

Sephardi Voices UK

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Khalastchi
Forename:	Jacqueline
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	15/02/1929
Interviewee POB:	Baghdad, Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Clerk
Father's Occupation:	Chartered Accountant, Iraq Ministry of Health (1920-1948)
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

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Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the Sephardi Voices UK project. For the record, can you please tell me your name?

My name is Jacqueline Khalastchi.

And when were you born?

I was born in Baghdad on the 15th of February 1929.

Thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about your family background?

Yes. My father was the accountant of the Ministry of Health in Baghdad for twenty-eight and a half years, from 1920 to 1948. After the, with the independence of Israel of course, they put him on retirement, because they loved him, otherwise they would have sacked him from his post, but because he was loved by the, his principals and the ministers there, he was still made a pensioner, rather than sacked him. And, I went to school, Alliance Israélite in Baghdad, Laura Kadoorie. I made the primary school there, then I went back to study in a state school, because I wanted to get into university of medicine, to have, to become a pharmacist really. Because my granddad from my mother's side, he was one of the first chemists who went to Istanbul with his brother, and he opened his first pharmacy in Baghdad, before I was born definitely, until, you know, he died in 1945. And...

What was the name of this shop?

His shop was the Toeg pharmacy. He was Haron Toeg, his name was Haron Toeg. And his brother has another pharmacy opposite him on Rasheed Street, both of them, it was Ephraim Toeg. They went to Istanbul, they studied there, and they became chemists and they came back to open their own pharmacies in Baghdad. Yah. My mother – my grandmother from my, from her side, also went to Laura Kadoorie School, until they married at the age of fifteen, because, at the time they used to marry very young. And, my mother had me when she was sixteen, and my granny was only thirty-

two when I was born. So, we had a nice upbringing. We come from middle-class, let us say, families, and, well-educated, my brother, my sisters. I have two sisters and a brother, and, we are all here, immediate family, with my two daughters and a son. And, unfortunately my husband passed away two years ago.

[03:43]

And, I am now retired, housewife, but, I worked in Baghdad for twenty-two years from the date I finished my secondary school, because I couldn't get into college of pharmacy because, it was after the independence of Israel, and the minister in the Ministry of Health told my father, as well as the Dean of the faculty of medicine at the time, they told him that, 'We are not going to accept any Jew. Tell your daughter and all other Jews that we have an order, we are not going to accept any Jew in university.' But still, we wanted to try. We said we wouldn't lose any occasion, perhaps, you never know. We went to interview, and, of course they failed us. They failed us in the interviews. And, we were about eight boys, and I was the only one who applied for the, to go to, for pharmacy, because, I loved it, because my grandfather was a pharmacist, I was always with him, seeing how he used to prepare medicine. Of course, not like now, patent medicine, they used to all, you know, prepare it, and put it in bottles, or, you know, in containers, if they were ointments or something like that. Anyway, after I finished my school, I studied, I went for a course of English and Arabic writing, and then, I went to Pitman shorthand, I took a course. I became, first I became secretary, and then I held the correspondence for my firm, which was also a drug store. I came there as a secretary, and then, from the day I finished my studies till the day I left Baghdad on the 22nd of December 1971. I left the 21st in the evening, and I arrived here the 22nd evening in London. So, I, I worked there for twenty-two years in the same drug store. And, here, when I came, I joined my brother-in-law in his import-export cash and carry business in the East End, he had a big warehouse which was called Sami and Salim, on Commercial Street, until the day I had to retire for the sake of my father who became very old, I didn't want to leave him alone in the house. He used to live with me. And, I retired in 1995. So, I made another twenty-five years here, I worked for twenty-five years here. And, now of course, I am housewife after my retirement.

[07:33]

Can you tell us a little bit more about your grandparents?

Yes. My grandfather, I said, he was a chemist. Unfortunately my grandfather from my father's side, he died before I was born. So, I had my granny from my father's side. She lived at the age of ninety-six. She went on *aliyah* in 1951 with my uncle and my aunties, and she died in Israel at the age of ninety-six. I had five aunties and an uncle. One of them emigrated to Indonesia; in 1927 she married an Iraqi boy who came to Baghdad to marry her and took her back to Jakarta, Java, in Java, and then, in Surabaya they lived. And, the other aunties, they married, some of them in Baghdad, and the others in Israel.

Did you live with any of the grandparents when you were born?

Yah, I lived with my grandmother from my father's side, but of course, we always used to go for the weekends to my grandparents from my mother's side, who used to have their, to build their first house in Karrada, a Muslim agricultural place where they bought their land from Muslims, and then, those Muslims have been their servants, you know, their watchmen, you know, they... Because, they lived among them. So, always weekends we pass it with my grandparents in Karrada.

And were there any other Jewish families in Karrada?

Oh yes, many Jewish families were there. It was named *sab qusur*, which means seven big houses, which all belonged to Jews at the time. And then of course, others followed them. It was an area where, many Jews lived there. And, we lived quite nicely with, with Muslims, with Christians, we were loved, we... We had nice childhood actually. Until the independence of Israel when it started, you know, bit by bit they became against us. We were discriminated in a way. And even, you know, because my manager loved me for, of course, for my work, which I was very sincere in, they tried to let him, you know, discharge me, when, after the Six-Day War, but, they tried hard but they couldn't succeed. I mean, because, they liked my job, I was very faithful to them, til I left Iraq. And, my manager was a Christian, Armenian, but the owner of the drug store

was the husband of the late Princess Rajia, who was the sister of the King Ghazi. He owned the drug store after, he bought it from Mr John Gunz, who was a Swiss owner, he bought the firm from him just before I joined the drug store.

[12:03]

Can you tell us a little bit more about the atmosphere of growing up in the Thirties in Baghdad?

Yes. In 1936 we had a very bad prime minister, who was a Nazi, and they tried to have, you know, some difficulties for the Jews as well. But it was a small era that finished, and everybody was happy, living again. Til the pogrom in 1941, also because, Iraqi soldiers, the Iraqi army, were defeated by the British soldiers. Of course the Government wanted to come back after they left for one month. They had to make the pogrom against the Jews, I mean, to make the people go against the Jews. But, also, it was a very, not... a short time, not very long time. We were again working, living nicely. We have many friends whom we still have, we have contact with them, some of them still in Baghdad, some of them scattered everywhere, Jews, Christians. I have a, two pharmacist colleagues, one is still in Baghdad, Muslim, and the other one is Baptist who emigrated to Sweden, because also they were massacred sort of by Saddam Hussein. And, we still have good contact with them, they come, they visit us. Unfortunately we cannot go back to Baghdad, we don't want to. And, at the moment only about, six, seven people only lived in Baghdad, live, still living.

Jews, Jewish people?

Jewish, yes, only. And... Because everybody emigrated, either in '51, which, we had the big *aliyah*, 125,000 people left Iraq. Among them were my uncle, my granny, and my three aunties, immediate family I mean.

[14:44]

Do you remember the pogrom in 1941? Where were you?

Of course. I was ten years nearly of age. We were still living in Karrada, but we had to move to Baghdad. My father's cousin had a house in Baghdad, and we thought it's better than staying with the Muslims in Karrada, we go to Baghdad where the many Jews, it was a Jewish area, near Shorjah. And, when we had the pogrom our house in Baghdad was hit, but we had to have a policeman, he was walking in the street, and we asked him if he can come and, you know, save us, protect us. So he accepted, and, when they hit our door he had a pistol and he started shooting in the air. So they were afraid, they scattered. Whereas our neighbours, Muslim neighbours, in Karrada, they protected our house. I mean, nice people, really nice people. But, that's what happened.

So where was your house in Baghdad?

In Baghdad, in Shorja. It was my father's cousin, he was a lawyer, Abraham Khazoom was a big lawyer in Baghdad at the time. He moved to another area which called Bataween, but he had his house empty in Shorja. So we thought we'll be among Jews, better than being among Muslims. But we didn't know it was the other way round, we were protected by the Muslims, with a policeman as well who was a Muslim.

But at the time, where did you live permanently? You lived in...?

No, we used to live in Karrada.

In Karrada.

On the river, on the Tigris riverbank, we had a house on the Tigris bank.

And can you tell me, who else lived in the house with you?

Yes.

Who else were they, your brothers?

Yes. My immediate family, my brother, my two sisters, my three aunties and my, my grandmother and my uncle, who was still young at the time. My father was the breadwinner for the whole family. And, until, you know, we emigrated in 1951, we all lived together. Yes. Only one aunty was then married in Baghdad, but, two of them emigrated with my uncle, they were still not married. They married in Israel later on.

And you said when you were born your mother was sixteen. So were you raised by your mother, your grandmother, or...?

Yes. My mother, my grandmother from my father's side, yes. But all our weekends we used to be with my grandmother, grandfather and my aunty who was the twin of my mother. My grandparents from my mother's side had only twin daughters, my mother was born first, and her sister, after three minutes she was born, her name was Margaritte Toeg, then married to Mr Heskell Al' Akri[ph], and she became Margaritte Al' Akri. She lived in Israel. She lived with us. She came to London before us. She came in June 1971, with her husband, then she emigrated to Israel after three months, and, she lived in Kiron [sic] in Israel. But, every six months she used to live with us here, and then six month in Israel. Because she had no children. So, her wish was always to die here in London, to be, you know, buried in London, and, she had her wish exactly. She came for six months, and just before leaving for Israel, one week, she became ill and she died here, and she is buried [sic] Edgwarebury Cemetery here, according to her wish. Because, she raised us with my mum for certain time, and, that was her wish. Because, we were like her children, considered.

[20:00]

What else do you remember of the house, were there any, did you have servants, were there people helping?

Oh yeah, we had nice upbringing. We had servants, we had cooks, we had, everything. Until we left Baghdad. I mean, we, we had to leave, we have to leave one evening, we locked our door. The second day we give the keys to our Christian friend, who took us to the airport with his car. And, we gave him the keys, because his sister was getting

married, and we told him, 'Go to our house, take whatever you like, before they will confiscate it.' The next day they will confiscate it. Once they know we boarded the plane, then they will come, the Government will confiscate everything. So, that was it.

[21:00]

Before we're going to speak about it, can you tell us a little bit, let's go back, about your schooling. What do you remember of your school?

Yes. Well it was a nice school. We had lovely friends, many, I have many colleagues, classmates, here actually. We are, we, sometimes we meet in Lauderdale Synagogue, or any other functions, we meet in weddings, in *bar mitzvahs*, in *bat mitzvahs*. Any other functions we meet here. We are about, ten of us, or even more, classmates. Yeah. One of them is Mrs Eileen Khalastchi, Mrs Dangoor, Mrs Zilcha, Elbertine, Mrs Elbertine Lev. Mrs... [pause] Many of them. I can't remember all the names at the moment. But we always meet here. And, we have nice gathering. Thank God, we are living OK.

And the school, til what age did it go, your school?

Yah. I left the school in, the Laura Kadoorie School, in 1945, or '46, when I finished my primary school. And then I went to the state school til the, til 1949, I finished the secondary school.

And were there any other Jewish children in the state school?

Yes, yes. I still have some friends, Jewish friends, we meet in Israel sometimes. Yah. But, I had a few of them, Muslims who came to London and they came to visit me as well, but they went back to Baghdad. I still have some friends who live in America, we went together to school. We, I went to visit them in Detroit actually, they went, they were Christians. And, nice, we had nice time. Of course, school days is the best in one's lifetime. After that, we started to work, and then, I married, and then have children, and grandchildren. And that's life.

[24:00]

What sort of social circles did your parents have, or...?

Yah. It was lovely. We had nice, nice social circles. We, we have many friends, Muslims, Christian friends, nice neighbourhood. We had lovely time in...

Do you know how your parents met?

Well it was a *shiduch* at the time, all marriages were done *shiduch*. But my grandparents, the Toeg family, they were cousins. My grandfather married his cousin, who was Dina Shashoua. And, it was a, you know, family affair. But my father and mother, they were married by a *shiduch*. Yah. I was married by a *shiduch* as well. Although I was already educated, I, I worked, I was, mind you, one of the eight people, eight girls, Jewish girls, who worked, one of them, I was. Because at the time, people used to just marry, and, went on *aliyah*, most of them. So, not too many Jewish girls worked at the time, in offices I mean.

Yes, it was rare for... Was it your choice, was it important for you, or why?

Yah, because, I, I wanted to work. Because I couldn't get into a pharmacy, so I worked. And, because my mother as well married at a younger age, she didn't want me to marry at a young age as well, me and my sisters and my brother. Because, she had hard time to be among three sisters-in-law and a brother-in-law as well as a mother-in-law, which is very hard, to be in one house, living in one house. Although it was a big house, but still, it was not the way she wanted to be, you know, to live. So, I, I didn't want to marry as well young.

What was the message, what did your mother tell you?

Yes, she, she always said, 'I don't want my children to marry young,' to have the same sort of life that she had. Of course she wasn't content to have children and living in the

same house with her in-laws. Although they tried to be very nice to her, they raised us nicely with her, but still, it's not independently living on her own with her husband and children. But we were all contented, you know.

So your parents supported you that you wanted to work?

Sure. Yes. And I used to give all my wages to my father, until the day I married. And, I... Because, he was, you know, supporting me living with him. And that's the way we always used to live with our parents til the day we marry. We never in Iraq left our parents to live on our own, never, ever, men or women, I mean, we always lived with our parents.

[28:03]

Can you tell us a little bit more about your father? You said he worked for the Ministry of Health. Can you tell us a bit about his job?

Yes. He was running the accounts for the Ministry of Health all the time. And he knew many doctors and pharmacists, because, he was dealing with the accounts section in the Ministry of Health where they had to send doctors and pharmacists abroad. He used to deal with them, you know. And he used to know most of them. And the first eight Jewish men who were sent abroad to become doctors and pharmacists, he used to make their, you know, make their papers ready to send them abroad to study medicine and pharmacy. And he knew most of the doctors and most of the pharmacists in Iraq through his job of course.

So he was a Civil Servant?

Yes, he was a civil servant for twenty-eight and a half years, til the independence of Israel in 1948. He joined in 1920 and he left in 1948.

So was he very aware, did he speak about politics, was he very aware of the political developments?

Yeah, sure, but, we never, all Jews never tried to be in, direct in politics, because we were always frightened what might happen, you know. Some of the Jews were in prison in 1948 after the independence of Israel, and even they were hanged. And one of them was a far relative of my grandmother, the Shashua family and the Toeg family. He was hanged because of his political, you know, interference or whatever.

[30:15]

When was that, can you tell us a little bit about it?

In 1948 he was hanged, yah. After the, Ades, they took Ades as well, they hanged, yes. And, some of Iraqi Jews were hanged as well. But, the majority, there were nine Jews hanged in 1969, January, 21st of, I think, 21st of January 1969 they were hanged, because of, as well, of Saddam Hussein, he was a tyrant, he wanted also to be against the Jews. And, we had that time, from the day he came to the chair until we left Iraq in 1971.

So the first, you said it was a distant relative, the first, was it a public hanging, that was done?

Yes, it was public hanging, yes. but, the nine Jews were hanged in, as we heard, they were hanged in the prison, and then they brought them to the big Tahrir, they call it the Tahrir Square, they hanged them there. It was terrible. We saw it on the television, and we were crying like mad, because, mostly they were young and they were innocent. They were, one of them as it happened is the uncle of my daughter-in-law, he was hanged in Baghdad. Yes, they are, they were all, they were all picked up from Basra, people, Basra, people from Basra. And, they were innocent, we know they were innocent, I mean, but, they brought them you know. Just a fake court case, and then they hanged them.

What were they accused of?

Of course, being spies for Israel. They said they were sent to Israel to learn how to deal with ammunitions and, to, to make a plot in Iraq. But it was all fake, everybody knows that. Because Jews never went in politics, they were always frightened to go against Government. But, it was for the sake of, you know, being Jews, they were hanged. They were imprisoned, they were... And my father and my husband went to prison for fifteen days as well, for no fault of their own, just because, when the Government saw that 1,500 Jews left Iraq illegal, within two years in 1971 and 19... 1970 and then 1971, they tried to give passports for old people over sixty, and my father was one of them, my aunty, her husband, and my sister-in-law and brother-in-law. So, when we got our passports, my husband and my father went to take them, the officer in the passport office wanted some tips from them, but because my father always was a civil servant he thought, to give a big sum, it might be considered as a bribe. So, he told my husband, 'You give five, I will give three dinars, so, you know, it won't considered as a bribe.' Apparently that officer was charging each Jewish person who got their passport about thirty to fifty dinars from each one of them. So, when they wanted, the other, you know, policemen in the passport office, wanted to share with him his intakes, he said, 'What did I take? Only three dinars from Jousif Khazoom, and five dinars from Haron Khalastchi. So, they, they took them in prison straight away, and through the partner of my husband, he was a Muslim, he put a bail for my husband and my father for each one 400 dinars, to get them out of prison. And when we left Iraq my husband gave his partner all whatever he had in the shop and plus the 800 dinars as well in cash just in case after we leave they will come and take him in prison. So he can pay the bill that he put for us. And, thank God, we left Iraq in good time.

[36:27]

How did your father feel after twenty-eight years as a civil servant?

It was, it was terrible. He stayed without... He stayed at home of course, for a few years, until in 1951 he, my chairman, the owner of the business, as I said, who was the brother-in-law of King Ghazi of Iraq, he had a petrol station. And he wanted him to go and be the accountant in that petrol station, to take the intake every day and bring it to him. So, he had a small job in 1951 for a few hours. And, then, he went to another

Jewish firm, he worked there til, til about, a few years before we left Iraq. It was called BTSS which belonged to the Soffer family. And, we met the owner here in London when we came here. And, also, he held the accounts, the cashier in that shop, they had a cash and carry shop, and he as the cashier over there.

But was he bitter about his treatment? I mean after such a long service.

Of course, of course it was terrible for him. Although they loved him. He knew they loved him, but, they had to go according to the Government, you know, orders, that they sack all the Jews from the governmental institutes. So, he wasn't the only one. My uncle as well was sacked, he wasn't on retirement.

What was his job?

He was in the, working in the railways, Iraqi railways, as a, in the... [pause] As a clerical job, he, he held there. And before that, my uncle joined an English firm, and, because he was good in English, he finished Shamash School in Baghdad, he was very good in English. So he held a nice job in the Iraqi Airways – sorry, Iraqi Railways, not Iraqi Airways.

And he was sacked? He, he lost his job?

He lost his job as well in 1948. He was sacked from his job actually with others. Most of the civil servants, Jewish civil servants were all sacked. But, only a few of them were on retirement, and my father was one of them.

But you said that also for you, when you finished school, you were not allowed to study. So how did that make you feel? You wanted to become a pharmacist.

Yes. It was terrible. Because, it's not for... I went for the faculty of pharmacy, but in the meantime I, I said, if I won't get into pharmacy, I was very good in English as well, because in Alliance Israélite we used to speak English in the primary school. So, I went

to become an English teacher as well, perhaps, if not in pharmacy they will take me, they will take me in as an English teacher. But, in the faculty of pharmacy they failed me in the interview, but, as we have some, they take, you know, X-rays, and as a healthy woman, I was a healthy girl, they couldn't fail me. But I failed in the interview – in the other; they couldn't fail me in the English, because I, I could answer any English question they made for me. They failed me in the, as a health problem, you know. So, in one week [laughs], the same body succeeded in one way and failed in the other, just, because we knew, they told my father, the dean of faculty of pharmacy told him, 'Mr Khazoom, we have an order from the Government, we are not going to accept any Jewish person for higher studies.' And that was it. Not only higher studies but not in, even in schools, primary or secondary schools, they didn't accept any other Jew. So it was hard time since then. And then came the Six-Day War, and that was really when everybody was having a very bad time, all the Jews. Because, even friends, some of them became against us, Christian or Muslims, they became against us. Neighbours, they didn't want to speak to us, they say, 'Please, keep away from us.' So it was really, very bad time. We had hard times since the Six-Day War, until we left. That was the worst time we had.

This is now, we are now in the Sixties. This was 19...

'67. From the '67, Six-Day War, until we left in '71.

[43:29]

Before going to speak about that, maybe, tell us a little bit how, about your husband and how you met.

We met through a *shiduch*. And, because I had my classmate as well, Saida Khalastchi, when I heard he is a Khalastchi as well I said, because I loved Saida so much, and Eileen afterwards, she married after me, she became Mrs Khalastchi, Eileen Dangoor, she became Khalastchi after I was married. But, because of Saida I said, I loved Saida and, if he is a Khalastchi, I will accept to marry him. I saw him only for quarter an hour, we spoke to each other, and then, because our families, you know, they know each other,

of the same standard more or less, so, they accepted, you know, him as a future husband. And we were engaged after two days, and we married after two and a half months. We married on the 28th of March 1954, and, until we came here, until he died unfortunately on the 16th of February 19... sorry, 2008.

So was there pressure on you to marry at some point? Because by then you were working for quite a number of years.

Yes. For me, as educated girl at the time, I could have my own, what I say, my own choice. But, being very conservative family, and we were not allowed to go with boys, and whatever our parents chose for us, we had to say yes. And thank God, we all married nice, nice people through *shiduch* as well. Except my brother, he married a second cousin, whom he knew.

[46:07]

So before you were married, what was your social life, did you go to some clubs, or...?

Oh yes. We used to have Jewish clubs as well, and non-Jewish. We used to go for shows, for, to swimming, to, everything you know. We had nice, a lovely time.

Tell us a little bit more about it. What sort of shows? What did you, do you remember anything?

We had theatres, we had, you know, we used to go to cabarets, to many social gathering. And, and that lasted, as I said, it was worse after the Six-Day War in 1967. That, everything stopped at that time.

Yes, but when you were working, probably a lot of your friends were already married.

Yes, of course. Yes. Married, but most of them, they emigrated in 1951, except a few whom I said, you know, married with me or after me and we came to England, some of them are still here, we gather sometimes, we see them.

What was your family's attitude towards Israel?

Of course, inside, we are all Jews, we are all pro-Israel, but, because being in Iraq we couldn't, you know, our emotion, we couldn't, we had to keep it inside. But, of course, on the Six-Day War when I was still working with Muslims, Christians, the first day until lunchtime the Government on the radio announced that they have already about forty-something planes, Israeli planes, they had already...

Shot down.

...shot down. And, it was terrible. So when I came, I went to the office, of course, the next day, they asked me, 'How do you feel as a Jew?' I couldn't say, 'I am with Israel,' of course, but, I said, of course, Iraqi soldiers are brave, they shot down so many planes, and they succeeded, where in reality, we knew after three days that it was the other way round. And when the Iraqi army were defeated, they came back, that's when they started to be against the Jews, severely, I mean, against us. Because, the Muslim always have pride, they must always be succeeding, not defeated. So it was a bad experience for them to be defeated by Israel, which is a small country owned by Jews. So, that's when we had bad time.

[50:04]

You said before, how many Jews were actually left after 1951 in Baghdad?

We lived, we used to be about 5,000, 6,000, I guess. And then slowly, slowly, people started emigrating, especially during the first three years of the revolution. After the revolution we had a nice president, Abd al-Karim Qasim, who, for the first time we, we felt that we are really Iraqi nationals. Because he said there is no difference between Muslim, Jew or Christian, they are all, the population are, should be treated alike. And then he accepted people in, in schools, in university, people started going, Jews went to many universities in Baghdad. And, many of them came to London, had lovely jobs here.

When was that?

In 1958 we had the revolution. And he was shot also by Saddam in 1963. The first three years it was fantastic, every, we felt like really we are living for the first time as a real Iraqi, you know, people. So, at that time, people who could afford to emigrate, they emigrated to America, to England, to Israel, wherever. My second cousin emigrated to Australia. To San Francisco, to, many other places, many other countries. But, after he was shot in 1963, then, the Government changed, and they were all against the Jews, started to be against the Jews. There came the commies, then the Ba'athists, which, among them is Saddam Hussein. But he was the one who killed Abd al-Karim Qasim. Since 1963, although he came to the chair later on, but, he was always behind the presidents. And he was such a tyrant that, he killed his own uncle, his own sons-in-law. And, for him, nothing would stop him to eliminate any, anyone who is against him.

[53:19]

Do you remember, was there any discussion about emigration in your family in the early Fifties, were they thinking of going on aliyah or was that...?

Yes, my grandmother, my uncle, my three aunties emigrated. But... Because, we were all working, I mean, we didn't think we have to leave. I was working, my brother was working, and, my father. So, we stayed behind. And then, my husband of course. We were living comfortably then, until, as I said, in 1967 with the Six-Day War then, everything changed.

What was your husband's business?

My husband first, he was working for his family, the Khalastchi family, then he opened his own, the spare parts shop for cars. And, he had to have a Muslim partner so he can get import licence through him. Until the day we left, he had to leave his shop to his partner. And on top of that, as I said, we had to give him 800 dinars in cash as well, on

top of the whole business. And that partner never ever contacted us, til 2007, we had a telephone call from him from Baghdad, I think he wanted to come to London through our, you know, we might have sponsored him or whatever. But because he didn't have any contact with us since we left, my husband was very angry on him, he put down the telephone on him. And that was it. We never heard of him. Because it was really bad.

Your husband felt he could have, he could have helped more, he could have done something?

Of course, we could have brought some money here, we could have opened our own shop. But, because we came with nothing, we had to leave everything behind and come with nothing, and that's why we joined my brother-in-law in his business. Because he sponsored us here, he sent us visas to come to London, and he sponsored us here, we are all, the whole family worked for him, my father, my husband, myself, my daughter, my son-in-law, my brother, everybody. So, we all ended up working in one way or other with him in the business.

Mrs Khalastchi, we need to change tapes please, we need to take a break

Yes.

[56:47]

[56:50]

This is tape two. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Khalastchi.

Perhaps we can go back to the Fifties a little bit, when you got married. Can you tell us a little bit about the wedding?

Yes. I spoke about myself, the *shiduch* that I had, and I was married. I had very big party, a Henna party, til five o'clock in the morning. Our wedding was a small, I mean,

we didn't have too many people at the time to be invited to the synagogue, only in the synagogue. Why? Because the same time, the same day we had flooding in Baghdad, and all the main roads were flooded. So, we couldn't have a party. We ended up having a dinner at home with some very, you know, close relatives. And, then, my other sister, the young sister married after the Six-Day War, in 1967 she married. First, she got engaged on the 1st of May 1967, before the war, and luckily we had a very big engagement party for about 250 people. We had a big garden, we had dinner there. But, for her wedding, it was like a fairy-tale wedding. We could only have the Chief Rabbi, who was husband of my mother's first cousin, also a Toeg girl. He stipulated that only ten men could be invited, among them himself, his secretary, the bridegroom, his uncle, his brother, and my father, my brother, only. So... Because at the time, any gathering in a Jewish home used to be like, they thought we are making a meeting for Israel. So, the Chief Rabbi stipulated that only a few have to come. But, on the other hand, we had my mother's second cousin, my cousin. So, we had to bring them and hide them in another room until, you know, the *chuppah*, the *chuppah* was in our house, and my sister had to put on her wedding dress, everything, and come from her room upstairs, come downstairs to have the *chuppah* in, in the room, in the reception room. And, at that time we had to open the door, and some other people who were invited, like my mother's cousins, and, the Chief Rabbi was really angry, he said, 'But I stipulated only ten men should be here, and only the women of the house.' But how could you? I mean, it's a wedding after all. We couldn't really limit it to ten people. So, I mean, that's another experience.

[1:00:37]

Then, my other sister, who is younger than me, she, how she came to London. By a miracle, her husband was shot in his mouth by the partner's brother, who were Muslims, and he survived it by a miracle. Because he had a brother here in London studying law, he could come to London. They emigrated in 1960 with, he had a daughter of five, a son of two and a half, and a baby of four months. They had to come to London. And that's how we ended up in London, we all emigrated, immediate family, to London, through my brother-in-law, who opened a big cash and carry warehouse in Commercial Street in London, named Sammy and Salim, it's a big warehouse, where all the family at the end worked for him, including myself.

[1:01:58]

Can you tell me a bit more about the circumstances, why did the partner shoot him and what happened?

Yes Well, my brother-in-law had a shop for crockery, and his partner's brother, he envied them always. So, my brother-in-law opened another shop opposite their shop for the other brother of his partner. But, people used to come, customers used to come to my brother's shop rather than to the shop of his partner's brother. So, he envied them. One day he came with a pistol and my brother-in-law thought he is joking, you know, as a fake pistol, but as it happened it was a real one, and he shot him in the mouth. By a miracle it came into his, one of the false teeth, and it stayed there, but he had so many... You know, went into his mouth, his tongue, he was, terrible. And, we didn't believe he will survive it really, but thank God, thank God, after operations he could survive it. And that's how we ended up in London.

Was there a trial after this? What happened?

Well, he didn't want to, as circumstances didn't permit him to have a court case against his partner's brother. Because, this brother shot my brother-in-law, shot his partner, the brother, and shot himself as well. But both of them, they were shot in the stomach. So they survived it by other operations. So, my brother-in-law couldn't have a court case against him. But thank God, I mean, it's all from God we all ended up here in London.

But that made him leave, that's what...?

That's what made him leave Iraq in 1960, yes, with the young children, as I said, young family. He had to come here. And at the time he didn't tell us that he is leaving for good. He said they are going only to Beirut. They had a few months in Beirut but they, they emigrated to London. So he didn't want my sister to know that she is leaving for good, she is leaving the family for good. So... But...

So, were they in a position to bring out some of the, some assets?

Yes. In 1960, it was after the revolution of Abd al-Karim Qasim, as I said, people could take their assets outside. They had even to move some of their furnitures, like my mother's cousin who emigrated to Australia, she had furniture with her to Australia. She could move most of her belongings. I mean, they, they were, time, at that time Abd al-Karim Qasim's regime was really good towards everybody. They could take assets and come and open their shop here. It was a smaller shop, then they, of course, by the time, they enlarged their business to become one of the big import-export business in the East End of London.

[1:06:00]

Just about a different subject. You mentioned you were married in a synagogue. Which synagogue did you go to as a child, do you remember, did you go often to synagogue?

I can't... I remember the synagogue but I can't remember the name of the synagogue. Of course we all used to go every Shabbat to synagogue. Since we were small kids my dad used to take us Shabbat to synagogues. He made us learn the Shema, every night we had to recite the Shema before we go to bed. Because my dad was a very religious man, and, luckily my husband comes from religious people as well, that we kept it in the family. And, we all are *shomrim* [observant of the laws of the Sabbath], and, you know, our children, our grandchildren, they go to Jewish school, all of them. So, we make sure they have good Jewish upbringing.

[1:07:05]

Can you tell us a little bit about the Shabbat, the home, what it would be like?

Here, or there?

There.

There. Of course, every Shabbat we used to go to the main, after, you know, we were older, we were working, I was working, my youngest sister was working, also my brother. My brother worked eight years for the Danish Embassy in Baghdad, and that was why he had to leave the country through Kurdistan to Iran, because he was afraid one day they will come and take him, accuse him to be a Israeli spy. And, he had to emigrate later on to London.

When did he emigrate?

He emigrated to London in August 1971. And then my sister emigrated, she arrived here fifteen days after him. No. She arrived on the 1st of September. So, after, yes, after fifteen days, something like that, she arrived to London. Because also, she went through Kurdistan to Iran, she took my two daughters with her, one was thirteen, and the other one was sixteen when they left Baghdad. She was expecting her second child, and she has to go for a Caesarean section, but she was pregnant eight months when she left Baghdad. Because she was afraid they might be, you know, picked up any day, taken to prison. So, she had to leave Baghdad as well.

And why did you decide to let your daughters go with her?

Yes, because, at the time, my husband and my father, as I said, were in prison, so, we wanted to send at least my two daughters who were old enough to go with my sister, to leave the country. So, that's why we sent them with my sister. But, in 1971, was well organised through the Jewish Agency, they had a post in Kurdistan, and another one in Tehran. So it was well arranged that people will go to Kurdistan, and meet there. And then they take them by Jeep in the middle of the night without lights, the Jeep will travel without the lights, on mountains, and, you know, very dangerous roads to take them to the border of Iran, in Khana. And there, also, the Jewish Agency will pick them up, put them on buses to Tehran. And, that's why. But my son, Freddy, I couldn't send him with them, because he was young, still young. So, he stayed with us.

So it was a known route, I mean people knew what to do if they wanted to leave?

Yes, yes it was well organised, as I said, by the Jewish Agency. They had a post in Kurdistan and another one in Tehran. And, of course they had arranged it with the Iranian borders, of course, all through money. And as we heard, they had to pay 1,000 dinar for every person who leaves through the border, they had to pay for them 1,000 dinar.

But you didn't pay?

Yes, we paid for the man who had to arrange it, we had to pay 300 dinars for each person who left. And my husband hired a taxi with a Kurdish driver who knew the road to Kurdistan. They left Baghdad three o'clock in the morning, by night, so people, you know, our neighbours wouldn't know that they are leaving. And, they went the next, the next morning they arrived in Kurdistan. By night they took them to Tehran, the same night they took them to Tehran, by Jeeps.

And once it was clear that members of the family had left, did the remaining members of the family have to suffer some consequences?

We were always afraid we might be picked up, you know. But, the Government, when they found out that in 1970 about 750 people left Iraq, in 1971 another 750 left, about, you know, through Kurdistan, so the Government thought then, why we don't give the rest passports, they go officially. We can make good use of the foreign exchange, they will use our Iraqi Airways, they go out, some to Turkey, some they travel to, any other destinations worldwide. And, that's how we came. We boarded Iraqi Airways to come to London. I mean they made good use of passport fees, anything. So that's why they gave us passports, they started giving us passports, started in October, November 1971. And, our name came to apply on, after we applied, they accepted our application on the 8th of November, but we left Iraq on the 22nd of November.

[1:13:37]

And what could you take with you?

Oh, only a few, a few suitcases, only. We couldn't take anything except some clothes. We were not allowed to take more than 100 dinars with us, each one. And, our Christian friend took us to the airport by his car, and we gave him the keys to our house, because one of his sisters was getting married, we told him, 'Go and take whatever you like from our house, because tomorrow the Government will know that we left, they will come and confiscate our house.' So, that was the end of it. We still had contact with this friend, they live in Detroit, we went and visited them to Detroit, they come and visited us here. We have good links with many of our friends, Christians, Muslims.

But you said your husband's business, he had to just give to...

We have to give it to his partner and come out. And he didn't even have the decency to contact us. We sent him a card after we arrived to London, and he had our address, but he didn't contact us, til he wanted to come to London in 2007, he rang us, and my husband was really furious. I think, at the time he had a go on him and he put down the receiver on him. Because, he didn't treat us well.

[1:15:21]

Can you tell me a little bit more about the persecution you had to suffer from in the late Sixties?

Yes. My... As it happens, we knew the family, Elias family in Baghdad, through my brother-in-law, they come, both families, from Baqouba, the Sebti family, the Elias family, and my sister is married to Yusef Sebti. And, we came to know them. And as it happens, later on Mr Reuben Naji Elias had a daughter who became my daughter-in-law later on, they left Iraq in 1990, just before the Gulf War. Because, he was the head of the Iraqi community in Baghdad for several years. They were not accepted as immigrants to London, but they went to Holland, they lived in Amsterdam. Because, my daughter-in-law, one of her uncles was hanged, and her aunty, they took them from their house with, in their car, with her husband, and nobody knows up till now what happened to them. So, we had really bad time.

But what happened to you, for example, the phones, what happened to the phones?

Oh yes. They were tapping the phones, and because my husband family lived in Diwaniyah at the time, we went one day as a picnic to Diwaniyah, and as it happened, it was Friday evening, we came back to Baghdad. My sister-in-law left eggs in the *tannur* [Heb: oven] for *Shabbat*, for her husband and her brother-in-law and sister-in-law, and, when we came back we have a phone call from them, they said, 'When did you arrive to Baghdad?' We said, 'We arrived to the Central railway station at five o'clock,' because there was a clock over there, we, as it happened we saw it was five o'clock in the evening. And, we told them that our friend Dr, the late Dr Naji Cohen, asked us to have some white ducks from Diwaniyah. And, that's... After we arrived home, say about an hour, and every Friday night we had the whole family, friends, for evening meal, three people from the intelligence service, they rang our door and they said, 'Tell us what code you had for spying?' thinking that, you said five o'clock you arrived to the Central railway station, to Baghdad; you wanted white ducks; and what is the eggs in the *tannur*. So, we told them that, you know, our friend doctor wanted white ducks; we couldn't buy them in Baghdad. They could send them from Diwaniyah. And, brown eggs in the *tannur*, as it happened we had them for Friday night, and my aunty went and brought some eggs and showed it to them, and she told them, 'Look, this is the *tannur* eggs. It will come brown.' So, they were convinced that nothing wrong, we were not spying, it wasn't a code between us. So, we luckily escaped imprisonment.

Which year was that, when was that?

[pause] I can't really remember which year was it.

After '67?

Yah, of course after '67, yes. Long way after it, yes. [pause] After perhaps two years.

What happened to the telephones later?

Then they, they cut the whole telephones, we had no telephone connections anymore. Even we couldn't write to my sister to London, because any, any movement from any Jew in Baghdad would be considered spying for Israel. So we were really frightened to do anything. I used to send letters through my boss to London to my sister, going through, you know, either Basel, where, our main firm was in Switzerland, or through America. And when we had any delegate coming from the firms, I used to give them, you know, some other letters, and they could take it for my sister. That's the only way we could get in touch with them. And of course, we couldn't get in touch with our family in Israel who emigrated in 1951, we couldn't see them, we couldn't have any connection with them. So. It was terrible.

[1:21:43]

How did the Jewish leadership deal with this very difficult situation?

Our late rabbi, Rabbi Sasson Khedouri, who was married to my mother's first cousin from the Toeg family, he was a very learned man, he knew how to speak with the Government, how to approach them, and they used to like him at the time. So, that's why, you know, he could run the community until he died. And, after that, people started leaving the country after he died. Although we had other people taking over, but not *Rabbinim*. He was the last rabbi to die in Iraq. And, my daughter-in-law's father, as I said, he was the one who took over the community properties, and, you know, things, with Mr David Nassim Khalastchi as well, who was working at the time there with him. And, they had to leave the country in 1990, as I said, just before the Gulf War. A few Iraqi families stayed there, but now we have only a few people, I don't know, six, seven people only living in Baghdad. One of them is a second cousin to my husband, the son of his second cousin actually. One is living in Baghdad, the other one is, taken five years ago by, by some of the police force, I don't know who, they took him with his car and he vanished, nobody knows about him up till now. Yeah. His name is Jacob Sharabani. Nobody knows about his whereabouts. We don't know what happened to him.

Why do you think the six remaining Jews, why do you think are they still there?

Some of them have properties, some of them have money, they don't want to leave and come, you know, how they will live out of nothing? And mostly they are old. Only a few of them are in their fifties now. So, that's why. They are dying, one after the other, there. So, that's the end of the big community for 2,500 years, we had the Babylonian, and, it's going to finish now.

[1:25:14]

Do you have any desire to go back to Baghdad?

Never, ever we think to go back. We have bad experience which we cannot forget. Each and everybody who came out of Baghdad had very bad memory, coming with a bad memory. Mostly they were in prison or confiscated, their money confiscated, or whatever. You name it, they had it. And those who were hanged as well, all their family left Iraq. So nobody likes to go back. Perhaps, still there is some people who might like to go and see, you know, after all it's our, our capital, our, where we have been born, brought up with our children. They like to go sometimes. If the Government will change, we don't know what might happen. At the moment they are massacred, Muslims are massacring Muslims, and, you know, it's a very bad situation at the moment. Thank God we left, thank God we left in good time. Otherwise, I don't know how we could have been living up till now there. They have suicide bombers, they have, you know, very bad time.

[1:26:42]

What was the experience of your children growing up in Baghdad? We didn't discuss that, when you had children in the, in the Fifties and Sixties.

Yes. No, they, they were... We were living all right, as a child, their childhood was OK. My son was in a Jewish school, but my daughters, I sent them to a convent school in Baghdad, because, it was not a mixed school, it was just for girls. My husband and

my father are very conservative people, they didn't want their daughters to go to a mixed school. Whereas my son only had one year in school, in the kindergarten actually. He left only after one year and three months in kindergarten, we left and came to London. So. My daughters had a good education, Arabic, French and English. But my son, when he came here he couldn't speak the language, so when we put him in Hill House School, we had a family, Iraqi family, the Basrawi family, who had their son in Hill House School, who could speak Arabic with my son until my son, after six months he got the language, he could speak nicely. So, that's why we had to put him in Hill House School. And why we got our house here, because he had to go, he was only nine years when we moved to this house, because it's on the main road, we have a bus stop here which will take him to another bus stop in Burnt Oak, he will board the bus 52 to Willesden, where Hill House School was situated. So, that's why we ended up in buying this house.

[1:28:58]

Do you remember the day when you were leaving Baghdad? What did you feel?

Of course it was really bad to leave everything behind and come empty-handed, but it was also a relief to leave Baghdad, because we had bad experience there, and we didn't know our future, what might, how we will end up there. So it was bad and good, I mean. It wasn't easy to come here empty-handed and start from zero, but thank God, through our brother-in-law, the late Mr Salim Zeloof, we could slowly build up our house, and thank God we are, we could survive it.

Because when you left, your daughters, where were your daughters at the time?

Yeah, they came... They left Iraq, as I said, mid-August. They arrived through Iran, my brother-in-law sent them visas to Iran, and he sent us visas to Baghdad as well. He sponsored us in London. So they came and they stayed with my sister in Golders Green where they lived. They stayed with my young sister who I said was pregnant eight months. They left with her, and then, they lived with her as well for certain time until we came here. And, we had to stay with my brother-in-law for one month until we

could rent a house for ourselves in Hendon Central. And, in 1973 we bought our house, because, as I said, for the sake of my son Freddy to go to Hill House School.

And do you remember your first impressions of England?

Of course, when I came, I told my sister, coming from Heathrow Airport to Golders Green, I told her, 'How do you know your house?' Because I could see all the houses are built the same style. Whereas in Baghdad every house is differently built. She told me, she laughed and told me, 'Well, when you will live here, in London, you will know where you live as well.' So that was my first impression. And to see the family, to see my daughters after four months, it was such a, you know, a relief, and to see my sister after ten years, eleven years, to see them, it was such a big relief, yah. Thank God.

[1:32:05]

Did you consider at the time moving to Israel, or...?

Yah. All my husband's immediate family were in Israel. But my immediate family came here, we came with my father, my brother, my sisters, my children, we were all here. We considered to go to Israel.

[electronic chime]

Shall we take a break?

Yah, can I?

Yah, let's take a little break.

[pause in recording]

[1:32:42]

We came... We arrived here on the 22nd of December 1971, and we sent my two daughters to JFS through our friend Mr Zief. They were the first Iraqi students to go into JFS though, the headmaster was Dr Conway. So, we could put them in school until the summer break. At the time, in 1972, July '72, of course my husband's immediate family lived in Israel, in Netanya, Dora, Netanya; he wanted to go and see them. So we intended to visit Israel July 1972, after the summer holidays in school. We went there, and, we saw that we couldn't have the same support in Israel from our family as we had them here. So that's why we didn't settle in Israel. Whereas my young sister emigrated to Israel from London after three months, because her husband's family all were in Israel. She lived there four years. And my eldest daughter, Bushra, she went to Israel with us but she didn't want to come back. As it happened, she finished A Levels here, and she left for Israel. She wanted to stay over there. And she stayed, she studied in university for a year, preparatory year, for Hebrew, and she worked later on in a bank. She took an accountancy course, and she worked in Israel for the agricultural bank in Tel Aviv for two and a half years, until she married her second cousin, also a Khalastchi boy, and, they wanted to come back after a year, not even a year from their wedding, because, he was always called for *Miluim* [Israeli Army Reserves], and he didn't like the idea. So he wanted, my son-in-law wanted to come to London. Whereas my daughter still loves Israel. She is sorry to leave Israel. But, you know, it's her fate. Then my other daughter also married an Iraqi boy, Salman Hikmet, he became a chemist here. And, she ended up having a pharmacy in Finchley Road, Gateway Chemist. My son finished LSE university as a chartered accountant, and then he had another degree in insolvency. He works for Harris Lipman as a partner now. And, they are all right. They all live around me. I am happy, I have nice grandchildren. The eldest is thirty years of age, Rudi Khalastchi; the second, Raymond Khalastchi, is working in Liverpool at the moment; the third one finished, his graduation was in Cambridge, he is working for Goldman Sachs at the moment; and the fourth one is still in university, in LSE, for computer and maths. From Freddy, I have two daughters and a son, and, they are young, the eldest is ten, Natalie, then Daniella, eight, and Aron is six and a half years of age. They all go to Rosh Pinah School in Edgware, a Jewish school.

[1:37:30]

What sort of identity did you want to give to your children?

Identity? Well, of course, they still keep in, you know, as Iraqi Jews. We still speak Arabic among us, except the grandchildren now, we speak to them sometimes Arabic, they, they reply in English. So, we carry on in English, definitely. Because, they all grow up here.

Where do you consider your home?

Of course, home is sweet home, but, we, we had half way of, we lived in Baghdad, but of course our home now is in England. Because, to have bad experience from your own country, you wouldn't be able to think going back home. So our home is here in England, in London. And after six years we had the British passports, so we are British from, long time ago.

And how would you consider yourself today, in terms of your own identity?

I am British now, I am British of course.

One moment.

[pause in recording]

[1:39:04]

Just to repeat the question. And how, what do you consider your identity today?

I am a British by naturalisation, so are my, all my children, and of course my grandchildren all were born in London, England, so they are British by, by birth. So of course, we are all considered as British, because we don't want to have any connection with our identity as Iraqis. Of course we are Iraqis still, but we don't like to consider we are Iraqis any more. Because, it's, it's really hard, we had hard time, so we consider ourselves as British.

And how important is religion to you?

Well, I come from a very religious background, my dad and also my husband's family, they are very religious. We all keep Shabbat, we keep kosher homes, and we belong to synagogues. We belong to the David Ishag Synagogue in Preston Road, Kenton, through our friend, also she was Iraqi. She introduced us to them, and we found out that we have a very lovely community in that synagogue, a mix of Sephardim and Ashkenazi, and from all over the countries. We have some from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia. Our late Rabbi Kamhi was from Tunisia, also our *Chazan* from Tunisia, Mr Zvi Amroussi. Our latest Rabbi is Dr Irving Jacobs, he was Principal of Jews College in London. We are a very happy community, very friendly, and, we love our Rabbi dearly, and all the community.

[1:41:45]

So when you came, did you find it was easy to settle down because you had family already here?

Oh sure, yes. Because, our main thing was to work and to survive after that. And through our late brother-in-law Salim Zeloof, and his brother, they had a big shop as I said, we could all work for him, for them I should say. And, we could have, we could buy our houses, we could survive later, you know, we are comfortably living here, thank God, through them.

And how did your husband manage, I mean how did he feel about starting in this business?

Yah. My husband wanted to start business here, his own business here. He was the first one who brought the puncture machine to Baghdad. He imported it from London at the time. But later on they manufactured it in Baghdad, they had to dismantle it and manufacture it in Baghdad. But when we came here, he wanted to open his own shop in the same business, like, you know, to start as well in spare parts, but, through lack

of, through financial difficulties, we couldn't have our own shop, so we had to work. And thank God, through our brother-in-law, we cannot forget his kindness, his, his generosity in every respect. We could, you know, have our own houses, have even perhaps better living than what we had in Baghdad, thank God.

And you continued to work here?

Yah. I worked here twenty-five years, and my husband twenty-six years. He retired one year after me. I had to retire, and I really regretted it, because my father was old enough, to be on his own, I didn't want to leave him on his own. That's why I retired in 1995 after twenty-five years' working in London. And, since then I am a housewife. Now I, last year I joined...

U3A.

U3A. U3A for French. I want to revive my French knowledge, because, I didn't speak the language for, since 1946. But, because we have, in our synagogue it's a mixture of big community from Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, they all speak French, I speak with them but not, you know, I still cannot really freely talk in French, so that's why I joined there. And I joined for, as well for Hebrew, I, I learnt in, Or Sameach, a course in Hebrew. And we joined for Hebrew, not really beginners as well, but, they cancelled the class because we were only few. They cancelled it. But they promised, if, for next year, academic year, if they have enough students in Hebrew, they will open another class for Hebrew, which we hope we'll do.

[1:45:42]

What impact do you think that the experiences you had in Baghdad, in Iraq, have on your life?

What about?

What impact, what, how did it influence you, these things?

Well, it's our... First of all, we are all born in Baghdad, we were brought up in Baghdad, we studied in Baghdad, we worked in Baghdad. And, of course, we cannot forget that era. It was sometimes good, sometimes bad. As a whole, it was all right for us. I mean, thank God we could survive it and come here. That's my impression you know.

Do you think about Baghdad a lot, do you think about...?

We think about Baghdad, of course. You cannot forget your childhood first of all; then, I was married there, I had my children, while I was still working I had three children. We had servants at home, we had cooks. You know, you cannot forget the good times as well. I was well loved by my superior in the office, they took good care of me. They even, you know, people, after the war they came to them and they told them, 'You better sack this Jewish girl.' And, they stood by me and they said, 'We won't sack her.' But they told them, 'You might even lose your import licence for pharmaceutical products.' They said, 'We don't care. We had her as a girl, she married here, she had her own children here. And we have her for twenty-two years. We don't want to, you know, sack her for no fault of her, just because she is a Jew.' So, that's how I stayed, up till the last night I stayed in my job there, in Baghdad, and I left on the 22nd of November and came here the same night, I came to London the same night. I mean, I left one day before I arrived to London, from one job to another. After I came here, my brother-in-law, after, two days after Christmas he asked me to go and join him with my brother, my husband, to join him in the office. And, that's how I started working, at the beginning of January 1972 I joined my brother-in-law as accounts clerk. Because he gave me the stock ledger. He wanted it to be kept with a part of the family. So it's very important you know.

[1:49:17]

It must have been very rare also when you were still in Baghdad to have children and continue to work.

Yes, but, I was living with my parents at the time, and, I had some help, because, my aunty who is a twin of my sister, she used to live with us as well, she took good care of my children as well. And, she emigrated... She came to London from Baghdad, she stayed three months, then they emigrated to Israel. She lived in Kiron [sic], part of Tel Aviv. And, she, her own wish was, because she didn't have any children, she always wished to stay and die here in London, and be buried here. And like, God gave her her wish. She came here, every six months she used to live in Israel, six months here. She always lived with me. And, she was going back to Israel after six months in 1991; she became a bit, she didn't feel well. The doctor saw her, and, she died here. And God gave her her wish. We buried her in Edgwarebury Cemetery here in London. Because she said, she had no children, we are her children, she wanted us to always go and visit her, and God gave her her wish.

What happened to your mother?

My mother had heart attack at the age of fifty-one. She had it in Baghdad. She had heart trouble for fourteen years. And, she had a sudden death, heart attack, in Baghdad.

So is she buried in the cemetery in Baghdad?

Yah, in Baghdad cemetery, unfortunately, the only thing, we have her there, with all her parents, you know. That's what happened.

[1:51:53]

Is there anything I didn't ask you would like to add, which we haven't discussed?

I don't know. I just, I don't know if you... I spoke, I think, about most of the things, events, what happened.

Is there any message you have for somebody who might watch this, based on your experiences?

Well, we all had bad, bad times and good times back home. But, we mostly want to forget the bad times we had. Thank God we are here. And, thanks to the British Government who accepted us here, thanks to everybody who helped us to come here. And thanks to you as well for interviewing. I hope I could speak as much as I could about my experience back home and here. And thank you for having me.

Mrs Khalastchi, thank you very much for this interview.

Thank you.

[1:53:15]

[pause on recording]

[1:59:45]

Yes, this one, it has my grandfather Haron Toeg, the pharmacist, my granny Dina Shashoua, with my mother on the right, Suzanne, and her twin sister Margaritte, my aunty. It was taken 1925, when my mother was nearly fifteen, with her sister.

So this was before she got married?

Yes, just before she got married. I think...

[2:00:24]

Can you please describe this photograph?

This photograph was taken, I was about a year I think, in Baghdad.

[2:00:39]

Thank you. Can you please describe this photograph?

This was taken in my school uniform in Laura Kadoorie Alliance Israélite, around 1945, 1946 I guess.

[2:01:03]

Thank you. Can you please describe this photograph?

Yes. It's my dad, my mum, and my brother Jimmy. On the top on the right it's myself, then my sister Doris, who is younger than me, two and a half years, and then my sister Souad, she was born in 1939, just before Hitler war, just two days before the war, Hitler. Yes, 1939.

And when was this photograph taken?

It was taken in Baghdad sometime before my, well before my engagement, definitely.

[2:01:48]

Thank you. Can you please describe this photograph?

This is our engagement picture taken on the 15th, I got engaged on the 14th of January 1954, and this was taken on the 15th of January, the next day after my engagement.

[2:02:08]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken on the 15th of March 1954, my *Henna* night.

Can you describe a little bit what happens on a Henna?

Oh, it was a lovely party. We had a Lebanese singer. It started about nine o'clock in the evening and lasted til five o'clock in the morning. It was a lovely party.

[2:02:43]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken in Kut, one of the picnics we had in Kut, one of the provinces of the southern, or, middle, middle section of Iraq called Kut, one province called Kut. I can't remember, my daughter, looks like her, my eldest daughter, about eight years she was at that time.

[2:03:16]

Thank you. Yes please.

Which one?

Can you describe this photo, here in the corner?

Yes. That's... It was taken when my two daughters were young, before I had Freddy. It has myself, my Aunty Margaritte, my mother in the middle, her cousin and, her two cousins, they were married together, Musli and David Toeg. And Bushra on the right side, and Brigitte on the left side, my two daughters.

[2:04:00]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture also was taken on one of our picnics to Salman Park, a locality near Baghdad, not very far. It has my father, myself, my husband, my two daughters, and my son with his back towards the picture.

[2:04:33]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture is taken in my office in Baghdad, just before we left Baghdad, in, early, perhaps it could have been 1970, '69, '70, the latest.

And what are you doing?

I was a secretary at the time, in Al Mahmud trading company, Sandoz pharmaceutical centre.

[2:05:08]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken in 1983, the Henna night of one of my nephews. It was taken in Milan, Italy. It has my husband, my father in the middle, my brother-in-law Salim Zeloof, then my sister Doris Zeloof; in the middle is my Aunty Margaritte; and I am on the far end as well with them.

[2:05:40]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken on the 14th of August 1983. It was the Henna – the wedding night of my second daughter, Brigitte Hikmet.

And who's in the picture?

It's myself and my late husband Haron.

[2:06:05]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken in, a birthday party for my youngest grandson Aron, Freddy's son. It has most of the family here with me, with my grandsons, my brother, sisters, all the family, and some friends as well.

Mrs Khalastchi, thank you very much again for this interview.

Thank you very much for having me. Thank you.

[2:06:46]

[End of Interview]