thing. This went on until we found out that the law, there was some trick in this. Armenians, being Armenians in the church, Protestants and Catholics. The order was for the Armeni millet to be deported. But they were including Armeni in the Armenian sense, they deporting everyone. So the governor, the acting Governor General, with the party instigators of started the deportation. When the governor general came, the governor general came, he rescinded that order and made Konia the transfer center. Transfer center gave him a chance to sort out. He became, it became practice all around the station was open fields. Armenians just came very day by trainloads from west of Konia. And they were sorted out. Protestants, Catholics, families of soldiers. You see, Armenians were in the Turkish army and they had in 1915, just before the massacre started, deportation massacre started, the troops, Armenian troops were sorted out, either killed where the barracks were out in the field or made into labor force. So in Konia the, the sort of, could sort out the families of the soldiers and, uh, sick, crippled or craftsmen, Konia was the grain production center and he wanted the villages to have craftsmen, so all village chefs came and took Armenians who were skilled in different

trades, crafts. So, uh, our minister has written that twenty-five thousand Armenians were saved by him. And Miss Kushman [ph], who was the administrator for the American hospital and relief provider, said that thirty-five thousand were saved. But in our family circles, because of this irregular way of saying we were involved in it, uh, it was mentioned that fifty thousand were saved that way. So he was righteous, merciful, just, in every way possible. And the Turks, the government was against him and he was forced to reassign within thirty days. He gave up his, you know, Governor General, he was militarily entitled to pensions, and he gave all that up and resigned in order not to be court marshalled because he was going to be court marshalled probably. So there are the things that, that I saw. And because I did make the decision to go to Corfu and I couldn't go to Constantinople. Had I gone to Constantinople, we had two homes there. Two homes and business. We would have been tempted to stay because business or possessions, you know.

DALLETT: Right.

MAHJOUBIAN: People have possessions, they lose their life and not their possessions. (he laughs)

DALLETT: Give me in a nutshell if you could the story of what's happened with your life since you came to this country, since you got off the Reading railroad.

MAHJOUBIAN: Since the day, I had had because of the war, I lost four years of education and when I came here I was fortunate enough to go work and go to school. And I had a teacher who was very much interested in her students. And she was teaching, uh, errant

American children, troublemakers, and foreign-born children. And she took individual interest, she took us to, uh, the theater, she took us to the automat, Horn and Hardart automat. She took, invited us to her house for Christmas party. And, of course, that helped me go into regular classes right, uh, right after easter holidays next year. This was 1922, 1932 it was, and during Easter vacation to closing of the schools I finished 8A, because of my knowledge of geography and business, arithmetic and so on, and, of course, they were all trying to help me. And, uh, in the summer I went to, uh, six weeks summer school. Uh, there, there I finished the 8B and September I entered high school. Four years of high school. In the meantime I ran a shoe repair shop because I had learned the trade with my mother and father had his own store and, uh . . .

DALLETT: Did he also continue on in the shoe business when he came here?

MAHJOUBIAN: Yes, yes, yes, right away. He had to earn a living. And I entered, uh, Temple University. There I had a very interesting experience. The first year I, my money was running out. I went to see the President of the college university. It turned out that he was one of the Near East officials who visited our city. So he gave me a hint that if I made good grades in the college entrance examination, I would get a scholarship. Uh, I did take the, I sweated out the summer, uh, vacation, uh, studied. Studied Ivanhoe and others, books and so on. I took the examination and I got the scholarship to attend second year. Of course, the following year 1930 I had to enter dental school. I had the idea of

becoming a dentist because the first teacher I had had false teeth. And that became interesting. And I, well, I have become a dentist and I have been practicing for fifty-one years dentistry in Lower Marion township.

DALLETT: That's the end of interview number 054, the end of side two.