

Sephardi Voices UK

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Forename:	Denyse
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	03/07/1929
Interviewee POB:	Alexandria, Cairo
Interviewee Occupation:	Teacher, Dress Designer
Father's Occupation:	Import/Export
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

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Track 1

This is Sephardi Voices, interview number 11. My name is Dina Saadoun and this is Mademoiselle Dwek. I'm in London. Today is April 11th 2011. Can you tell us your name and where you were born?

Bonjour, je m'appelle Denise Dwek. Je suis née à Alexandrie en Egypte, en 1929, le 3 Juillet 1929.

Can you repeat that in English, please?

I was born in Egypt, in Alexandria, the 3 of July 1929.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by Sephardi Voices. Can you tell us a little bit about your background, about your grandparents, where they came from?

My both grandparents came from Syria, Aleppo. My – I never knew my grandparents, the side of my father, but I knew the grandparents the side of my mother. And we used to live in different towns, so I was not with them – I was with them occasionally. And my mother used to like to spend one month in winter at my grandmother house, so she used to – as I was the youngest of the family, she used to take me with her to Cairo. So I remember to go to Cairo and we used to go to visit the pyramids, and I have one picture with my mother at the side of the pyramids.

And what were your grandparents' names?

My grandmother name was Setti and her mother was Gracia. My grandfather name was Abraham, but I used to call him Chito, I don't know why. My grandmother, I used to call her Nonna.

And what memories do you have of spending time with your grandparents? What do you remember doing with your grandparents?

My grandmother was spoiling me a lot. She used to make me – she used to make embroidery with a *makook*, with a special thing, and she told me, “Look, I am going to make those for you so you’re – so you can remember me” [laughs]. My grandfather, I never saw him working. He used to be at the house. And he used to work with a mirror and a, *une pince à cheveux*, *une pince*, a pin. And I used to hide them for them – for him, and he used to tell me “Look, look where I put my mirror.” So I used to give him the mirror and he used to give me money so I go and buy chocolate [laughs]. This is what I remember.

And why is it that you don’t know your grandparents on the other side, on your father’s side?

Because my father, when he get married, he was already 36 and he didn’t have his – alive his father and mother. But I knew the uncle, the brother of my father, and we were very close to the children. Till now I see my cousin, she live in Miami, and the other live in Panama. I am on the phone with her all the time.

And what languages did your grandparents speak?

Always speak French with them. They speak a bit of Arabic. I used to – I don’t remember speaking Arabic. I don’t remember. I remember my grandmother, side of my mother, she used to have friend coming every week at home to play cards, so they teach me to play ... [laughs] poker. So I was already six or seven years old, I knew how to play card.

Do you know how your parents met?

It was – you know, at the time it was – my aunt, the – my mother aunt was married with a gentleman, very nice man. His cousin was my father, so introduced the cousin of my aunt – the husband of my aunt, they introduce her to my mother. It was a very good match because my father at the time there used to be big businessman.

What type of business was he in, your father?

Textiles, textiles. They used to sell spice to England, coming from India, and they used to – from India they used to bring textiles to sell it in Egypt.

And what were the names of your parents?

My father's name was Salim, *filis de Abraham*, and my mother, his wife, his mother was Setti, my mother's side.

And your mum's name?

Mazal. They used to call her Fortunée.

And where were your parents born?

I think in Aleppo, but they left my – my mother – my grandmother told me she left Aleppo at the – when my mother was two years old, and they went to – they took the boat, they went to Venezuela. They stay one year in Venezuela, or two years in Venezuela, then my grandmother was very unhappy so she returned to Egypt.

To Alexandria?

I don't know. I think to Cairo where – because of my mother – I don't know. I don't know. When my mother get married she was in Alexandria anyway.

[0:07:06]

And that's where you were born, in Alexandria?

Yes, yes. We used to live in the road called Ambrose Raley, with a building where – we used to live in a flat where there is lots of Jewish families. There is the Mizrahi -- and I forgot the other name. I know that my mother was very friendly with three or four families living in the same building.

And –

[*I remember*] Ambrose Raley. I remember 194 Ambrose Raley.

And what type of a school did you go to?

I went to a private school called *Institution de Leo*. It was near the house, and to learn French. And ... I remember I had some friends, one Greek, one Italian. The – one, her name was Mary Corby. I was perhaps six years old, and the other was Adrienne Papayaleris. Jacqueline Yarid, that is another friend. I don't know where they are at the moment, if they are still alive or not.

Did you do all your – did you finish your education in Alexandria?

No, we left Alexandria during the war. We used to live in this road near – Ambrose Raley, near the seaside, not far from the seaside, and all the – during the war, there is – *des canons aériennes*, fighting the Germans or the Italians, I don't know. So my mother get afraid. One day a bomb fell nearby. I don't know – nearby. My mother decide to go to live in Cairo. So we went to live. At the beginning it was very difficult to find place to live in – we live at my grandmother house. And here I learn how she's cooking. She used to cook the special food they call *Kobeba Napolseya*. It was something very difficult to be done. I used to admire her, how she used to do the filling of the meat inside some mixture, with rice or *bulgul* [bulgur]. And she have like a help, a little boy of 13. He used to make the cleaning of the house. And I – they used to [phone rings] – they used to do ... I don't know what the little boy was – cleaning the saucepan with sand. At the time they used to buy sand, special red sand, to clean the saucepan. It was a bit funny. I used to look at him, how he used to clean the – all the saucepans.

And this boy was a local boy?

Yes, he was – he was an Egyptian boy, 13. He used to make some shopping. And sometimes, when they want – Alexandria – Cairo was more *sans façon* than Alexandria. People – you'd see people selling oranges in the street. They had a big something on their head and calling, they

have orange, orange, who want to buy the orange. So we used to call him and we used to send a sort of *panier*, a sort of basket, to give us the – and we send him money in the basket so he doesn't go to the third floor from the balcony [laughs]. Very funny today when I see people – I live in this very high house. I remember, if we need something, you send the basket [laughs] instead of going on the lift.

So then you went to a new school in Cairo?

Yes, I went to the *Lycée Franco Egyptienne*. It was a French lycée. It was near the house, and I was a very, very good pupil there. I used to – I used to have all the time *satisficite*. *Satisficite*, it means that you have very good notes in French. I was very good in history, in mathematics, and I grew up liking studying. At the age of 12, I think, or – no, 13, I changed to another school called *L'Ecole de Madame de Maintenon*. It was a very, very high sophisticated place where all the students were very beautiful. I remember when they used to play against another school volleyball, we used to win all the time. I don't know because they are good or because they are beautiful [laughs].

And until what age did you go to that school?

Oh, I finished my French Baccalaureate there. I made – I made one year of philosophy, and then I finished school. At the time my father sent my brother to study in France. I want also to go to study in France. My father did not want, so the director of the school, I forgot his name, he told me, "What you are going to do?" I told him, "I don't know." "It's a shame you don't study more. Come, I give you a course to study to be teacher, and you work at the school at the same time. You have a nice – you go three times – two times, I think, a week, you come to study to be teacher, and then you work at the same time, *au jardin d'enfants*."

So I was working for three years there.

But meanwhile I was not made to – I liked the children but I study also – I liked the very nice dresses, so I was complaining that my mother doesn't make me nice dresses, so I went to study how to cut patterns so I can do my own dresses, and this helped me a lot when I went to South America because I was able to open a very big place where all the high society used to come to

me to do clothes. I had also lots of luck when I went to South America because my neighbours, they owned a shop. They wanted – they give me the shop and they went to America and I bought the shop. I paid them over three years. I used to travel four times a year, in France, in America, in London, in Panama, to buy clothes. I had about six – eight employees – it depends, six or eight employees. I work very hard, but it was rewarding because before coming to England we already had the money to buy house and to work – to buy a house – two houses, we bought, because the house where I used to live and the house for – I went to study interior decoration to – to make - you know, to use – so I can convert the house, the second house that we bought, to convert it into flats. My husband helped me a lot but he used to work also in textiles, and I had two children. The gap – difference between one child and the other, seven years. My first child, I have it in Egypt, and the second, I have it in London. When I was in Peru I came to London to stay with my mother and father and I had a little girl here and I went back to Peru.

What year did you leave Egypt and why did you leave?

We left Egypt in 1956, in December. Before that my sister used to be married in Peru and she want us very much – because the situation was not very good in Egypt, she want us to go to Peru. So she already prepare us our sort of paper so we can go to Peru. So when the situation come tense in Egypt and there is these bomb at – the French and English was near Port Said and the Egyptians was fighting, I don't know, so something appear in the newspaper that all British subjects and French should go to the police and put their name. And we went to the police. We thought that the English are going to save us. At the contrary, the second week we receive orders from the Egyptians that we should leave the continent in eight days. So I had my suitcase ready, but we left Egypt, I took – by boat. I went from Alexandria and I took with me 20 suitcases. Between them my sewing machine that I keep till now. I took my sewing machine to Peru. I was working there with my machine [laughs]. The employee used to work there. And I still have it in my room. I use it from time to time. It's not working perfectly but it works like me [laughs].

Did you miss your life in Egypt when you were living in Peru? Did you leave family behind?

I was – yes, I left my – yes, I left my family, but my mother came after, after. We are the first that we left Egypt. I left my in-laws, who were lovely people, my mother-in-law and my father-in-law, and they went to Brazil. But my mother – so we had this very big problem. They used to write to my husband to go to Brazil, to don't stay in Peru. So when I was pregnant and I decide to go to England to have the baby, because – why we decide to go to baby, because my sister had the baby in Peru and they made a caesarean and she spend about \$20,000 to have the operation done. So when I was pregnant, the doctor saw me and he told me – I had pain in my left side. He told me I have to be operated. So I get frightened to be operated like my sister, so I decide to go to England to have the baby. And when I went there they told me no operation, I don't have to need no operation. You know, in Peru they used to do like business, the doctors.

And how long did you live in Peru?

Altogether 14 years. We had very nice friends, very, very nice friends. Till now I – they are with – they're writing to me. They come to visit me, and we speak on the phone all the time. There is two of them that are still alive.

Did you meet other Jewish families in Peru? Did you have a Jewish life in Peru?

No. Jewish life. We have the – in Peru there is three synagogues – there have been three synagogues, one Sephardi, one Ashkenazi and one German. So we were in the Sephardi synagogue, very nice people, but my sister and husband used to live there so we were very friendly with her and the children were very – till now they are still – they see each other, the children. My sister unfortunately, and my brother-in-law, passed away like my husband, but the children are still phoning us and come to see us.

And we had this friend of mine, she was a converted – she was a Romanian girl who married a Jewish boy who escaped from Germany – no, they escaped from Romania. He was half Hungaro and half Romanian. So they escaped there. They go walking - without asking nobody how to walk, how to find, they went to Germany. There my – this friend of mine, she was studying to be a doctor, but when she arrived in Germany she decide to learn how to do hairdressing. So when she came to Peru she opened a school to teach hairdressing. And we used to be neighbours. She helped me – I never cooked in my life. She helped me, to teach me

how to cook, how to do sweets. She was adorable, yes. And the children are still friends together. One of them – one of the girl, friend of my daughter, live in Israel and the other live in France, and my friend, she lives in Peru with her husband. He's over 90 now, the husband. I still speak with them on the phone. And I have another friend, she was in Peru and she – she's the one who sold me the shop. She lives in Los Angeles, and she comes to visit me and each time she comes, she brings me a present. I'm very, very fond of her because she's very elegant and very well spoken, so – and when she phoned me, she wants to speak in French because I am the only person she can practise her French. In Romania those people used to speak five languages. They used to speak Yiddish, French, English, Spanish, Romanian. I don't know which other language they used to speak. German, they used to speak German also. Then she told me at school, when they were young they teach the children – special Jewish school, I think they were, they used to teach them to speak several languages.

I want to tell you, when I left Egypt, all the way I was very lucky. It's true, it's true, I was a hardworking woman, but I was very lucky [sobs].

Do you also have friends in Egypt that you stay in touch with, like your friends in Peru?

No, no.

You lost all your contacts?

Yes. No, no, not at all. I don't know if they are still alive or they went to Israel. I don't know. But anyway, I have one friend, she is in Italy, but I don't know if she is – the head is not very good, so ... You cannot speak with everybody.

Do you still have any family in Egypt?

No, I don't have family, no.

[0:25:32]

And tell me about when you felt that it was time to leave Egypt.

I was crying like a baby, because it was very difficult. They gave us eight days to leave. My husband used to go to make the paper, and they gave us \$100 per person to leave Egypt. But when we arrive in Italy – we took the boat, I told you. We arrive in Italy, we went to the ... In the boat there is an English consulate man came to see us and they pay us the hotel in Italy. And something very funny, the owner of the hotel, he came and they gave us money.

And what kind of people were on the boat with you? Was it –

When we arrive in Italy, there had been lots of Jewish from Hungary. They were also expelled. There had been a problem also in Italy. So in the hotel we had Hungarian and Jewish, Egyptian. I don't know, you name it. Romanian, I don't know. There has been – and in the boat, when we took the boat to go to Peru, also with us there has been people from Hungary going to Venezuela, I think, because the boat stopped in Venezuela before going to Peru, Lima. When we arrive in Lima, my sister was very nice. Well, she had – at the time she had a very nice house, so we stayed with her. My little boy was then four years old, or three years old. I put him at school, a Jewish school there. And at the Jewish school, he used to come and tell, “Mummy, I don't have cousins, I don't have cousins. I don't have sisters. I don't have cousins. Can I call the maid my cousin?” [laughs] And, you know, my heart used to go with him [laughs]. And then ... What else? Something funny happened. I don't know

... Ah, I want to tell you something. I put him at – I put Ronald at a Jewish called Leon Panello, and the Jewish school decide to make a raffle so to build a nursery for the children. I bought one ticket. What do you want? I won the first prize. They gave us two tickets to Israel. This is not luck?

Did you use the tickets?

Yes. We went to Israel with my husband [laughs].

Was that your first time to go to Israel?

The first time, yes.

And you saw family when you were in Israel?

Yes, I saw family, yes. This cousin of mine, Lucy Gottesman of, she married a very – her boss. She married her boss. A Sephardi from Egypt, she married an Ashkenazi boy, Russian coming from Germany. He was the head of the petrol company in Haifa. She was secretary there and they get married. She was blonde with blue eyes. For an Egyptian it was not ... Yes. And this is the cousin, I would like to see her. She still lives in Haifa, and she just phoned me yesterday, that we would like to go to the Dead Sea there. Here is everything.

And where did some of the – the rest of your family, what other countries did the emigrate to?

I have very – my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law, and my father in law, went to Brazil. My mother-in-law came – and my sister-in-law came to visit us, but that's all. And my very friendly cousin, they went to Canada. All the – I had five cousins in Canada, in Montreal, so we went often to visit them. And I used to – when my husband passed away, I had a cousin in Miami, she used to invite me every year to Miami. So all those people from Canada, they used to rent – to buy flat in this place in Miami, so I used to meet them. And still now we speak on the phone together, yes. Four daughters and two boys from Canada. Montreal, they used to live. Now one of them lives in Toronto. She told me to go to Toronto. I don't – it doesn't fancy me to go to Canada. I don't know why. Well, I went to Montreal, but to go to Toronto, I don't know. Nothing to attract me to go to Toronto. First of all I don't like the name, *to-to-to-to*.

[0:31:40]

And going back to your childhood in Egypt, do you remember spending time with those cousins when you were young? Do you remember going to synagogue?

Yes. Not those cousins, with other cousins, where the – *Tante Celine*, *Tante Celine*, we used to spend all the time with them, all the time, because they used to have a very big flat, ten room flat, the ground floor. And the owner of the building was the Haradi family. There has been two

boys, very handsome, living above. We used to play in the garden together. I was the youngest of all so they don't – they don't give me too much importance.

I have something to tell you. What about my childhood. When I was eight years old, I used to have an uncle, my mother's brother. He used to come to Alexandria and he used to live in our home. And he came one time, it was in Christmas, so I put in an old envelope – I send him a card. I put a card like this – in the envelope I put a card to wish him a Happy New Year. He was so touched that he told me – first of all he opened the envelope. It was a – I thought – I didn't know how to write at the time, and he was so impressed, he told me, "Come and we go to the shop to buy you a present for Christmas." He took me to the shop. I went to the shop. I bought a set of bedroom for my – for my doll [laughs]. When I came home the second day, my sister, my older sister, told me, "Are you mad? What you are going to do that? Let's go to the shop. We are going to change it." So we went to the shop and she changed to a ping-pong game. She told me, "This is better. You are going to play ping-pong." You don't know what she have done to me. It was one week, we have to go to Cairo with my mother, so the ping-pong, I put it in the – well, in the suitcase [laughs]. When I arrived to Cairo, no ping-pong, she took it out [laughs]. I was furious, you can't imagine [laughs]. And this is the joke of when my childhood. I still – one of the cousins is still alive, the one from *Tante Celine*. Her name was Odette. She's still living in Marseille in France, so once a month I phone her and we speak together. She's older than me, but she was such a beautiful woman that all the time I used to copy her, to try – she was older than me. She used to knit me my jumpers, so I was very fond of her. At the time we don't buy readymade jumpers. Everybody was knitting.

[0:35:07]

And tell me about when you met your husband.

I met my husband. I was a member a very posh club in Cairo, and one day, Saturday afternoon, a boy came and told me, "What you are going to do this afternoon – this evening?" I was – at the time I was 20. He told me, "What are you going to do this afternoon?" I told him, "Nothing special. Perhaps we go to the cinema." He told me, "You know, there is a party. A family called Pinto, they are doing a party. I have a friend there. Do you want to come with me?" I told him, "Yes, if you take me out, yes." He had a car, so he come and took me to the house of my husband

[laughs]. And then my husband came and he opened his mouth when he saw me. I used to like to dress very well. I used to be very, very careful with it. I used to make all my dresses. This is also something. I made all my daughter's dresses till she get married [laughs]. All the most fashion one, I used to copy all the high ... *couturier*. Now finished, I cannot open – I cannot do with a needle [laughs].

Did your husband come from a big family? What was his background?

No, one boy and one girl, and I used – I used to have only two children. I used to – my mother-in-law tell her, “Look, look, I want more children.” She told me, “No, it's enough.” And when they grew up I told her, “Look, now the two children are married. You don't – *je ne regrette pas*. You don't regret that you don't ...” She told me, “Yes, I regret, I should have a third one” [laughs]. She never – no, she never gave me courage to have more children.

[0:37:33]

Were they –

I used to have a very good nanny, because when I used to work I had a Peruvian nanny. She was so good with the children. One day she came to me and she told me, “I want to leave.” I told her, “Why you want to leave?” Because when we cross the road, Ronald doesn't want – Ronald, my son, doesn't want to give her his hand. He was ten at the time [laughs]. She was very, very good. She stayed with us till we left Peru. And when I came to England, I came with a Peruvian girl. She stayed with me ten years and then she get married, and now she's more rich than me. She own two houses [laughs]. She married a Spanish boy. She married – she bought – they bought a house in London and they bought a house in Spain, and she has only one child.

And what made you come to England from Peru?

We have to choose between going to my friend in America or coming to my parents, so I decide to come to stay with the family.

Why did you have to leave Peru?

Oh, because we had revolution. There have been a revolution there, when we left in '69, terrible, revolution and earthquake and you name it. We had lots of problems. And my husband decide it was – my son was 15, 16, it was time for him to go to university. He told me, “We are going to have the same problems like Egypt. It’s better if you go – to leave Peru.” So I told him to go to visit England to see – to see ... By the time – by telephone, my brother helped me to buy a house in London, because when I used to come I used to give him power of attorney. So he bought us a house in London and my husband came, with my son, to see if he can settle there. So my son – my son was very happy at school, so my husband decide to - for me to join him. Me and my daughter were in Peru. At this time, before coming, such an earthquake arrive in Peru, you can’t imagine. All the wardrobes in the house fell on the floor. The house was moving. And although our house used to be built on a special way against earthquake, to build it on the concrete, I don’t know what it was. When my mother come to visit us one day in Peru, she told me - you know, every two or three days we have a small earthquake in Peru. My mother used to say, “I don’t know how rich people can live in Peru, because all these earthquakes.” We used to live in the seventh floor so the house used to move. My mother was very scared. So we never bought any property in Peru, although my husband used to live in – to work in import/export for material, for construction. He never want me to buy in Peru anything, he told me, because in Peru if you want to sell they don’t pay you cash. The bank doesn’t give you the money like here. You borrow money and the things. At the time the – I don’t know. I don’t know. He never want us to buy something in – in Peru, but we bought in England before leaving. Before leaving Peru we bought a house in Golders Green.

[0:41:55]

Was your husband in the same business in Egypt?

My husband used to be from a family, very important family, the Pinto family, and they used to work in the business called the Tractor Engineering Company. His father and uncle was the director there. Anyway, he used to be first in elevator and then he – they put him in selling *les roues, les roues d’auto* - Dunlop, wheels, Dunlop. He used to be very friendly with very big

Egyptian people, owner of *series d'autos d'autobus*, and when they gave us the – to leave Egypt - they gave us eight days to leave Egypt, he went to tell them that he's leaving, one of them opened a drawer and gave him £1,000, Egyptian one. And he had a very good friend, an officer in the army. He went to ask him if he can stay a bit longer in Egypt. He told him, "I don't..." This officer was not Muslim, was Coptic. It's a sort of Christian from the time of the pharaohs. So my husband ask him if he can stay longer in Egypt, to don't leave in eight days. He told him, "I don't suggest you. It's better for you to leave. Even for us the situation is not good." For the Copts the situation is not good." This is it all. Are you happy? [laughs]

Why do you think the Egyptian government wanted you to leave so fast like that?

Because we were British and we were – they went to tell us who – all the French and English should write their name in the police station. We went to write the name. We thought that the English are going to *nous aidez*. To the contrary, the Egyptians told us to leave. We should not have gone [laughs] to the police station to tell that we are English.

So it wasn't because you were Jewish that you had to leave?

No, no. No, because we are English and my husband is French. At the time my son was two years old, and when we left I received a letter of my mother-in-law, telling me that the nanny, Ronald's nanny – the baby – my son called Ronald – Ronald's nanny come to see to – to see how we are, because she was very upset that we left so quickly. I have a picture of the maid with my son.

[0:45:40]

Did you have time to say goodbye to your friends?

No, no. Who had the time? You had to spend the time to collect your clothes and to do what you have to take with you. So we took - you know when we left Egypt I took a big suitcase full of milk. I told myself, for my son, if we arrive in Europe, we don't have enough money, at least we have milk to the baby. But I told you, everything went perfectly when we left Egypt because

I managed to – the boat stopped in – the boat stopped in Lebanon and in Lebanon all the money people changer – I don't know how you call them, those people. I gave £5,000 that I have in Egyptian money and they gave us French francs – Swiss francs they gave us, or Swiss franc?. I don't know. Anyway, they loan us – they give us some – they took the Egyptian money. So we arrive in Italy. The hotel gave us money instead of – because the English paid – the consulate paid the hotel and the hotel thought that he took too much money for us, he gave us part of the money. So we stay about one or two months in Italy, in Milano, at my uncle's house. It was my husband's uncle. And then we went to France. The France, we had – my husband – I had the aunt, a very nice auntie, but they were a bit old, no? My cousin help us more or less. And ... I tell? No. I don't know, I tell? No ... And then we stay about – my husband try to work with his cousin but he didn't like it, so he decide to go to Peru. So we went to the French consulate. He told us, "We are going to go to Peru." Meanwhile we left all our luggage in the *Dogano* how you – *la douane*?

The customs.

The custom in Genoa –

Genoa?

Genoa. We left all the customs. So we went to the French, we tell them we want to go to Peru, and we have the – all the luggage in Genoa, and we have to pay to take them out, post, stamp. They gave us money and we took – with the money they gave us, I bought jumpers from Italy to sell them in Peru. So all – all the money we have. My sister in Peru used to have this shop to sell clothes, so selling the jumpers was very successful. So we worked very hard but it was very nice, because we were young.

[0:49:19]

We didn't – I remember, it was – when I came the first time in London, after Peru, I came to have the baby, my mother used to live in a two bedroom flat, and she was suffering. She didn't know how to clean the house. She didn't – so I went to help her to buy a Hoover, a cleaner,

because she didn't know to buy – at the time in Egypt we don't have hoovers. So she used to make the washing up. There is no washing machine. She used to – they go to the – to a laundry to make the washing, and they used to – don't know how to dry the clothes. So at the time she used to have a chimney [laughs], so I bought her a sort of – something that you can open and dry the clothes near the chimney. All – we didn't suffer. We didn't – it's true that I was crying, I was this, but we came over. But the young people, this is the – was the difficult for them, because they couldn't manage. They didn't have the strength to go over when they left country. My mother used to have two maids in Egypt and in here, in London, nothing. It was very difficult for her, and she didn't know. And she used to fight with my father, throw the paper in the floor or something like that. Even so he used to help her [laughs]. One day I was walking in the street and I saw that people can have a swim in the – in the Swiss Cottage library. I told Daddy, "You know, you can swim there." "How do you know?" he told me. "It's written in the wall." "Ah, you read the wall?" He didn't think to read the wall to go to the swimming pool. The old people suffer a lot when they move.

They didn't speak English, did they, when they first arrived?

My father used to speak a bit of English. My mother no, French. My mother used to have [laughs] an old lady who want to teach her English, a Jewish old lady, and my mother told her [laughs], "What do you want me to study English?" She was old fashioned. Myself, if somebody tell me now, I started to begin computers at the age of 80 [laughs]. I have a teacher coming to me to study and I – to repeat, to repeat, because – and he write to me and this and that. At least I can have – read the email. She didn't like it. She liked to go to play cards, my mother. I like to play cards. I like to gamble.

She didn't like it here in London, your mum?

Well, I don't know if she like it or no, but she didn't like to work. And my father used to have a sister in Paris, very rich, this one, so twice a year my mother used to go to her [laughs] and they used to go to – they used to have a flat in Nice they used to enjoy. She used to have a maid, the cousin. It's my father's sister was very, very – they were very lucky during those – this aunt of mine because they used to own in France a factory doing light lamps. When the Germans came

they escaped. They took the boat with some – I don't know, and went to England, and they left the factory in the name of the secretary. So when the Germans came, the secretary did not tell them that the house belonged to Jewish people. She continued to work. And when the war finished they came back from England. It's true somebody took their flat but the factory – the secretary give them the factory, and they made a lot of money because it was the only factory working during – after the war, so they managed to have money anyway.

Shall we take a break?

Yes.

[0:54:14]

Tell us about your mum.

Ma mère, c'était une très jolie femme. Elle était grande et elle a donné sa billet et j'ai pris ça d'elle pour....

She was coquette?

Très coquette et pour aller, je me rappelle très bien, on allé chez un

Pour choisir des vêtements, et elle me prenait avec elle. Moi, j'étais plus jeune et elle me prenait avec elle, car j'étais là seule qui puisse la donner conseil. Voilà.

Can we continue in English?

Yes.

Talking about your mum.

Well, I don't remember well, but I know that she was – she liked playing cards. She was a very good cook, and my father used to tell her – to tell us, "Don't tell her that she's very good cook

because she's going to be very proud of it and she's not going to cook for us" [laughs]. Yeah, what do you want to know?

Tell me as far back as you remember, when you were very little. How far back do you remember in Egypt?

Oh, in Egypt, we used to be members *Casino Saint Stefano*. We used to go there. There has been – I used to have a – I was so naughty myself that I had a special maid, Jewish girl called Marie. She used to for me, just for me, because I was – nobody can support me. I was shouting. When I was upset with somebody I go to the staircase and begin to shout [laughs], to empty my bitterness. And well, I had this girl called Marie, you remember, and her mother used to cook for us. And I used to go to the *Casino Saint Stefano*. They used to make us a party, and Marie didn't say that she is my maid, she used to tell she is my cousin [laughs]. She was a Jewish girl. The mother used to come from Israel, Palestine. They used to work for us.

And how old were you when you moved from Alexandria to Cairo?

Don't tell me how old I know – I don't know [laughs]. I know that –

You were a little girl or ...?

Yes, little girl, because I went to this college, *L'Ecole Franco Egyptienne*. First of all they put me in an American school with my sister, and then they decide that they put me with the little babies because I didn't speak nothing English. So they decide to put me in the French school. So my oldest sister stay in the American school and me, they put me in the *L'Ecole Française*, French school.

[0:57:09]

Did you have lots of Jewish friends when you were in Alexandria?

No. In Cairo, yes. In Cairo, yes, because the – we used to live at my grandma and the quartier, the borough, was plenty of Jewish people. At school I didn't have special friend but I used to see them at the school only. They didn't come home to see us.

Do you remember the synagogue in Alexandria?

In Cairo? Alexandria? Yes, I remember one day – I don't remember the place of the synagogue but I remember one day it was a – I think *Rosh Hashanah* or something like that, they took – they gave me a *sepher* [Torah scroll] to hold and to walk. It's a toy. I imagine it was a toy, a small *sepher*, like a toy, to walk – to walk in the – with the people. I don't know which day it was. My father used to be very religious but not my mother, and my father used to tell her, "I marry you. You are the granddaughter of a rabbi." And my mother was not religious. My father get very much upset [laughs]. What do you want to know about else?

And do you remember the synagogue in Cairo – do you remember going for –

Yes, every Saturday morning we used to go – no, every Friday evening. Here we go at the synagogue Saturday but in Egypt it was Friday evening we go to the synagogue. All the girls, we used to go there, walking to the synagogue.

And did you belong to any Jewish clubs for young people or ...?

Darling, the – where I was a member, all were Jewish. This – the – the swimming ... It was a – what is the name – Sporting club, it was a Sporting Club, all inside was Jewish people. Very little Muslim, very little Muslim. I remember all my friends at school was – at the same college – at the same sport.

But you had Muslim children at your school also?

In my class, we were 12 girls, one Muslim, and there is two French – no, one French girl, from France. The father and mother used to – were living in Port Said. And there had been one girl, Anisha Fere, I think she was German or *Hongroise*. I don't know, something like that. Annie

Grio, she was the French. Anisha Fere, she was the foreign girl. I don't know where from. And the rest were all Jewish, from – one Italian girl, perhaps, Lydia. I think she was Italian, and the rest were Jewish. Liliane Tweta, Leah Liebschitz, Denise Orebi, Estelle Minerbo, Giselle Levy, all were Jewish.

Are you in touch with some of those people now?

Finished. I used to speak to my mother, “Where is your friend?” “They’re all died,” she used to tell me [laughs]. And it was--, I remember--, why I am laughing, because I am the same [laughs]. In our group I think there is four girls that already died. I used to have a very good friend, Jacqueline Fils. I used to be with her at school, *L'Ecole Maintenon*. She passed already three years ago. Well, the years passed not for us only, for the rest also. If they are older, worse.

And what do you remember about your teachers at the school?

Oh, I used to have a teacher, she used to adore me. When I was – the – it was at the – I had one, Mademoiselle Katie, she was a French teacher, and Mademoiselle Ariel, she was the mathematic one. The Mademoiselle Katie, she used to love me so much, lovely. I used to be a very good pupil before the *certificat d'études*. When it was *brevet*, I already was grown up, we change. We change. We are not so tied to the teacher. So we become more independent. So I changed school, I went to the *Cours Maintenon*. To the *Cours Maintenon*, I was fighting, fighting to have better know, to have better study. I made my French baccalaureate there. I was friendly with one girl, Denise Orebi. She was married to a Cohen, and I don't know, she live in – I know that she live in Italy, in Milano, but once I phone her but I not – I think she – she doesn't remember very well how to speak and this, so I stop phoning her. First of all I have no time. It take me so much time to move myself here. I have a cousin of my husband in France, in Paris, I don't have time to phone her. Each time I thought, this evening I'm going to phone her, I forget. I come in the evening, I forget. Hetty, her name is Hetty, Levy Garbois. She was my husband – the husband was my husband's cousin.

[1:03:39]

And did they teach you a little bit of Arabic in school?

Yes, I studied – my French baccalaureat, I have two language, extra language. First was French. All – everything, mathematic, French, history, everything in French. But I study English first language. Second language Arabic. The Arabic they teach me, I had the formal Qur'an. So [*speaking Arabic*]. It means, God give you the permission to [*speaking Arabic*] – to go tell you to give something to not belong to you to the person to whom they belong, and if you have to judge between the people, you have to judge correctly.

And did you also do some – did you have to do some Jewish studies? Did you go –

Unfortunately in Egypt they teach the boys. We have a rabbi coming to my brother to teach him Hebrew, but not for us. I remember the rabbi used to come to – I ask him, “Rabbi, what you have done today?” “We have done the prayer to push the Germans out of Egypt,” because at the time it was Alamein, the Battle of Alamein. I remember the rabbi, “We have been praying so to push the Germans out of Egypt.” I remember the rabbi very well. He used to come with his kaftan. You know they used to wear like a kaftan with a belt? Yes, to teach my brother Hebrew. My younger brother came out after 15 years – 12, 13 years, my younger brother. He's 13 years younger than me. So it's very annoying because he doesn't fit. It's very bad to have a – one child is very difficult, to have one child, and to have one with this big gap also is difficult. Like my son and my daughter, there is a seven-year gap. Thank god those are good together.

And your other brother?

Albert? Albert, he got one daughter, Sandra. We are very friendly with Sandra, David, and they have another boy called Sylvain.

And when did he leave Egypt? When did your brothers leave Egypt?

I know that he left after us, after us. You know, he was very unlucky because when he finished studying in France, he came to Egypt and he opened a factory of textiles, of knitting. And when he decide to leave Egypt, he thought that he going to be for one or two months out of Egypt and

come back, so he left the company in the hand of his partner, a Greek boy. So the Greek boy, when my brother left, he sold it and he left. So when my brother came to England, he have to claim from the British compensation money. He couldn't, because he left the factory to his friend. He should have gone to the Swiss company and left the key there.

[1:07:48]

So they don't compensate him, but me, they compensate me. They compensate even the price of my car. When they told me, "Put what you left in Egypt," I put what I left in Egypt, I put a car. They told me, "The car, it was not in your name. It was in the name of your husband." I told them, "Yes, but my husband bought the car with my dowry." So they gave me £500. At the time a car was £500. I remember, when I was young, a Balila it was Italian car, it was new, £10 [laughs]. Balila, I remember. I remember my neighbour had a Balila. I used to look at the window. It's like a Mini car [laughs], Balila you know, it's – I don't know, look, till now I remember the name, Balila.

[1:08:47]

Do you remember at all in the Jewish community, people beginning to talk about Zionism and going to Israel?

Well, this was – yes, yes, this was at the end. I remember I used to have a friend – we used to live in the ground floor. I used to have a friend. His name was Cesar Masri. He used to come to speak to me from the balcony and he told me he's going to Israel, "Do you want to go?" I told him, "No, we don't go to Israel." My mother used to say, "*Por favor*, don't speak," because it begin to have problems in Egypt, Israel. I don't know which year it was. It was well before – I was at school. I was at the *brevet* perhaps when he came with that. Because another boy to my sister – my sister was older than me, five years, so she had a boy called Simmy, Simon perhaps. I don't know the other name. He want to go to Israel, and my mother told him, "Why you are going to Israel now?" "Because we are build – we are going to build Israel." He went there to build Israel. We were afraid to speak at the time about Israel, because they put in prison lots of people at the time in Egypt. The youngsters who used to belong to a group of people, they used

to put them in prison. But without – it's only – without, *sans*, ... without punish them, they just to keep them out of society, I imagine.

Do you know anybody that went to prison?

Prison, no. I think – I don't know. I have a cousin, the one who was in Canada. They put it – not in a prison. They put it in a sort of concentrated camp, something like that, but they didn't make her suffer, no. Well, she never told me so I don't know. I don't know what happened really, but we know that Lilianne was a problem - had a problem with the government. In our group, no, we didn't have no problem at all.

But you were careful.

We are out of it, so we didn't say we are going to go to be friendly, no. We were ... out of it. We didn't know exactly what about Zionists. We didn't know. After, after the thing appeared that in Israel there have been this boat who came landed by – people was swimming to come to Israel, after that we heard, but at the time we – first of all I don't remember having a television once. There has been radio and we have – perhaps the radio was not telling the truth about what happening, so we didn't know exactly, no.

What was the radio saying?

In French [laughs], I don't know because we didn't open it. No, nothing, nothing we knew. After, after we knew the story. Like the concentration camps in Germany, we knew it after, not at the – I remember at school, my French girl, the one she live – her parents live in Port Said and the other in – they used to tell us stories, what the doctors used to do in France, that if one was pregnant, she have a baby, he make the baby – don't see, yeah. So is it possible a doctor make like that? The girl was telling, so we didn't know the true story, what happening. After, we knew about the concentration camps and all the suffering. Last time in the television you see this man of 93, he was in this camp. Did you see the story last week? He wrote a book about the camp where he was prisoner. He was not Jewish, I think. He was Jewish boy?

I'm not sure. So as far as you saw, the Jewish people in Cairo, they didn't suffer because they were Jewish.

No, not at all, not at all.

You don't remember any antisemitism?

There is this boy, he was from - Lisha. He was not Jewish, he was Karaite. You know there is this Jewish who belonged – Karaite section. They come from Russia, I think. They have a problem. He was a doctor. He had a problem. But we didn't know because we didn't go near this group at all. We were afraid, and my mother used to prohibit ... *Nous défendre d'aller les voir, ce groupe*. And my brother Albert was young at the time. He was 15, 16, so he was not in a group for people who doing fighting for Israel or something.

But you felt free people as Jewish people?

Oh yes, free, free, of course.

Could you walk in the street wearing a Magen David without problems?

No, no, forget Magen David. You walk in the street, they know you are Jewish, but not wearing Magen David, yes.

How did they know you were Jewish?

Your face [laughs], beautiful. But you know, I used to live in this building, *immobilier*, one of the nicest buildings in Cairo. We had 26 lifts in the – there is four buildings, 26 lifts, and who sold the lifts to the company? It was my – the Pinto family. They sell 26 – there has been a lift for the furniture. There is a lift for the domestic. There is two lifts for the owner of the flat, and there has been four buildings and there is – quatre, six, already eight, at the back for furniture and for this, yes.

[1:16:35]

Do you remember the Bar Mitzvahs of your brothers?

My brother Albert, he was a *Bar Mitzvah*. No big party like before. We had just a family with a small party. My brother was very happy to receive a box of chocolates [laughs]. That is not like here, cheques and this and that and that. Scandalous, scandal, too much party. And even people who doesn't money, they borrow money to make a party, *mashugana* [laughs].

What were the Bar Mitzvahs like in Egypt?

I know they went to make *Bar Mitzvah* and they make – and we were at the time – we left Cairo – we left Alexandria to Cairo. We were living at my mother and my grandmother. And I remember my mother make a party for – in my grandmother house for my brother, so some of the family came, and he receive – he doesn't receive too much money. They don't give money at the time. I remember my son, we make a *Bar Mitzvah* in Israel. We had about 500 people, and he received so much money that we put the money in the bank on his name in London. When he come to London, he took the money to buy [laughs] – without telling us, he went to buy something electronic or something. My husband goes furious. He told me, "Tell me, tell me, I'll go with you." No, he took the money from the bank and he went. At the time he was 16 or 17. Anyway.

And tell us about your wedding. Which synagogue was it in, your wedding?

In a synagogue in Koubbeh Garden. My mother-in-law at the time, she used to live in Koubbeh Garden because in the centre too much bomb, too much – she was afraid, too much soldiers, too much – she was – so in the Koubbeh Garden Synagogue. It was not very famous like Adi Pasha, the synagogue of Adi Pasha. It was smaller synagogue. But anyway, we didn't have too much people, about 100 people, yes. I remember my wedding dress, my – the wife of my uncle, she used to be very good, very – she teach me to do patterns – she taught me to do patterns and she made me the wedding dress. I remember the top was lace and the bottom – the skirt was in tulle, very nice tulle. Very nice. When I married my husband I was a big – when my husband –

my father want me to marry somebody, he was in textile business. He want me to marry somebody from the textiles, a friend of his. He was old. I told him, “No way, I will not get married to an old man. I want a young man.” Look, I married a young man and he died so young. So this is what you can do – life is not on your hand. He was two years older than me and he died at 66, 67. He was not careful with food. He liked – and cigarettes and this. So you build your life as you want. But it’s a shame that he – it’s so nice to be old and to be with the grandchildren and he’s not there. But he saw the children marry, then he saw all the babies. I remember when I get married, I married in Cairo and we went on honeymoon in Alexandria, and we went to stay in the Mena House, the hotel near the Pyramids, going to the south, to the beach, Mena House. And I took a picture there, very nice. I married a handsome – he was very handsome, my husband. He had green eyes, tall, educated, good family. Money doesn’t matter. Go and count the money. If you have somebody to – you understand, this is better than to have somebody rich and ... yes.

And when you first got married, did you have your own home or you lived with family?

Darling, you couldn’t have home. There is no new construction in Egypt, in Cairo. So my mother in law used to have a big house, in Mobilia, and my husband used to have his own room. So we arrange this room to be our flat – our ... I used to have a nanny for my baby, because after nine months I have a baby, and my mother-in-law used to have a man who cleaned the house, and he serve us at dinner with a red belt, with a white kaftan and a red belt, very, very chic.

You said your husband was very educated. What did he study, your husband?

I think something about electronics. He was so good in everything. He was so clever on his hands. He was very nice.

Did he do his studies in Egypt or somewhere else?

Yes, yes, in Egypt. They want to - you know the office where my – the uncle was there, they want to send him to Europe, to England. He didn’t want. He went to the stock exchange. He learnt stock exchange. They had somebody in the stock exchange, he was working there. He

do everything. He was so bright, so intelligent, that he – I told him, “I marry you because you are more intelligent than me” [laughs].

Was your husband a – was he a religious man?

No, not at all, not at all. To do Seder Pesach I used to go to my family. They were very modern. No, not at all. But it doesn't bother me because I have my own quarter and I don't – it doesn't matter. They used to eat *kasher*. My mother-in-law used to make lots of charity. She have people specially to do the *matzo-meal*. They were, *comme ils veulent*, a bit modern. My father used to be more religious, than my mother. My father used to tell me, “You should not sew on Saturday.” “Okay Dad,” I told him [laughs].

[1:25:00]

Do you remember seeing very orthodox Jews in Egypt, very religious, or you didn't see any like that?

No. I used to – only one of the group of the school who go to synagogue the Saturday. My father used to tell me – to ask me, “You went to synagogue?” “Ah, very good.” He used to tell me very pleased when he hear that I go to synagogue. So I used to please him. I used to please him a lot because I used to love my father, yes. You know, when I was ten years old, or eight years old, I used to have – they used to give me some problems to resolve in mathematics. One day I didn't understand one, I didn't know, so I told my father. He gave me very quickly the result. He told me how – he made the multiplication or subtraction, I don't know. He made it so quickly. I thought that he was fabulous, how he can do it, and he didn't went – he went for school for long time, because – till now I keep his letters. When I was in Peru he used to write to me. I told – yesterday I told my brother Albert, “You will be very pleased. I have some letters of my father. You can read them.” He told me, “You are fantastic, how you keep them.” Look, he died in 1969, I still kept his letters. I was very ... Yes, I used to love him a lot. I used to have very respect for what he had done and what he was done. When he used to go to help my mother shopping, my mother used to tell him, “The meat is no good.” He told her, “Alright, I will eat it” [laughs]. “The meat, you have to return it,” and my father [laughs], “I will eat it.” To

eat meat sometimes, you buy it, the butcher gives you what they want. So he told her, “No, I will not return it. I will eat it” [laughs].

When your parents spoke to each other, what language did they speak in?

French, French. French and sometimes they speak – my mother used to – my grandmother used to speak Syrian, the way – Arabic in Syrian way, so some of the – my mother used to be like Syrian when she used to speak, but in general in French.

And when they went shopping, you said your mum and your dad used to go shopping together.

No, together, no never. My father used to go alone [laughs], and my mother used to – all the time she used to complain about the meat. You know, kosher meat in Egypt was very difficult to have, and he used to make a queue to buy and she doesn’t like it. So I told her, “Why you shout so much? Go and buy it yourself.” She told me, no [laughs], she will not buy it. She used to buy him – he used to buy her the meat.

[1:28:32]

So when your dad was in the street with the shopkeepers, what language did he speak with them?

I don’t know. Arabic, I suppose. He used to wear a *tarboush* when he went to – when he went. You know, it was – you know, he used to work in the Hamzawi. You know Hamzawi? It’s a – it’s like in Golders Green. It’s a place where they sell wholesale textiles. He used to work in the Hamzawi. In Egypt, in Alexandria, he used to have a shop. When he came to Cairo, he had to liquidate the shop, and he came to Cairo. So in Cairo my mother’s uncle propose him to work with him at the company. My father tell, “Never a Dwek will be an employee.” He told him, “Never a Dwek will be an employee” [laughs]. He used to pay me for school every month £30. It was a lot of money in Egypt, £30. Because I used to have the *bacheau* lesson, I took some extra Arabic lessons, I took some mathematics lessons, I have to pay the school. Every month

he used to give me £30, and he never told me no. Never told me no. Whenever I told him, “Look Dad, tomorrow I have to pay,” “Okay darling.”

Have you been back to visit Egypt since you left?

Yes, once, yes, 20 years ago. I went to see Egypt. I went to see my school. Of course the school was closed, but when I saw the building, very – like a woman, *en deuil*, do you know how to say *en deuil*?

A widow.

A widow, I begin to cry like a child. It was near the Modana tahrir, it was the Isiaridge. There is a shop called Isiaridge who sell ice cream. It’s in the centre of Cairo. It was not far from the Egyptian Museum. La Rue Champollion, it was, the school where I – it was a very big villa where they have ... There has been some *pensionnaires* there in the school and some private students, I don’t know, private teachers, anyway. Anyway, I present there my baccalaureate.

And what was it like, going back, when you went back 20 years ago? Did it feel like home?

No. First of all you went to Cairo, it’s so dirty. You don’t like it. Alexandria much better, more modern. And in Alexandria I went to the Jewish Centre. At the time there has been a cousin of mine who was in touch with them, so he helped me a lot [phone ringing]. He helped me a lot in this place.

So there was an area that was like a Jewish area in Alexandria?

The Jewish community? No, I went to the Jewish Centre. It was near the synagogue. And there it was an uncle – a cousin of mine who was in touch, Setton, a cousin of my father, something like that. He helped me a lot. He took me to the Sporting Club. He took me to the car to visit all the city beaches and all the places. I went with my son. My husband did not want to go. I went with my – you see some of the pictures, my son, I went to visit Egypt. At the time

my son bought a special camera to take pictures. When we arrived there in Egypt, the camera went – break.

Something happened. He began to make me a story, “I don’t want, I don’t want to go. I don’t want ...” I get mad. So I went – I ask everywhere where we can repair this camera. Finally they told me to go to the market, market where they sell – what do they sell, fruit. I went to see somebody, they told me somebody else, and we arranged the camera. There has been a place called Groppi in Cairo, Groppi. It was a very posh restaurant, to have tea there. And every Saturday afternoon they had this dance for young people. And it was open by a Swiss people, Groppi. The best – when I was at school, the school, *Cours Maintenon*, was not far from Groppi. We used to go there. We used to eat cakes, *les gateaux*. We used to eat cake, very nice. So you gained weight, you eat it [laughs].

[1:34:24]

And did Cairo have an area that was sort of like a small Jewish neighbourhood, where the kosher butchers were and where the Jewish people lived?

No, kosher butcher, there is kosher butcher in Falwala, the market. There is a corner who belonged to the Jews. But in Cairo there is a special road, specially with all the synagogues, the Old Egypt. There is the synagogue of Maimonides. There is – when people – somebody’s ill, they go to sleep in Maimonides. I remember my mother used to have problems in the kidney. She used to have a stone in the kidney, so the doctor suggest that she should be operate to take off the stone. Today you break the stone with injection, but at the time no injection, they have to open the stomach. So she went to sleep there and she dreamed that she went on the seventh floor and she fell down, but when she fell down she remembered that she stand up and she was walking. She was ill seven months in the hospital. She stay seven months in the hospital. And when she came to England the kidney did not work. He damaged it, the doctor in Egypt, so she had only one kidney working. We used to go with her – I used to go with her to Vittel to have water specially for the kidney, to have three weeks there.

And who was it that told her she should try sleeping in the synagogue?

The grandmother. So myself, I used to go often to the synagogue to give money to the poor people there. I remember I used to have – in [unintelligible] it was £20 – 20 piastres. I used to give it to the poor. I remember very well.

Do you remember any special superstitions, Jewish superstitions that your grandmother or your mum had?

We used to be – my grandmother, she was the daughter of a rabbi, so she was very religious, very religious, and she was beautiful, you see. I took her to take this picture. I remember, I took her to the photographer to take this picture. She had lovely skin. All the family, like my mother, very nice skin.

What was her name?

Nonna, Nonna Setty. We used to call her Nonna, that's all. She used to repeat, "*Ba'adi*, yes, *ba'adi*, *ba'adi*". Badi means, yes, "after me" [laughs]. She was such a good lady. She make, I told you, embroidery especially with a special – she had a special thing. She used to make – like laces, laces. She told me, "So you remember me." "This is for you," she used to tell me. From time to time I light her a candle. I don't remember when she died. I know that it was summer but I don't remember when.

She's buried in Egypt?

You know, during the war the Egyptians, they took off the dead, and where there is a tomb with marble, they sleep in, you know, in Cairo. In Egypt all the cemeteries are guarded with a high wall, but in Cairo it was a disaster. You know, in Egypt after 700,000 people, there is four million. All the people from the inside, they came to Cairo, so they didn't have where to sleep, so they were sleeping in the cemetery. So in Egypt they used to do special marble thing for cemetery, so the people used to sleep there. So we don't know what happened. I don't know – even in Alexandria, I went to visit the temple of my uncle, I couldn't find it. I went with my son, we couldn't find it. We have an uncle who left us his property in Egypt, and the property,

some of the money go to *bechor cholim* [Heb: sick people]. So during the war, when the people left Egypt, the government ask stamp duty to pay all the money on the houses. The people who are not there to pay, the house was taken from them. They lost it. Yes. Well, during the war it happened. You hear terrible things happened during the war.

So when you went back 20 years ago to Egypt, it didn't feel like home any more to you?

Yes. You know what happened? I had here a friend of us, now he passed away, his brother was at the embassy. He was second in the embassy, the Jewish embassy in Egypt. So we went to him. Till I get in touch with him you don't know how many they took us – they ask us how many questions to there. But when we get in, he gave me a car, so we went shopping, we went – going all round. Yes, it was very nice visit. So we have been lucky really because I had this connection, who had confidence that we are not spy, we are friendly older brother of him of London, so he help us a lot in Egypt, to go to Hal Haleel, to go to visit – he used to go to visit the museum of the king. I don't know. I don't know what else. We went to several places. I had this cousin in Alexandria. Also I was lucky because the cousin in Alexandria took me to the Sporting club. We went to visit Stanley Bay, see the beach. No, it was very nice. But we didn't went to visit the- *la haute Egypte* we didn't, no, at the time. We didn't. I went to visit the property that we have in Egypt, that's why. A flat is rent for five shillings [laughs], the conversion, it was something. So the lawyer told me it's not worth it to sell. We are expecting to have peace with Israel, so we have seven shops, we can make a bank downstairs. It's a very good area in Alexandria, the house. Anyways, it's only money. Don't speak about money. Money go and come. To have a good time is better.

What special Egyptian Jewish traditions have you passed onto your grandchildren?

To go to the synagogue Saturday morning [laughs]. When the twins – my daughter had twins. When they were young I used to take them every Saturday to the synagogue, and I used to sing them in French, songs that I know, I used to teach to the school when I was a teacher. And after the *bar mitzvah* they stopped going to the synagogue. I told Alexandra, one of the granddaughter, “Do you remember the songs?” She began to laugh [laughs].

Any special Egyptian Jewish food that you make that your grandchildren have been able to have with you?

Look, when my husband was alive, I used to invite Friday evening every night the children, every night. Now I stop inviting, I've no strength, but from time to time I make a cake or I make small *rosquitas*. They're – my daughter loved them. Even the neighbour, my daughter's neighbour, lovely. I do also – I do the lemon, lemon *corsido*. I put the lemon – I put it in olive oil for six months and then we eat it. So it was – the children doesn't like this. The oldest people – my brother like them. How I do the olives also.

Is there a special message that you would like to give to somebody watching the interview, maybe future generations, about –

Keep Shabbat. As my father said, you have to keep Shabbat. Have it in mind.

Thank you very much for your time. We've enjoyed interviewing you.

Thank you.

[Pause]

Mademoiselle Dwek, can you tell us who is in this picture?

It's my mother's grandfather.

Your great grandfather?

Yes. He was born in Aleppo and he get blind, I think, when he was young. My cousin told me he fell on the ice and he get blind. And he was very famous for his poetry and he used to compose with a friend of his, some music that now they are doing in New York. In New York he get some followers who use his music and what he has left. I have cousin – I told you, I have cousins in Montreal, they are related – they are also – there is – *c'est leur grand-père*, it's their –

myself, it's *grand-grand-père, mais c'est leur grand- père*. So they have all – they are very religious. They inherited from the rabbi, I think, the *shomer Shabbat* and ...

What language is his poetry in?

I think it was in Hebrew. I think it was in Hebrew, because here there is some words they are telling that he composed. You can read it, some of – somebody wrote. This is my cousin in Israel, the one who live in Haifa, she gave me those pictures. It was her grandfather.

C'est mon mariage, c'est le jour de mon mariage à la synagogue de Koubbeh Garden. C'est là où habité mes beaux-parents pour quelques années durant l'occupation des anglais qui étaient au Caire. Mes beaux parents étaient habités à Koubbeh Garden pour un quartier beaucoup plus tranquille que le centre de ville.

And who is this man here?

Ça c'est le rabin, le rabin qui est officier ce jour là, et il m'a donné un papier, un serment pour mettre la bague, quelque chose comme ça.

And who is this lady here?

Et à côté, c'est ma belle mère qui était à côté, du côté de son fils. Durant la cérémonie.

[Pause]

Can you tell us about these pictures?

Well generally, en hiver, au Caire,

In the winter?

In the winter in Cairo, the Sunday morning, they used to invite the girl – the boy used to invite the girl to go to horse riding. So I have myself a special outfit, and so I was very pleased to go there. They used to invite us for a ride. Sometimes we go – we go on bicycle, from Cairo till the Pyramids on bicycle, and there we take the – and there we take the horses. I have a picture of mine, I think, bicycle, no? Did you see it? No? Cycling through the Sunday morning.

On allait, moi, j'habitais le centre, c'était loin, c'était loin, une fois c'était fort de pédaler. C'était très gentils, les garçons. Very helpful. Oui. Ils sont juifs? Oui oui.

Next picture?

The all the staff of the school. The school, the name was Lycee Franco-Egyptienne. It was all the staff of the school. When they decide – the *directrice*, Madame – I forgot her name ... Madame ...

The lady in the middle?

I cannot see.

It's a French lady?

Oh yes. The top are all French. *La directrice* – the direction used to be French people. There's Madame--.

And this is a school where you worked?

Yes. I used to study in the school at the beginning when we came to Cairo, I used to study in the school, and then after finishing my baccalaureate at the other school, at the *Cours Maintenon*, and the director of – they told me, “If you are not going to study in Europe, why don't you come to be a teacher, to study to be a teacher?” I stay with – I used to work for three years and then I was studying during the night. A bus used to take me every – twice a week to the school, to the

Lycee Franco-Egyptienne, or on *les Police* we used to go, on the whole of Cairo. We used to go to study there.

And in the second picture?

I was teacher at the same school where I was – I have been working with the older teacher.

[Pause]

Very nice picture. I think I used to have 30 children. Did you count here how many? *Deux quatre, cinq*

24, maybe 25. Yeah, close to 30. Close to 30, definitely.

And I tell you, when I talk to them, “Be quiet,” they had to be quiet. I used to ... shh.

And tell me, what kind – the backgrounds of these children. Where were they from, these children?

All Jewish coming, all Jewish. There is some not very rich, something with – a mixture, but not very poor. There is poor school for-- *la goutte de lait*, not this college.

Did the school have any religion classes, any Judaism classes?

No, no, nothing. Nothing.

[Pause]

To do the – it’s not normal knitting. You have to knit one and one, you take it without knitting, so it will be thicker.

[Pause]

So who is in this picture?

It's me when I was still at school. I was perhaps 16 or 17. I sent this picture to my brother, who used to study in le Chapelle in France. He went to study something about machinery, textile machinery. We used to have, in Alexandria, a very nice beach and we used to spend three months' holiday every year to Alexandria from Cairo. And I used to go every day to the beach and become chocolate, exactly like dark chocolate. You know something very beautiful in Egypt? The summertime, the boys used to invite the girls to go dancing and they used to buy them necklaces in flowers. And you know also, when the lady has more – more boys, they gave her poor girl [laughs] a necklace of flowers, and it was dancing, very nice Saturday dancing. I used to have a friend, every week he used to invite me dancing. Every week he used to give me a present, not too grand, *a boucle d'oreille*, something small. Yes, I was 17. And the boys, when he go to the girl, he never kiss her. He kiss the hand.

[Pause]

Can you tell us who is in this picture?

There is two top employees of the shop I used to have in Peru, Lima. They used to help me a lot. One of the ladies used to keep accountability, because in Peru everything was sell *en credit*. The clients used to be from government, business office, some insurance companies, and they come and pay every week, or every month anyway – every month, I think. Every 15 days the employees used to be paid, and the client, they come to pay their weekly, monthly payment and they buy new things.

[Pause]

Is that you?

No.

Oh, I thought it was you.

No, this was the – she was an Italian lady, and the other one, the one with the necklace, she was a Peruvian.

Oh sorry I thought -

This picture was taken in my home in Lima, Peru. I decide to do this picture. There has been a couple coming, refugees from Argentina, they came to Lima, so I want to help them, so I took several pictures for me and the children together.

[Pause]

Can you tell me about this picture?

This is a picture taken for the *Bat Mitzvah* of the twins, my daughter's two lovely girls. We take all the family. We managed to have everybody taken in this picture, my brother, my sister-in-law, my nephew, the wife, the children. All the family have gathered in this lovely picture, a nice souvenir of the family.

[End of recording 1:57:25]