

KECK-68

KOREN KREEDIAN

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GUMB: This is Dana Gumb, and I'm speaking with Mr. Koren Kreedian, on the 25th day of October, 1985. We're beginning this interview at 10:18, and we're about to interview Mr. Kreedian about his immigration experience from the Armenian part of Turkey in the year 1924. Okay, Mr. Kreedian, if we could begin with where and when were you born?

KREEDIAN: I was born town of Guren, Guren, Central, Central Anatolia. It was Anatolia then.

GUMB: Okay. And what, what country is that in today?

KREEDIAN: Turkey.

GUMB: Okay. Could you spell those two names?

KREEDIAN: Anatolia?

MRS. KREEDIAN: G-U-R-E-N.

GUMB: Okay. All right. Yeah. Go ahead.

KREEDIAN: Guren. Anatolia. A-N-A-T-O-L-I-A. Anatolia.

GUMB: Okay. And, um, uh, what was life like there?

KREEDIAN: At that time, I was, I belonged to a rich family, that's what, my life was very good. Not politically, I'm talking about, individually. Home. Home life. Of course, we were under the Turkish government, and we had to be very, very careful what we were doing, what we were saying, but it was all right.

GUMB: Did you give the date of your birth? I'm not sure.

KREEDIAN: July 14th, 1895. That's French Bastille Day, I was born. I did not know until I came to France, Bastille Day. You see, the first time I came to, I used to come to buy merchandise. I was only twenty-nine, wait a minute, 19, the first time I came to, the year, 19, it was, uh, I don't remember exactly what date was it. ( voice off mike )

GUMB: Yeah, okay, right, just because, there's too many voices. Yeah. Okay, um, well, first, let's talk about your youth in Turkey.

KREEDIAN: My parents, my father was a manufacturer. My father was a manufacturer of, uh, shawls, they call it, I'll show you the, I have.

GUMB: Okay. We'll look at that in a minute, we'll look at that after.

KREEDIAN: Well, he sent me to American College when I was, 1908, 1909, I came to Euphratias College, Harpout. And then . . .

GUMB: Could you spell Harpout?

KREEDIAN: R-H-A, H-A-R-P-O-U-T. Harpout. H-A-R-P-O-U-T.

GUMB: Okay, and where is that?

KREEDIAN: Harpout, in Turkey. Anatolia. It was an American missionary school. I was there until, massacre started, American massacre started in Turkey, and I came home, they took away my father, I never saw him again, he was killed. So my family, my mother, my five sisters, they left from Guren, and others, from East to West, they start to come towards West, towards Beirut. And, um . . .

GUMB: Okay. When, when did you lose your father? What was the year? Do you remember?

KREEDIAN: 1914.

GUMB: Okay. That was the . . .

KREEDIAN: Massacre. When the Turks massacred all the Armenians in Turkey. That was 1914.

GUMB: Okay. Uh, and, uh, uh, what do you remember at that time? What, uh, you were at college, you were away at college.

KREEDIAN: No, I wasn't, I was in college. And the college was closed so I came home. And all the things happened when I came home. They took my father away and I never saw him again. They killed him, and we were deported from Guren towards Aleppo, towards, like, Syria, towards Syria, you see. So my, I was the only man in our family, five sisters and my mother, to take care and bring them to Aleppo. From Aleppo I went, and when I came to Aleppo, I want to go to Beirut to study, to, you know. I went to Beirut, at that time, it was Syrian Protestant College, now it is University of Beirut. Dr. Bliss was the president of the college then. He was from Montclair. And Mr. Dodge, that had

married Bliss' daughter, he was there. So, somehow, I don't know why, always, we were talking about it, I was telling her about my background, my father and my family. So then, from there, I came to Aleppo, and I came to Aleppo, Mr. Cleveland was at the consulate, embassy, in Turkey, consulate in Aleppo. I went to him and I said, "I want to go to America," and then, not in (?), I'm sorry, America. So he says, "It's very hard, but," he says, "there was an understanding between Ottoman Empire and America that any person from United States can go Turkey, stay there to buy merchandise, to sell merchandise, and anybody can come from Turkey here, and that there was a regulation about immigration then. They can buy all they want, they can stay as long as they want."

GUMB: You can go as a businessman.

KREEDIAN: As a businessman. That, in other words. ( voice off mike )  
So, uh . . .

GUMB: Right, maybe we can, uh, so, to finish the story, to go on with the story, you, that businessmen, the consulate in Cairo . . .

KREEDIAN: So, 1930, 1924, I came here to buy merchandise, second-hand clothing, because clothing was very expensive over there. I was to buy jackets, overcoats, jackets, you know, and the shoes, second hand shoes, to export to Egypt and Beirut. And, uh . . .

GUMB: Okay. Maybe, maybe we can go back, uh, to your, to your youth, for a minute, and sort of fill in some of the details. Um, uh, you mentioned that, what was it, 1914, that, or, the Turks massacred the Armenians.

KREEDIAN: 1914.

GUMB: 1914. Can you give a little background, why did they do that? What was the . . .

KREEDIAN: Why did they massacre, that I don't know. Why did the Germans massacre the Jews? Because the Armenians were, the Armenians were the power of money. Everybody worked hard, they had money. And Turks, they were not educated, they were, at that time, and they just hated. So they wanted to take everything that the Armenians had. So they massacred, they took (?) from one place to another. So I, we only had a loaf of bread a day for all of us to eat. And then, sometimes, when we were hungry, I used to pick up grass on the, grass, you have to, you can't, when you are hungry, you don't care what you eat, as long as you eat. And we were not sick, we ate grass and bread, grass and bread, that's it. ( voice off mike ) Oh, yes, and then I was the only, in Turkey, Guren, they took all the women away, not the men. So they had to dress me as a little girl. So I was with my little girl, my sisters, I walked through, for the mountains, walked, don't forget, about two, three weeks, from my town, Guren. I came to Otonow, which is towards the east, towards west, the beginning of civilization was over there, then. Americans , they were not there. We don't have Americans in Guren, but we had American schools, we used to go there. Because my father wanted me to learn the languages, different languages. And someday, he said, maybe we'll all go towards west, you know.

GUMB: You said that in your youth you had a, your family was prosperous, but that politically there were problems. What kind of problems

were there?

KREEDIAN: They had, because they didn't have money, like the Indians in here, and ( he laughs ) they're all, what can I say, peasants, according to them. Because there were no, if don't believe in Mohammed, you were no good.

GUMB: But, your family, was there some sort of political problems that your family had?

KREEDIAN: My father was, as I said, was the richest man in town, one of the richest men. He had thirty, forty people working for him. I'm going to show you, see that one there, that's my father's production that I, only one I'm lucky to have. We used to manufacture that, my father. So . . .

GUMB: What kind of house did you live in then?

KREEDIAN: Oh, we had a very nice home, one of the best in town. Living room, dining room, kitchen, and then a storage room, and upstairs three, four rooms. We had two floors home. It was all brick, and that we call it, brick building.

GUMB: Did you have servants?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes. My father, we had servants. We had cows and milk, the servants used to milk the cows to have the milk.

GUMB: What kind of schools did you go to before going to college?

KREEDIAN: Local schools. They would teach you, the only thing you could learn was Armenian and Turkish. No French, no English, because they don't have any teachers there, until I had to go to college to learn that.

GUMB: In those years, uh, did you hear anything about America?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes. Americans were the, they're from God. We understood Americans like, oh, it was the very pleasure, biggest honor in the world to know an American, you know. When I came to Aleppo, especially, when I met in Beirut my professor and everything else, it was one of the finest things that you couldn't buy with money. And I don't know why I was the, I was always, uh, I want always to meet Americans, not English, French, yes, not English, but Americans and French.

GUMB: Did you hear anything about the country when you were there?

KREEDIAN: America?

GUMB: Yes. What kind of country was it?

KREEDIAN: Yeah. We, I tell you what, I always say I came from hell to heaven. It was heaven. To be able to come to America was like heaven. And I came from hell to heaven.

GUMB: Had you met anybody in Turkey who had been in America, you know, any Turks who had been, or any Armenians who had been there?

KREEDIAN: Well, my, yes, my, my nephew, my cousin, rather, came form, uh, when I was there he came to America, Chicago, or Cleveland, Chicago. When I came he was responsible for me to be able to come. When you come to America you're got to know somebody, so he brought me in here.

GUMB: Right. Okay, so . . .

KREEDIAN: There were lots of Armenians that came, after the massacre or before the massacre. 1895 there was a massacre, and then 1914

there was a massacre.

GUMB: So, uh, 1914 you were in college, you were in Euphrates College. What do you remember, what happened in the massacre, what, what happened?

KREEDIAN: What happened? They just, they killed the natives, you know, the peasants, rather, the Turkish peasants. They started shooting and robbing you.

GUMB: Did it start on one particular day? Do you remember a particular day when it started?

KREEDIAN: No, just, in other words, we were lucky, one person, yeah. Certain spots, they called, you know, New York, you know, just like Parsippany, coming, walking, down the way.

GUMB: Uh, so, uh, at college where you were, were there, was there killing there on the campus?

KREEDIAN: No, not on the campus. The college was closed, and Mr. Briggs was my president, and he was responsible for me, because I met, he came to Egypt, he was in Beirut. And I applied for my visa, there is a letter written there, if you look. That's how I was able to come to America.

GUMB: Right. So, uh, the college was closed, and so you had to go home, uh, during the massacre.

KREEDIAN: Yes.

GUMB: When you went home, what did you find there? What was happening there?

KREEDIAN: It was terror. We didn't know what was happening tomorrow. All this living on is up, and finally they start to do it. My

father was the last one, because all the native merchants, Turkish merchants, they liked him very much. But then the massacre, the people that came to massacre, they were not in town. They came from outside, next town. In town we were protected.

GUMB: When you arrived in your town, uh, to see your family, was your father already gone?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes. My father already was in prison.

GUMB: Did you see him at all?

KREEDIAN: No. After he was in the prison I didn't see him.

GUMB: What happened to his business?

KREEDIAN: Everything went.

GUMB: Okay, so, how long was it in your town before you decided you had to leave, do you remember?

KREEDIAN: I didn't, I didn't decide. They deported us. We want to stay there, no matter what happened. We had a garden and vegetables, and wheat, corn, apples and peaches, you know, trees. But they said, "Get out."

GUMB: What happened? Did someone from the government tell you that, or . . .

KREEDIAN: It was (?) government.

GUMB: Do you remember what happened, I mean, did they come and knock on the door, and . . .

KREEDIAN: Yes, they came to knock on the door, and then they said you had

to leave the house. So we, we took what we can, you know, and start walking. I don't have the map, but from Guren to Albistan, it took about six days, another ten days, fifteen days to Aleppo.

GUMB: Okay. The first stop was Albistan?

KREEDIAN: Albistan.

GUMB: Could you spell that? You might have spelled it before.

KREEDIAN: A-L-B-I-S-T-A-N.

GUMB: And, uh, do you know any, that's in Syria, right? Is that Syria?

KREEDIAN: It was Turkey then.

GUMB: It was Turkey then, okay. Why did you go there?

KREEDIAN: On the way to Aleppo.

GUMB: Okay. And could you spell Aleppo?

KREEDIAN: Aleppo. A-L-L-E-P-P-O [sic]. Aleppo. It's Syria now.

GUMB: Syria now. Okay. And why were you headed toward Aleppo?

KREEDIAN: That I do not know. It was a desert. It was the beginning of a desert, you know.

GUMB: What, uh, what sort of group was traveling together, what . . .

KREEDIAN: All the ladies and girls in it, and young boys.

GUMB: Where were the men?

KREEDIAN: They were all taken away, killed.

GUMB: Okay. How big a group was it traveling, do you have any memory?

KREEDIAN: We were about three, four hundred, five hundred. We used to walk early in the morning and then, where there was water, camp there overnight, and following morning start walking again.

GUMB: How, how did you get food along the way?

KREEDIAN: We just walked, that's all.

GUMB: Okay. So, um, uh, uh, how long was it before you finally arrived in Aleppo, do you remember?

KREEDIAN: Oh, I would say about five weeks.

GUMB: Five weeks. This was all walking?

KREEDIAN: Yeah. Of course, they were all, my grandmother was then, I would say, eighty. For the elderly ladies that they couldn't walk, they had horse.

MRS. KREEDIAN: Carts?

KREEDIAN: Not horse cart. Uh, cow, not, cow, what's . . .

GUMB: Okay?

KREEDIAN: Yes. There's, each one, about ten, fifteen, as much as they could. We used to walk with them, with the ox. (Wife speaks.)

GUMB: What happened to your grandmother on the trip?

KREEDIAN: She died on the, she died on the cart, so they dumped her out and they carried on.

GUMB: Were you under guard, were there Turkish guards with you, or . . .

KREEDIAN: Well, it was a civilian guard, that they had, weapons.

GUMB: These were Turks.

KREEDIAN: Not army, but civilian.

GUMB: Okay. Um, so then you arrived in Aleppo after five weeks, right, Aleppo. And, um, how long did you stay there?

KREEDIAN: Aleppo I stayed, uh, my brother, my brother was then in that area. My brother was in Aleppo. And, uh, we stayed, I stayed, we stayed in Aleppo four years, four or five years. Then they sent me, I went to American University of Beirut. That was Syrian Protestant College then.

GUMB: Okay. Uh, right. Before we get on to that, how many, how many family members, uh, took that, were deported from, uh, Turkey, yeah, were deported from Turkey.

KREEDIAN: How many families? ( voice off mike )

GUMB: No, your family, I was wondering what family, what family members were traveling? ( voice off mike )

KREEDIAN: I had five sisters, my mother and grandmother and myself.

GUMB: Okay. And how many survived the trip? Were . . .

KREEDIAN: Only, only one died. Only grandmother died. The rest survived, and they were, my sister, younger sister died when I was in America. Ah, so they're all dead. Only one sister is alive, which is in America, Boston, right now.

GUMB: Okay. So, um, you said, from Aleppo you then went to Beirut?

KREEDIAN: There's a Syrian Protestant College. And then, because

Mr. Cleveland knew me from Aleppo, you know what I mean, I think I got special treatment, I didn't have to go to many political ways. Any time I had something, something to be done, I had some trouble, I went to him, and it wasn't hard to do. And Mr. Briggs came from out of (?) to Beirut. So I went to the, I went to the, I was studying to be a doctor. You know, they prepare from college, from college they prepare ( voice off mike ) to be a doctor. And I was taken into the Army.

GUMB: Okay. Before we get too far ahead, how did you finance your education in Beirut?

KREEDIAN: In Beirut? At that time American Missionary Association, they used to give qualified people free education. That's why Americans were like God to us.

GUMB: They, they, uh, so the Americans paid for your education.

KREEDIAN: Missionary, Missionary Association. The college belonged to the Missionary Association. You have to pay them, but I never paid.

GUMB: What, just to go back another step, what possessions did the Turks allow you to take out, you know, when you were deported?

KREEDIAN: Nothing. Nothing. We just had our clothes on, that's all. ( voice off mike ) Oh, that was hidden. I had gold. My father used to keep gold in his closet. So I, I think that was about twenty-five or thirty pounds. So I gave each one of the family, in case, my mother had three, I had five. And when I was doing all this time coming, walking towards Aleppo, they, the Turks came, you know, they want to kill me. So the man said, the head man says, "Don't kill him before you take the money out." So I had, what, silver dollars, and I took my money out and threw it

on the floor. And everybody wanted to grab it and I ran. And I ran and I came to the ladies. And they told, they dressed me like a little girl. Imagine?

GUMB: Where did this happen?

KREEDIAN: When I was to return from Albistan to, what they call it, Aleppo.

GUMB: Aleppo.

KREEDIAN: They used to, because it was desert. It was wilderness. Of course, at that time, there's, there's another spot, they killed about, I would say, three thousand Armenians. It was history. There's a book about that. (?) wrote it.

GUMB: Where did you hide your gold?

KREEDIAN: Where I had, in my pocket, you know.

GUMB: Was it in a special place.

KREEDIAN: No, under my underwear.

GUMB: What was it like a . . .

KREEDIAN: Small gold. ( voice off mike )

GUMB: Coins?

KREEDIAN: Coin, yeah.

GUMB: Coins, right. So, uh, how did they disguise you like a girl, what did they use to . . .

KREEDIAN: They gave me girls' clothes and then, what do you call it.  
( voice off mike ) I didn't have a moustache then, you know.

GUMB: Why did they want to kill you at that point?

KREEDIAN: Why did they want to kill everybody?

GUMB: I mean, did you, had you done something, or . . .

KREEDIAN: No, no. The Turks killed all the Armenians, the Armenian Massacre.

GUMB: Right. Well, I was just wondering why that particular point.

KREEDIAN: The philosophy was that you're an Armenian. They want to get rid of the Armenians, the Turks.

GUMB: How could they, how did they recognize an Armenia? I mean, was there some way they recognized an Armenian?

KREEDIAN: Well, the Armenians it's entirely the language they speak. When you are born in Turkey, some Turkish family, you have entirely different accent than when you are born in American family, Armenian family, Turkish accent.

GUMB: So they could tell when you spoke?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes. Everybody knew, in town, everybody knew everybody. Town, townspeople, they were, take out of town and get rid of it.

GUMB: Did, did the Armenians have a different religion from the Turks?

KREEDIAN: Oh, of course. Armenians are part of the first Christian nation in the world. They were one of the first ones to accept Christianity.

GUMB: And the Turks, of course, are Mohammadian.

KREEDIAN: The Turks are Mohammadian.

GUMB: Okay. To get back to Beirut, you were studying in Beirut to be a doctor, and, uh, uh, well, first, what year was that, when did you arrive in Beirut, do you remember? To get the chronology right.

KREEDIAN: I just, could take them, 1917 or '18. Fifteen? ( voice off mike )

GUMB: Well, to get a step back, maybe this would be a better way to ask the question. In Aleppo, where you finally ended up after the march out, how long did you stay in Aleppo? Were you . . .

KREEDIAN: Aleppo.

GUMB: Right.

KREEDIAN: Well, I stayed there, the family stayed there, a long time. And then from Aleppo, I went to American Protestant College in Beirut.

GUMB: Well, how much time did the family stay in, did you stay with the family . . .

KREEDIAN: Oh, oh, uh, family, I came to Cairo, they were in Aleppo, I would say about three, four years.

GUMB: How did you survive there that period? How did the family survive?

KREEDIAN: With bread, no matter what happened we had enough things to have a loaf of bread. You see . . .

GUMB: You used the gold to

KREEDIAN: Well, we used the gold, yes, that's . . .

GUMB: Did you set up a business? Did the family set up a business there?

KREEDIAN: No. My brother was, my brother was not with us. He was in Aleppo. He had his own business, my father's business. So, we had enough money there to, enough merchandise, things to sell, until we came, then, from Aleppo to Cairo. I was in Beirut and my brother was in Cairo. So we all went to Cairo.

GUMB: I see. Okay. But the family moved to Cairo, but you were in Beirut.

KREEDIAN: Yes.

GUMB: Okay. So you were studying in Beirut and, uh, uh, how much time did you spend there studying?

KREEDIAN: Then war started, the first World War. At that time I was eligible to be in the army, Turkish Army, that's why I have, I can't go on. I start (?) from there. I was in the, I went to military school, Turkish military school. And, uh, I became a second lieutenant, interpreter. I spoke in French, English, Armenian and Turkish.

GUMB: Wait, wait. Uh, after being deported from Turkey . . .

KREEDIAN: From one part of Turkey to another part. At that point, you know, because in the 20th there was no foreign influence or media at all. But when you came to Aleppo and Beirut, you couldn't do that because there was American, British, German embassies, they couldn't massacre then. We were saved when we came to Aleppo. We were saved.

GUMB: Because they were all the American, there were all the consulate and

foreign influence. But then, when you were in Beirut you were drafted into the Turkish Army?

KREEDIAN: But what I can't understand is how could they, how could Turkey draft you when they had deported you out of there?

KREEDIAN: You are alive, and they need soldiers, you know. I had to be, I was, I had to go there.

GUMB: Okay. You had to go.

KREEDIAN: At that time there was a law that anybody that was eligible and has education can go to Istanbul to be, to be an officer, not soldier. That's how I became second lieutenant. I went to Istanbul and I studied there. I was trained there.

GUMB: This is the end of side one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

KREEDIAN: They didn't have nurses, but when you were an American student, you become assistant doctor in the hospitals.

GUMB: Oh, assistant doctor.

KREEDIAN: In other words, injections, taking the blood, taking temperature, we didn't have nurses then. There used to be those things. Then, I was eligible to, then I came to the military age, so from there I went to (?) Istanbul to be trained to be an officer.

GUMB: In the, uh, Turkish Army.

KREEDIAN: In the Turkish Army.

GUMB: Was this the Ottoman Empire?

KREEDIAN: Ottoman Empire, yes.

GUMB: At that time, okay. So it sort of included Turkey and . . .

KREEDIAN: Then, after I graduated from the college, I came back to Damascus. I came to Damascus and then, still the same life but we used to have a very hard time to make a living. And one day, when I was walking on the streets of Damascus, somebody told me that there's a group that they are going to Lawrence of Arabia, Damascus, in the, in the country, like, all the way. No roads, but all forest. So I joined them, like to come to, what you call it, Lawrence of Arabia. And I, the war was started, but the British cannot break the (?) front so they had to, they had, Lawrence came from Suez Canal, from the deserts, you know, had desert, to Damascus. So, they were fighting here, they just get, and I met Lawrence then. And he told me to join him. I did join him.

GUMB: What kind of man was Lawrence of Arabia?

KREEDIAN: He was very nice, very nice. My boyfriend, you know, when I told him my story, I used to, he gave me a tent next to his tent. So he told me if I want to become a soldier. I said I didn't want a soldier's life, I want to go to Egypt, you know, so . . .

GUMB: That's where your family was?

KREEDIAN: My family was, I didn't have family then. I was separate from my family. I didn't know where my family was.

GUMB: Oh, I thought your family was in Cairo.

KREEDIAN: Later on. And I went first to Cairo, and then I brought the family to Cairo.

GUMB: Oh, I see. Okay. Where had your family been during all this time, or during the war?

KREEDIAN: Oh, in the, what you call it? In Damascus.

GUMB: In Damascus. Okay. Well, anyway, so you ended up after, after World War One, in Cairo.

KREEDIAN: Yeah.

GUMB: Okay. And you got involved in your brother's business?

KREEDIAN: Yeah.

GUMB: Is that right?

KREEDIAN: Not my brother's business. My father's business.

GUMB: Father's business, right.

KREEDIAN: Which my brother was in charge then.

GUMB: Right. Okay. I think, maybe you could describe the business again. I think you described it a little bit before, but . . .

KREEDIAN: He used to manufacture this (shows the shawl) my father. And we used to sell it to the natives. They used that as a belt. And then my, I had a cousin, a cousin that he was an American, in America. And at that time, that was the first shawl that they made, new, example. I sent him to give this one him, Cleveland. When I came back here he says, "Koren, this is yours, you

better keep it. Which is a very, as far as I'm concerned, a family, what do you call that?

GUMB: Heirloom.

KREEDIAN: Right.

GUMB: So, all right, the other business, though, was second hand clothes. Is that right?

KREEDIAN: Second hand clothing.

GUMB: Right. Okay. So, uh, the, uh . . .

KREEDIAN: 1924 I came to New York.

GUMB: As a businessman.

KREEDIAN: As a businessman. And I was told that I can stay as long as I'm exporting and I don't have to worry. So '19, I used to make, I used to ship about, oh, twenty-five, thirty thousand a year, second hand clothing, lots of things.

GUMB: Did you ant to come as an immigrant?

KREEDIAN: I'm coming to that.

GUMB: Okay.

KREEDIAN: I came as a businessman. Then, 1930, I went back to see what's happening in Cairo. Before I went there I went to Washington. I went to washington, I went to the Pentagon, State Department. I said, "I'd like to see Secretary of State Davis." The girl says to me, "Who are you to see Secretary Davis?" The girls says to me, "Who are you to see Secretary Davis?" I said to her, "Listen, lady, in my country, Fridays," I said, "anybody

can see the king." I said, "Today is Friday, and I cannot see Secretary of State?" So she said, "Just a minute, sir." She, that entrance lady, she said, "There's a young man here, he has no appointment, he wants to see Secretary of State. And he's very arrogant, I don't know what to do with him." He said, "Send him in." And he says, "Secretary is not here, but can you see Under Secretary Davis, Under Secretary Davis?" So I went there, I saw him, I told him the story. I says, he says, "Forget about it, they don't know. As long as you, what can I do for you?" I said, here, I said, "I came here '24. I can stay as long as I want to according to the visa. Because," I said, at the embassy in Aleppo. Mr. Cleveland told me that." He said, "You're right." I said, "Now I want to come back, this time, to be an American." "You want to be an American?" I said, "Of course I do." He said, "Don't worry about it. I will give them something. When you go to Cairo, go to American embassy and ask that I told you to talk to them, to the immigrant's entry." So I went to Cairo and then I went to the embassy and I told him, I said to the girl, "I want to see Under-Secretary." He said, "You Kreedian?" I said, "Yes." He says, "You want to go to America and be an American?" I said, "Yes." "We know about you. Go ahead." So they gave me the visa to stay here. The first time I came I didn't go to Ellis Island. S.S. Olympic, used to go there at the, at the port because there was, then, you know, they just routinely check up, to take you out. The second time I went there I had to stay about five or six days.

GUMB: So, in 1924, when you came as a businessman, you didn't go to Ellis Island?

KREEDIAN: No. At that time, because I had, I was a businessman, immigrant, the boat, S.S. Olympic, went to Ellis Island. They came to examine your passports, and said it's all right to go. But the second time that I was going to be American citizen, I had to stay there a week, quarantine, blood test, all the story, so . . .

GUMB: Hmm. Okay. Well, first, going to 1924, when you first came here, uh, uh, you were coming as a businessman. But, did you want to come as an immigrant, did you want to come to this country?

KREEDIAN: I want to stay here, as an immigrant, but they couldn't give me a visa like that because it has to go to State Department and lots of formalities. The second time it was no problem.

GUMB: Right. I see. Okay. Why did you want to come here as an immigrant?

KREEDIAN: I told you. I was coming from hell to heaven. America was heaven to us, then. I used to live Lower East Side, New York, the Lower East Side, Rivington Street, (?) Street. You know the area, don't you?

GUMB: Right.

KREEDIAN: (?) Street I had, ten cents buy my breakfast, twenty-five cents buy my lunch, and fifty cents was supper. It was about a dollar a day. And I, in those days a dollars a day was lots of money as far as I'm concerned, you know. So I used to live downtown, down in that end. My living, my, what you call it, rooming house, was a dollar a day. I used to live on dollar a day.

GUMB: Why America and not France or England or, you know, some . . .

KREEDIAN: America, at that point, you know, was the heaven for anybody that came from the other side. And because the missionaries came, the Missionary Association. They used to give money to the starving Armenians, or anybody that was starving. But then thing changed politically, you know. Everything changed.

GUMB: Do you remember a group, an American group, called Near East Relief out there?

KREEDIAN: What name?

GUMB: Near East Relief?

KREEDIAN: Yes, Near East, Near East Relief was the, was the association that came to Aleppo, Near East Relief, I knew them very well.

GUMB: All right. Okay. Um, all right. So, that first time, 1924, uh, uh, when you, when you took the voyage over, uh, what class were you traveling over on the voyage, do you remember?

KREEDIAN: Was, I can't remember now what it was, but, as I said, any class on the boat was like paradise, you know, living like a rich man, because, what they call it, when you paid the ticket, the meal was included in your, whatever I paid, you know, for to come, the meal, breakfast meal, was included in that thing.

GUMB: Right.

KREEDIAN: The only thing that you paid, if you want to drink beer or scotch or something like that.

GUMB: Yeah. Do you remember first impressions of America when you were approaching the harbor?

KREEDIAN: As I said, heaven. Paradise. When you see that Ellis Island

coming there, you know.

GUMB: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes, and how. Many times.

GUMB: That first time.

KREEDIAN: Yes.

GUMB: Do you remember what your feelings were at that time, or . . .

KREEDIAN: Well, I was so young I don't remember now.

GUMB: But you knew what it was?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes.

GUMB: You had heard about it in, in . . .

KREEDIAN: School, American school.

GUMB: So, uh, that first time in 1924, uh, uh, do you remember where the boat docked, do you have any memory of that?

KREEDIAN: It was, there was a pier there in Ellis Island, there was a pier there. We didn't go out of the boat, you know. They came on the boat to examine your passport, and mine was, as I said, a merchant's, so no problem.

GUMB: So they just let you go.

KREEDIAN: No, we came to, then we came to New York port. Or, there was a ferry, I think, that they transported, the ferry to bring to New York. I came to New York and a friend of mine, that we were in the desert together, he came ahead of me. So he met me at the New York, how you call it, harbor.

GUMB: But, you never set foot on Ellis Island the first, in 1924. Do you remember anything . . .

KREEDIAN: Not '24. 1930.

GUMB: Okay. All right. So, um, well, when you first arrived in New York, uh, you know, when your friend met you, uh, do you remember your first impressions of this new country?

KREEDIAN: Well, as I said, paradise. You wouldn't believe that so many people walking free, automobiles, and hot dog stands. I didn't know hot dog, what a hot dog was. And when I ate a hot dog it was very delicious. Not any more, but at that time was delicious.

GUMB: Okay. Well, in 1930 . . .

KREEDIAN: Uh . . .

GUMB: I never ate hamburgers. You know why? In the desert, (?) desert, there is no vegetable, only sand. The only thing they had to have meat was when the men died, they took from the back of the man, spice it, broil it, and eat it. You had to eat what there was.

GUMB: It was human flesh?

KREEDIAN: Human flesh. That's right. Absolutely right.

GUMB: So, uh, what does that have to do with not eating hamburger? You just wouldn't eat meat.

KREEDIAN: No, I would not eat, it's all mixed up, you know what I mean? I never eat it.

GUMB: You think of it as human, it might be human . . .

KREEDIAN: It's mind.

GUMB: There might be some human flesh mixed up in a McDonald's hamburger.

Okay. Um, 1930 you arrived in New York Harbor. Uh, oh, do you remember where the boat docked?

KREEDIAN: We had to get out of the boat to Ellis Island, first to see how, if the health was all right, and then they had to know your background, everything else, to become a citizen, you know.

GUMB: Um, do you remember, um, exactly what kind of, what they looked at in the medical examinations, how thorough they were?

KREEDIAN: If you had any typhoid, blood tests, or everything. I don't know.

GUMB: Okay.

KREEDIAN: General health. They didn't want to bring cholera or different things that, you know, come from the other side of the, from Europe or from Middle East.

GUMB: Uh, so you spent five or six days there, you said. Why so long?

KREEDIAN: Oh, they had to, they want to know, twenty-four hours, your examination, and then it was, I don't know why.

GUMB: Do you remember where you stayed, where they put you for those days?

KREEDIAN: It was in a tent, I think, it was in a tent.

GUMB: Uh, uh, on the Island, on Ellis Island? What sort of food did they give you?

KREEDIAN: I don't remember. As long as I had bread, that was enough for me.

GUMB: Do you remember, was it a kind of prison atmosphere, or what was the . . .

KREEDIAN: I don't remember. Not prison. It's immigrant, in other words, they had to process you there, to prepare you to be American citizen. They talked about certain thing, you know. Like church, school, like educational things.

GUMB: Oh, educational things.

KREEDIAN: They tell you about what American life, how the family life is, what religion.

GUMB: Oh, really.

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes, at that time they did that. Missionaries.

GUMB: Missionaries were doing this?

KREEDIAN: Yeah.

GUMB: Do you remember what church, or what kind of . . .

KREEDIAN: No, I don't remember anything.

GUMB: So, I mean, were you upset during this time, or was this . . .

KREEDIAN: No. Everything that was doing was much better than whatever it was in the past over there.

GUMB: Okay. Do you remember what kind of questions they asked you?

KREEDIAN: No, I can't remember. No.

GUMB: The officials, the Immigration and Naturalization Service? Uh, do you have any general feeling about the atmosphere of the place, you know, at that time?

KREEDIAN: It was very, as far as I was concerned, it was like paradise, I told you that.

GUMB: Ellis Island.

KREEDIAN: Ellis Island, yeah.

GUMB: It was like paradise?

KREEDIAN: Yeah. To me, it was like paradise, because the food was there, we used to drink milk and, uh, it was paradise.

GUMB: Okay. So you didn't feel like you were being . . .

KREEDIAN: When you were hungry, you just ask, you were hungry, they give you something to eat.

GUMB: You didn't feel like you were being held back?

KREEDIAN: No, no. Not at all.

GUMB: All right. I'm wondering why they, why they had to hold you, was there some sort of problem with your visa?

KREEDIAN: No. There was no problem at all. But, what do you call it, the visa was, it says there, I had my passport. I don't remember what happened. ( voice off mike )

GUMB: We can look at it later, look at the passport later. I wonder why you were held back, you know.

KREEDIAN: Everybody. Not me. ( voice off mike )

GUMB: Everybody on the boat was?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes, anybody that was coming to America. Because you came, left Marseille, I was not the only one. There were so many hundreds of them. They are not only Armenians, English, Holland, from Amsterdam, from Holland, from Bulgaria, Austria. There were lots of immigrants.

GUMB: That were being held on Ellis Island.

KREEDIAN: At that time, everybody. The boat has to go Ellis Island, if they are coming to stay permanently they had to go to Ellis Island then to be, what they call it, processed, to land.

GUMB: Okay. All right. So, um, was there some announcement when your time was over, I mean, did they, was there some sort of, did some kind of official tell you that you could leave?

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes. You could leave because, or you couldn't leave at all. It was, to be able to enter Ellis Island was, government, what you call it, uh, regulation to get out. They had to take you out, it's not like free, it wasn't free. Ellis Island was the key of all the immigrants coming from Europe to America, and the processing had to be done.

GUMB: Right. Okay. Of course, you were very fluent in English at the time.

KREEDIAN: Well, I spoke English, but not, even now I don't speak good English.

GUMB: Sure you do. Well, what was, so, was there any problem with language on Ellis Island?

KREEDIAN: No, because I spoke, I speak five languages, Armenian, Turkish,

Arabic, French, English.

GUMB: So you had no, no problem with language. Okay. Um, all right, once you were let go, once you were allowed to leave, uh, what were your feelings at that point, uh?

KREEDIAN: Feelings. As I said, I was so happy that I can go. I can do anything that I please. And then when I came to New York Harbor my friend, that's in the picture, he met me. They used to live then, at that time, had an apartment, 72nd Street and, uh, 72nd and . . .

GUMB: Broadway?

KREEDIAN: What?

GUMB: Broadway?

KREEDIAN: Not Broadway. The East Avenue.

GUMB: East End Avenue.

KREEDIAN: East End Avenue. 72nd Street and East End Avenue.

GUMB: Right. Okay, so . . .

KREEDIAN: At that time the apartment was the elegant place because my boyfriend was from Istanbul, Turkey, and they used to be, they came here, they were in the exporting textile business. At that time it was a great privilege to be able to export textile.

GUMB: Hmm. So you, um, just picked up your business in New York?

KREEDIAN: I came to New York to buy merchandise, yes.

GUMB: Right. But when you arrived again in 1930 as a citizen, or, as an

immigrant . . .

KREEDIAN: Yes, I came, and I had a rooming house, downtown, Regent Street . . .

GUMB: You just picked up your business that you had from 1924 in 1930?

KREEDIAN: Yeah, I continued to buy the merchandise. I had orders. One of the reasons that they let me go out in Ellis Island, at that time, at one point there was a fifteen thousand dollar letter of credit in my name, Bank of America did that. So, I told them, look, I have ten, fifteen thousand dollars, let's have a credit check done. And they saw that yes, over fifteen thousand dollars, lots of money.

GUMB: Right. How long did it take to become a citizen?

KREEDIAN: Oh, I went back 1930, 1936, 1933, no, 1936. 1936.

GUMB: What did you have to do to become a citizen?

KREEDIAN: Nothing. Just had to register and they saw your passport that you can stay here, so . . .

GUMB: Did it have some meaning for you? How did you feel about becoming a citizen?

KREEDIAN: Well, no matter what happened, the feeling was positive because I couldn't wait the time to go that I can have my citizenship papers.

GUMB: Uh, okay. Were there any customs that you brought from, from the old country, from the old world to America?

KREEDIAN: I had nothing to bring. ( voice off mike )

GUMB: Customs, any customs, you know. ( voice off mike )

KREEDIAN: I know, but I had nothing, to go through the customs . . .

GUMB: No, I'm not talking about Customs, not that kind of customs, uh, habits, you know, like Christmas time, or Easter time.

KREEDIAN: Oh, yes.

GUMB: Any kind of, any sort of traditions that you brought to the country, this new country?

KREEDIAN: No. It was there already. I didn't bring anything new here.  
( voice off mike )

GUMB: Okay. Can you tell us about some of those Armenian things?

KREEDIAN: Well, church going, church was, at that time, there was only churches, and no other societies. We had Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox church, Armenian. I went to Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church. I used to go to Church, and I used to go to Protestant because I was studying in University of Beirut Protestant Church. And I, one thing that I forgot to tell you. At one time, I was traveling from Damascus to Cairo, to take the train from Damascus to Cairo, and I came to (?), I don't remember that, I saw an American. You had to change your train to go to Jerusalem or to Cairo. I was going to go to Jerusalem, and I was waiting for him to come to train. So I saw this American fellow, Harold Speigman. I said to him, "What are you doing?" And I said, "What can I do for you?" "Oh," he says, "I want to go to Jerusalem." I said, "You're on the wrong track. That's going to Cairo." So we came together from that station to Jerusalem. And I start talking with him, I said, "What do

you do?" He said, "I'm a writer, I'm going to write a book."  
"Yeah?" So he starts talking to me. ( he points to a book ) I  
am in the book.

GUMB: What's the name of the author? We'll look at it, not right now,  
but . . . ( voice off mike )

KREEDIAN: Harold . . .

GUMB: Harold Speigman, yeah, yeah.

KREEDIAN: He was from Cleveland.

GUMB: Oh, right. Yeah. Okay. Did he, yeah, okay. Um, all right. Well,  
um, let's see. Did he, yeah, okay. Um, all right. Well, um,  
let's see. Well, you were talking about Armenian customs and  
going to church. Do you celebrate, and you said you go to an  
Eastern, uh, Orthodox . . .

KREEDIAN: We celebrate Christmas time, oh, yes.

GUMB: When do you celebrate Christmas time?

KREEDIAN: January, yeah. ( voice off mike )

GUMB: Right. Instead of December 25th. Right. Okay. Um, did you have any  
problem with your name, I don't think he did. ( voice off  
mike ) A lot of people had their names changed on Ellis Island.

KREEDIAN: It was Kreedian, you know what I mean. So I took the H, and  
Kreedian. ( voice off mike ) Two E's.

GUMB: Um, all right, I don't know. That's not really a . . . Okay. Just to  
sum up, uh, Mr. Kreedian, the, um, your expectations of America,  
when you were in the, in the old world, how did those

expectations compare to the reality, what you found here?

KREEDIAN: It was there, but later on it changed. The first time that I came it was paradise, and it was, frankly, I'm talking American society, they were very friendly wherever we went. But not any more, if I may say so.

GUMB: Why do you think it's changed?

KREEDIAN: I don't know. I don't know.

GUMB: How has it changed?

KREEDIAN: I can't explain how it's changed, but the feeling, you know what I mean? To be able to come to America was like going to heaven at that time. Everybody want to come to America. It's not for the money of it, but the freedom. Because as I said, financially I didn't need to come here if they hadn't kept, if they hadn't taken my father away and killed him, because I was living like the Rockefellers in the town. But not any more. It's not any more. In other words, now everything is depending money. If you have money you are somebody. You have no money, huh.

GUMB: In this country?

KREEDIAN: Yeah. It wasn't like that before. We were, we were educated, but from Missionary Association. At that time that was the American way of life. That's how we know, if you are poor, what you call it, you had food and a place to live. Of course, I never did, but that was the feeling that we had before, like in that.

GUMB: What do you think would have happened if you had stayed in the old

world, if you hadn't come here?

KREEDIAN: I don't know. I would have been dead. ( voice off mike ) My nephews are in Cairo now, they are very happy. Of course, they'd like to come to America, but, financially, they have their own factory, they, you know, they started, you see, when Russia came, 1947, my brother wrote me a letter saying that this (?), he's the UN Ambassador, but he wants to buy machinery equipment for the, to bring industry in Egypt. So, help him. So I helped him. We went to Pennsylvania ( voice off mike ) and, uh . . . I helped him to buy machinery equipment. But I never thought about it. It was, I made a few, I think I made five thousand dollars commission, which was lots of money then.

GUMB: Do you ever regret coming here?

KREEDIAN: No, no.

GUMB: This is the end of tape one, side two, the end of the interview with Mr. Kreedian.