

AKRF-57/PAPAZIAN and MIAMIDIAN

KECK-57

SATINA MIAMIDIAN PAPAZIAN and ALBERT MIAMIDIAN
BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 20, 1913 and UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 23, 1985
RUNNING TIME: 20:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
RECORDING ENGINEER: BOB BIELECKI
INTERVIEW LOCATION: PHILADELPHIA, PA
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1995
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

SYRIA (ARMENIAN), 1920
AGES 7 and 13
SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

DALLETT: This is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Satina papazian on Wednesday, October 23, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 1:30 PM and we are about to hear the story of Mrs. Papazian's immigration from Aleppo, Syria in 1920. This is Side One of Interview Number 057. Let's start back at the beginning and tell me, if you would, uh, where and when you were born.

PAPAZIAN: I was born in Aleppo, Syria.

DALLETT: And when was that?

PAPAZIAN: October 20, 1913.

DALLETT: Tell me about your family. How many were there in

your family?

PAPAZIAN: There was five of us. Two brothers, older brothers, and I was the youngest, my father and mother.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. And what did your father do in Aleppo?

PAPAZIAN: Uh, he was in the, uh, was in the dry good whatever, import export?

MIAMIDIAN: He was, he was a commissioner merchant.

PAPAZIAN: A comm--, yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: (before he was asked to join the interview) He bought, he bought stuff from Europe and he, you know, he sent it to his customers whatever order he got through to those little towns there in the interior. He went to, uh, get the orders and he went around and got the best deal for him, as far as, I mean, I guess he shop, he was a shrewd shopper. You know, if, if it was something that he didn't know, he shopped three places before he can, you know, sometimes you don't know the value of these things . . .

DALLETT: Right.

MIAMIDIAN: Then he . . . (break in tape, a microphone is put on Mr. Miamidian)

DALLETT: Who made, hold on. Tell me, what's your first childhood memory? What do you, what do you remember about the house where you were brought up in?

PAPAZIAN: Well, there was like a large courtyard and there were rooms all around it and I remember there were steps. We had a large room upstairs so when we walked to the right. And then up the stairs and there was one to the left. And, uh, I remember the kitchen in the corner. I remember where that was, an old fashioned kitchen and rooms all around it. It was a courtyard.

DALLETT: And you, you were too young at that time to go to school, weren't you?

PAPAZIAN: Yes.

DALLETT: So you hadn't started yet.

PAPAZIAN: No, no, I didn't. I started school here.

DALLETT: So tell me what you remember about, uh, anything that happened before you made arrangements to come to this country. Anything at all?

PAPAZIAN: I really don't, uh, remember. Uh, as I said, that incident of the sliding door. Like we, we were up in that second floor, that large room, it was like a living room, I suppose. And then the people came, some men came, looking for my father and there was a sliding door up there that he got in and closed the door. I was there, he asked me, I don't know anything. So after they left I remember him getting out, I remember that specific incident.

DALLETT: So how was it that your father, uh, you said then your father started to make arrangements to come to America.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah.

DALLETT: How did he do that?

PAPAZIAN: Well, I heard that he called my, uh, uncle, uh, okay, you continue.

MIAMIDIAN: I'll tell you, uh, the British were there, after the war. I was in school, so was my brother, and

then word went out that those, uh, uh, Arabs and Turks or something like that, they went on and killed one thousand Armenians. It was after that that there was some people were coming to this country anyhow. they, they, they told my father, "What's wrong?" He says, "John, why don't you get up and go? You have a trade, too." By the way, he had learned watch repairing. After 1896 their, their home was, uh, my grandfather was taken away and killed and they burned the house. So they thought they had to learn, he has to learn a trade.

He learned a trade then, uh, he put it aside, then he was a commissioner merchant until the war broke out. Then he went back into watch repairing because there was no more business. And by the way, all this stuff that he would send out, most, the last order he sent out was out in the, in the road going on with caravans, you know, here and there, and, uh, the government confiscated all that stuff there and my father had to pay (?). We barely got over here.

DALLETT: How was it that he made those arrangements to come?
Did you have relatives that were already here?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, that's what I mean. There, there, there were some people that were living in the same place we were. They said, "John, what's wrong with you? You have a trade, you can go to America. Why do you have to wait over here?" We wrote a letter to my uncle, my, my mother's brother, we wrote a letter to him that we were on our way and before the letter got over here we were here. That's how fast we made up our mind and came here.

PAPAZIAN: He didn't expect us.

DALLETT: When had your mother's brother come to this country? How, how much sooner?

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, he was, he was . . .

PAPAZIAN: Few, few, quite a few years.

MIAMIDIAN: My uncle was here, uh, I guess, uh, 1910, 1912.

PAPAZIAN: '10, about that.

MIAMIDIAN: Probably about that. I don't know, I don't know the exact, but he was here quite some time.

DALLETT: Did you, um, had you met people who had come to America and come back to Syria and told you stories

about what life was like in America? Did you have any conception of what it was like?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, we had the Near East relief that was over there, because they were all these starving Armenians and all that sort of, and all those people dying like you see the, uh, the, the Ethiopia there. I saw myself with, with my own eyes. The Turks used to bring the, throw all those bodies up in a wagon and carry them all away. I saw all those things my, my, I remember once when I was a little kid I was so damn hungry I took the grains out of a horse thing in order to survive. I mean, I just can't forget those things. And I'm glad I'm here.

DALLETT: So it was very, it was very much in a hurry that you, you put your things together?

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, one, two, three. Sold everything, came, and just about got over here.

DALLETT: Were there some special things that your mother and father brought with them that you remember?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, yeah, we brought few, uh, oriental rug with

us. How, how many, how, how can you carry . . .

PAPAZIAN: We brought some bedding too, remember?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, well, it was wool. Wool, wool.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah. They said wool, they said to bring it over with you, it's precious. So . . .

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, precious. They said that. So throw them away now.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, yeah.

DALLETT: Uh, where did you go to, uh, sorry, before I ask that, did, uh, what kind of procedure did your father have to go through, uh, in order to get the necessary papers to come to this country?

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, I, I guess he, he went around to get a passport over here no less made, made all the arrangements, we got over here. And coming through Ellis Island, uh, they, they especially see if you're sick or something, especially the eyes. They . . .

DALLETT: And they check that, yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: They check the eyes, if you're okay. And you got

to show them where you, you got a place to go. Otherwise they won't let you. And, incidentally, we came over here just before they, they threw the quota on. And after that it was, it was quota. 1920, it was . . .

DALLETT: Immigration, you weren't allowed . . .

MIAMIDIAN: Immigration quota, yeah.

PAPAZIAN: Until, was it 1923?

MIAMIDIAN: I don't know what it was, '22, '23, it was a little bit later . . .

PAPAZIAN: '22, '23. We just about made it.

DALLETT: So, tell me, uh, from Aleppo, where did you go to get the boat?

MIAMIDIAN: Beirut.

PAPAZIAN: Beirut.

DALLETT: How did you make that journey?

MIAMIDIAN: Train, Aleppo to Beirut.

DALLETT: And from Beirut you got on, the name of the ship?

AKRF-57/PAPAZIAN and MIAMIDIAN

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah.

PAPAZIAN: I don't know the name.

MIAMIDIAN: I don't know the name of that ship.

PAPAZIAN: But a lot of people got sick, I remember, on that boat. Yeah, I remember that. Yeah, yeah, it was, yeah . . .

MIAMIDIAN: I don't, I don't . . .

DALLETT: One second. Uh, sorry. From Beirut here did the boat go?

MIAMIDIAN: Marseilles.

DALLETT: Marseilles. Then you stopped there . . .

MIAMIDIAN: We stopped there a couple weeks.

DALLETT: A couple weeks.

MIAMIDIAN: Ten days or something like that, yeah. You got to make passage to another boat to come over here. It takes a little time. You can't get a boat every day, you're not, it's not like a trolley car.

DALLETT: Tell me about the boat. What was it like? Do you

remember anything about, uh . . .

PAPAZIAN: The first boat or second boat?

DALLETT: Any boat you might remember.

PAPAZIAN: Well, the first boat was, I remember, a lot of people got sick. But the second boat was pretty nice. It was a pretty nice boat and we were all well-treated. Being I was very young, they gave me a little, a little snacks or something extra, but it was a very nice boat compared to the other boat that we took from Beirut from Marseilles.

DALLETT: And the whole family was traveling together at that time?

PAPAZIAN: Yes.

DALLETT: And you had an address, uh, your mother's brother was living . . .

PAPAZIAN: Yes.

DALLETT: In Philadelphia?

PAPAZIAN: Yes.

DALLETT: Okay. Uh, tell me what happened when you, when you

got to Ellis Island. Do you remember what the building was like?

PAPAZIAN: Maybe you remember more.

MIAMIDIAN: Uh, uh, I know they had a lot of gates, you know, wire there, you know where they went through in case, uh, where they examine you, ask you how much money you got, where you going, you got to show them the address and everything. Fine. Out you go. Fortunately, there were some people in the boat with us that, uh, the people were coming to this country, they had people to meet them, because they knew they were coming, so they came over to meet them. Then they showed us how to, where to go, take a train to Philadelphia and all that sort of thing. They, they, they helped us on that, on that score there.

DALLETT: Um, did you stay together as a family when you went through the medical examination?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, we . . .

DALLETT: In what language were, what was your primarily language when you came through?

MIAMIDIAN: Armenian.

DALLETT: And the officials? How did you communicate at that point?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, uh, I, I just don't know, I guess.

PAPAZIAN: We just managed.

MIAMIDIAN: I knew, I knew very little English because I had taken up a little English in, in school for one year. I could read but I couldn't understand everything. Uh, I don't know whether they have, they, they, they . . .

PAPAZIAN: Interpreters?

MIAMIDIAN: They have interpreters over there also. So, I don't, it's not very clear, uh . . .

PAPAZIAN: We just managed. That's the main thing.

DALLETT: Somehow you managed.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, managed, yeah.

DALLETT: Uh, you mentioned that they checked to see that you had enough money when you came to Ellis Island?

PAPAZIAN: Oh, yeah, they want to ask if you have, you got to have a little bit of money to, uh, to go wherever you're going or something like that. See who's going to pay, see.

DALLETT: So your father had to, to show money?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, yeah, he had, he had enough with him to, uh, take us where we want to go.

DALLETT: So your uncle wasn't there to meet you because he didn't know you were coming.

MIAMIDIAN: No, no, he didn't know.

PAPAZIAN: No, no.

DALLETT: So what happened? What did you do at Ellis Island?

MIAMIDIAN: So, we took, we took the train. We came to Philadelphia. I think we, we got off at, uh, Reading, Reading Station. Then we showed the address to somebody, you know, how to get over. They said, "Get on this trolley car." It, it was on York Road, to 4700 block, and when we were getting off we showed the conductors and, uh, they let you know. Then fortunately somebody got off at

the trolley stop and was going in the same direction says, "You follow me, I'll show you where it is." I guess evidently it was a customer of my uncle. He was a tailor. So it took us right there, he said, "This is it." We knocked on the door of my uncle . . .

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, it was late at night. He was sleeping and we knocked and knocked and I remember saying, "Uncle, uncle, it's us," and he was surprised. He wasn't expecting us.

DALLETT: Um, so then what happened? How did you, how did you set up your life here in Philadelphia?

PAPAZIAN: Oh, we went to my, uh, we have an uncle in Camden. It was very nice of them. Uh, they had four children of their own. We stayed there about a month, did we stay?

MIAMIDIAN: I don't know about a few . . .

PAPAZIAN: About a few weeks.

MIAMIDIAN: Few weeks, I don't remember exactly.

PAPAZIAN: They put up with, you know, uh, five of us until we

got a little home in Camden that we moved into. It was a few blocks away from my other uncle's house.

I have a lot of uncles.

DALLETT: And your father, uh, did he carry on with the watch repair business here?

PAPAZIAN: Yes.

MIAMIDIAN: Well, of course, he couldn't, he couldn't . . .

PAPAZIAN: No.

MIAMIDIAN: . . . get a job right away. Uh, he, he took a factory job. My, my father was a little bit of a fellow, and that was too hard for the poor fellow. And he worked at it a little bit. Then, uh, he got a job (?) jewelry. Uh, I have, uh, some people knew us, they took us around and they, they got him a job. So after that he was just doing the jewelry. He didn't, I mean, he didn't work at the factory no more because it wasn't for him.

PAPAZIAN: He was too frail a man for the factory work.

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah.

DALLETT: And was there, was there, uh, an Armenian community

that was set up here that you sort of moved into?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, they were about . . .

MIAMIDIAN: There was in Philadelphia, yes. There, there, there is quite a few in Camden.

PAPAZIAN: No, in Camden.

DALLETT: Sorry, in Camden.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah. Camden, yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, we had, we had a lot of, a lot of friends there and we, uh, we would go over there and, uh . . .

PAPAZIAN: I think there were about, wasn't there about six families on our street? They all clumped together in the beginning to try to be near because we, no, no English so, uh, it was at least six families in our block.

DALLETT: And do you remember any, anything that might have happened when you were first trying to get used to, first of all, a different language and a different culture?

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, yeah.

PAPAZIAN: It was a little hard. (they laugh)

MIAMIDIAN: I don't know. Uh, I went to school. Of course, the teachers asked me, and I, I tried to speak English as much as I could, to tell exactly what happened, everything like that. And, uh, and, you know, they, they enjoyed me tell them all the stories.

DALLETT: How old were you then when, when . . .

MIAMIDIAN: I was thirteen myself.

DALLETT: You were thirteen.

MIAMIDIAN: I was thirteen myself. My other brother, we were . . .

PAPAZIAN: He was ten.

MIAMIDIAN: . . . two years apart. Yeah, yeah.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, yeah. He was ten and I was six.

DALLETT: And how about your mother? How did she manage to pick up the language when she came?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, it was pretty hard for her. It was pretty hard for her. My father was pretty hard, too. I had to go with him to the jewelry shop to get parts so, so I could explain to them. Um, I did that for him so . . .

PAPAZIAN: Excuse me, after we moved to Philadelphia after Camden, the teacher used to come and teach my mother, uh, English.

MIAMIDIAN: For a while.

PAPAZIAN: They would come for a while, she taught her how to make flowers, read and write. She was a very, very nice person. So it was very helpful. So she, that helped her very much.

DALLETT: And were there any, uh, customs that, uh, you practiced in Armenia that, that fell by the wayside here, or were there any that you definitely carried on even though they weren't American practices?

PAPAZIAN: Yeah. We sort of continued some of the things. You know . . .

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, yeah.

PAPAZIAN: . . . the baking and things and all, we certainly do, yeah.

DALLETT: Same foods.

MIAMIDIAN: Baking, food and everything else.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, certainly. Then we gradually drifted with some things, you know. But we still have some of our, uh, old customs, bread and, uh, baking and all.

DALLETT: So that was carried on here.

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, uh-huh.

DALLETT: And how, how did you, uh, acquire citizenship? How long did that take?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, I myself got it after I was married. It was during the '40s. There was a rule set up. You have to be a citizen or else you're deported. It was something during the war. And my husband was a citizen so then I got my citizenship. It was, uh, about '40, uh, in the '40s, early '40s, I got my citizenship myself, and I don't know about, I don't remember.

MIAMIDIAN: I became a citizen and voted for, uh, FDR. That was the first time I voted. And I served in the army, was disabled, got wounded in the chest.

DALLETT: And your father, did he, uh, get his citizenship at around the same time?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, yeah. (break in tape)

DALLETT: Tell me what you remember about, uh, life in Syria, some of the conditions that went into your decision to come here.

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, well, the condition was Turk, uh, Turkey was in war against the Allies and, uh, they treated Armenians very badly, very badly. I'll tell you, I couldn't wait for the day the, the British, you know, uh, took the city over, and it was a sight to see. First you see those, uh, Arabs on camels. Camels came first. And then the horses. And then you see the, uh, the Indian sikhs, you know, those, the, uh, turbans. And then the British came, and I'll tell you, it was a sight. And, uh, Lawrence of Arabia rode with the Arabs on a horse.

DALLETT: And you saw that?

MIAMIDIAN: I saw that.

DALLETT: You, too? Do you remember that?

PAPAZIAN: I never heard about that until now. (they laugh)
He has been keeping this from me. I was too young.

DALLETT: Too young.

PAPAZIAN: I don't remember that at all. Yeah, uh, that's something.

MIAMIDIAN: And when we saw any, when we saw the Turks over there we went around and spat on them. They robbed the people. They killed my grandfather, my uncles, my cousins, everybody. You can't, you, you won't find one Armenian that wasn't touched by the Turks.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, uh, my husband's, uh, parents were killed during the massacre and, uh, his brother and his family. And he had to, uh, bury his father fairly deep so the dogs wouldn't get at the bones.
(she is moved)

DALLETT: When you, when you came to this country, um, did you really feel that you had put all that behind

you and, and you were in a safe refuge here?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, yes . . .

DALLETT: Was there some . . .

MIAMIDIAN: . . . but at night you go ahead, you go to
sleep . . .

DALLETT: Yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: . . . you dream about it. Some, some people
never get over it. They just . . .

PAPAZIAN: Yeah. I know of a young woman now, her mother, she
still broods about that. She still broods about
that, just, she can't get it out of her thoughts
till this day. She's a, Mary Sachian's mother, she
passed away, didn't she?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

PAPAZIAN: They say she brooded till the end. She never got
over the shock of it. Yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: She, uh, you look at her face, she looked so sad.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, yeah.

DALLETT: Were you, were you too young at the time or, or do you have any recollection of when you came to this country and actually landed here . . .

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah.

DALLETT: . . . that you were coming to a country where, uh, that kind of persecution wasn't going to happen.

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, God. You bet.

DALLETT: You knew?

PAPAZIAN: Yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: That's why we came. Everybody was coming here.

DALLETT: When you came, when you came into the harbor, uh, did you see the Statue of Liberty then?

MIAMIDIAN: Yes, yeah.

DALLETT: Any feelings or emotions happen then?

MIAMIDIAN: Well, we knew that was it, we're here.

DALLETT: And did, once you were settled here did, uh, many other people from your community come after you came and settle?

MIAMIDIAN: Oh, there was a few more people came . . .

PAPAZIAN: Yeah.

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, few more people came.

DALLETT: That you had known from the old country?

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, few more people came, but, uh . . .

PAPAZIAN: My grandmother came, my . . .

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, my grandmother came.

PAPAZIAN: . . . my, my grandfather passed away but then my grandmother came and she brought a bride for my uncle from over there.

MIAMIDIAN: Yeah, yeah, that's right . . .

PAPAZIAN: At the time they used to bring . . .

MIAMIDIAN: . . . that's the mother's mother, my father's father, you know, the Turks killed him.

PAPAZIAN: Yeah, yeah. At that time when they came over they used to bring a bride for their sons here. They'd pick them out. And she brought a very good looking bride. A lot of them did that.

AKRF-57/PAPAZIAN and MIAMIDIAN

DALLETT: So it was pre-arranged really.

MIAMIDIAN: Pre-arranged, yeah.

DALLETT: Yeah, is that custom still carried on at all?

PAPAZIAN: No, no.

DALLETT: Not at all.

PAPAZIAN: No, in those days yes, but not now.

DALLETT: Okay. Uh, unless there's anything else you want to add to the story, I think that's all I have to ask.

PAPAZIAN: No.

MIAMIDIAN: No? Okay. Thank you very much.

PAPAZIAN: You're welcome.

DALLETT: Uh, that is the end of Side One and the end of Interview Number 057. (Mr. Miamidian sings "Ave Maria," and other songs)