

Sephardi Voices UK

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Sephardi Voices UK.

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the Oral History curators at the British Library prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

**Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road
London
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk**

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform the Oral History curators (oralhistory@bl.uk).

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	Sephardi Voices UK
Ref. no:	SV90
British Library C. Number:	

Interviewee Title:	Mrs
Interviewee Surname:	Dangoor
Forename:	Doreen
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	26/09/1927
Interviewee POB:	Baghdad, Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Housewife
Father's Occupation:	Publisher
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

Date of Interview:	23/10/2018
Location of Interview:	London, UK
Name of Interviewer:	Dr Bea Lewkowicz
Recording Format:	Video
Total Duration (HH:MM):	02:54
Copyright/Clearance:	Yes

Additional Material:	Photographs
Interviewer Comments:	

Today is the 23rd of October 2018 and we are conducting interview with Mrs Doreen Dangoor and my name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Can you please tell me your name?

Doreen Dangoor.

And when were you born?

I was born in Baghdad in 1927.

Thank you very much, and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for Sephardi Voices.

My pleasure.

Doreen, can you tell us a little bit, in general, about your family background?

Well, where do you want me to start? My grandfather was the Chief Rabbi in Iraq. And – and we all lived in Iraq all the time, my parents, we – my brothers, and we all lived in Iraq and that was our birthplace, and that was where we lived all the time. Yeah.

Tell me a little bit about the grandparents. Who were they and –?

Well, I don't remember myself really, my grandfather, because he passed away when I was a baby. But what I hear from everybody, he was a very well respected Rabbi, in Baghdad, and he wrote many books that the family still has them now. And some of them were published by my brother Naim and – and he was recognised by everybody, even outside Iraq. And I know that many times they wrote him letters asking him about some interpretation in the religion from abroad [00:02:02]. And when he passed away, all the schools in Baghdad closed that day for the funeral and – and what I hear, about a thousand people went to his funeral. And yes, they all remembered him very well, they closed the Jewish schools and, yes, that's what I hear of my parents.

Yes. And what was his name, for the record? What was his name?

Hacham Ezra Dangoor.

Yeah. And when the funeral was – he was – you were already born when he died?

I was born.

Yeah.

Yes, but I can't remember anything, I was a baby.

Yeah. So Doreen, what are your first memories of growing up in Baghdad?

Well, very pleasant. Very nice. I mean – we were very happy there. We were a happy family. I was born after four brothers and I was a little bit pampered by my brothers. I was the first girl that they wanted, a girl. And my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, she wanted her name although it was unusual for a living person to name after, when they were living. But she insisted to have her name, so my name is Doreen Habiba. She wanted her name and she called me after her.

She got her wish.

Yeah. That was her wish.

Mhmm. And how much older were your brothers?

How?

How much older were your brothers?

My brothers? Well, they um, I was born in '97 – 1927, the youngest one was born in '21 [00:04:08]. So there was a difference and my eldest was born in 1914.

That's Abudallah.

Abudallah.

Yeah.

Yeah. So yes, I was the youngest and this is why I got pampered by all of them [laughs].

So tell us a little bit about the house where you lived and what you – what you can remember.

Yes, it was, it was very nice, very simple and, at that time, all the Jews were in the same district- so to say- nearer to school, near to synagogue, and – yeah. But afterwards, we moved out from that house. We moved to the Alwyiah, by the river, and that was the last house where we lived all these years and from where I came back to – I came to London.

Mhmm. So the first house, which area – what area of Baghdad was that? Where the Jews lived you said.

Well I don't know exact, maybe we called it 'the Torat', it means the Torah, you know cause not far from the Synagogue. Yeah.

Mmm. And what did it look like? What – do you remember the house? Was it-?

It was a house and at that time, the houses were not covered. They were open to the sky, you know, so like if it rained, it rained inside the house. All the houses were like that, not only our house. It was only afterwards they started doing the house covered, like here in Europe.

So you mean it had a courtyard?

Yeah.

Was it a courtyard?

Yeah. Inside. Yes [00:06:04].

Mmm.

Yes.

And you lived there with your parents?

My parents, and my grandparents. That was the done thing at the time.

Yes.

The grandparents never lived alone, they used to live – they lived with one of their children. As my uncles – one uncle was in China, and my oldest uncle – the eldest one – was married already and had his own house, so my father was the only one left and he lived with my grandparents and they continued to live with us till they passed away. We were very lucky to have them.

And what do you remember? Tell us the names and what they were like.

The names of my grandparents? Well, I told you one is [*Bea: yes*] Hacham Ezra Dangoor and my grandmother was Habiba.

Okay so those were the – so sorry I thought it was the other ones. Yes.

Yeah, so Habiba, she was the one who gave her name to me.

Yes –

So I'm Doreen Habiba.

And do you remember her vividly? What was she like?

Oh, she was very nice person. Really, very generous. She liked to help the poor, and um, while my grandfather passed away, I can't remember him, but I remember her very clearly because she lived till 1937. And every morning, she used to call me and ask me to help her to read the prayers of the morning. Every morning I remember that very clearly. She used to call me, 'Habiba, come and help me,' [laughs]. So, she – she was very nice.

And you read the prayers?

Yes. Yes. Every morning till the end, she used to say the morning prayers [00:08:01].

And who else? Did you have servants who lived in the house?

Oh yes. Always in Baghdad. It was the done thing. I mean, not like here, it was the done thing to have servants with a big family like that. Yes.

Mmm, and both houses, also in the – in your first house?

Yes.

Yeah. And tell us a little bit when – when did your parents get married? When?

My parents got married in 1913. Iraq was still under the Ottoman Empire at that time.

Yeah.

Yes. they got married in 1913.

And how did they meet? Were they introduced? Were there –

Yeah, they were introduced. That was the done thing in Baghdad. I mean, nobody met somebody just like that [laughs], boyfriend, girlfriend.

Yeah. And were they cousins as well or were there [both talking at once].

No. They were strangers.

Right.

Yeah.

Mmm. And what about – you talked about your father's parents, what about your mother's parents?

Yes. My mother's parents. My – my mother's mother died when I was very young. I don't have a lot of recollection about her. But her – my mother's father lived till he was a hundred and he was a very nice person. And I remember when I used to visit him, as a young girl wearing short dresses and all, he used to tell me 'binti', it means, you know, daughter, 'Make it next time one inch longer.' [laughs] I still remember that [laughs].

And where did he live?

He lived with my uncle [00:10:00], again with his son you know, that's the done thing in Iraq. Grandparents never lived alone. Always with one of the sons.

And was it far from you, from where you lived?

At the beginning yes. But eventually when we moved to the Alwiyah, we were very near – very near each other.

So he didn't like your skirt, the length of your skirt?

[laughs]

Yeah. And what was his profession? This – that grandfather?

What?

His profession. What was –

My grandfather. I really don't remember.

Mmm.

I supposed he was just in business because he was already retired when I grew up to – so he was very old, so I don't know what was his profession.

Mmm. And you said you lived quite near the synagogue?

At the beginning.

Yeah. At the beginning. Tell us which synagogue was that.

There – my grandfather used to go to one synagogue. They called it his synagogue actually and there is a picture of it with my grandfather, standing in Or Yehudah in Israel. Yeah. That is – they called it the 'big synagogue.'

Is it the picture with the sort of flag? Or there's something in the background.

He was standing in front.

Yes.

Infront of the Hechal.

Yes. Yes. And where – what is the name of the synagogue?

The – the Big Synagogue they used to call it. Yes.

And do you –?

And also, there was a – another synagogue I remember, the school – the boys' school. On Saturday, it used to transform it into a synagogue [00:11:58].

And what was the name of the school?

Alliance School.

The Alliance School. The boys' school.

The *Alliance Boys' School*. Yep. Our school was the, again, the *Alliance*, but was the girls' school – Laura Kadoorie.

And the Laura Kadoorie was in a different location?

No. It was few yards from each other. Yep.

So the boys school became a synagogue on Shabbat.

Yeah.

Mhmm. And did you go to Synagogue?

Sometimes, not always. But my brothers went. My father made sure that they went.

So at that point, did the girls get a very different education from the boys?

Yeah, in a way. I mean it was not, er, so necessary for the girls.

Yeah. Wasn't demanded.

But the boys, really, they were very strict with them.

Mmm.

Yes.

Well so tell me about your school please, the Laura Kadoorie.

It was a very good school, very, very good school. All the teach – most of the teachers came from abroad, for the English, for the French. We had – French principal you know, the – the director and it was really very good school, and I'm thankful that we got our education there because we learnt Arabic, French and English. And when I came to Europe to France, I spoke French. Came to London, I spoke English and nobody believed that – we learnt all this in Baghdad. It was very good.

But your main language at home was Arabic.

Arabic. Yes.

Mmm.

And we did exam in all the – all the languages [00:13:57].

Yeah. And what sort of friends did you have? Do you remember your friends from childhood?

Friends?

Mmm.

Yeah. All these years back. I mean... the friends that I had then, either they went to Israel or America or – so really from my class, um I still have one friend from – who lives in America; Berta Shohet and we are still in touch. It's a –

From the original class, from the class?

Yes. yeah. We were together at school.

Mhmm.

Yeah. But otherwise, we are dispersed, everyone in a different place.

Yeah. And did you go to any youth or any clubs or a youth – youth things?

In Baghdad?

Yeah.

Yes. There was next door to us, the Alwyiah Club where I went sometimes, yes, and there were other clubs, yes of course. There were other clubs; Rafidein, the few other clubs that we belong to, the clubs. And we used to go and meet there. Yeah. We – we had very nice life, there.

So was it mostly – was it also among the family? It was quite a big family.

Very big family, yes.

So was it lot of family gatherings and-?

Yes. Yes. We had family gathering, like on Shabbat and the –

So tell us about Shabbat. What would happen on Shabbat please?

Well on Shabbat, Friday night, I mean there we didn't invite, people never invited each other, they all had their family Friday nights at home [00:16:00]. Of course it's dark, the transport not easy and, um, everyone had big family so we each – we all – all families had their Friday night at home. Yes. I remember very clearly.

And what would happen in your house on a Friday night.

Friday night? At home.

Describe us a little bit what –

Well, my father used to say Kiddush, we had very nice meal, all my brothers and my sister, we were there and it was a family gathering, and, um, we all had to kiss my father's hand after he made *Kiddush*. And yes, very nice.

And at some point, your brothers were sent abroad to study?

Yes.

Yeah so –

They came to London to study, and at that time really, when I think about it, how my parents had three sons abroad at the same time. I – I feel like they were very brave because they never – there was no aeroplanes at the time. They came by boat, and the letters used to take one week to come, no telephones. So it was really – I think, they did a big sacrifice by sending them, but then at the end of course, it was very good for my brothers.

Why did you think that they sent them to England in particular?

Well, um, because Iraq was more inclined to the English language at the time and it wasn't under the rule of – of the British but the – under the influence of the British [00:18:12]. They had a big say in everything –

Yeah.

In Iraq. So it's more connected to England than to any other country.

So it made sense to –

And they – yeah. They send them to England.

Mmm. And what happened to you when you finished your schooling? What were your plans?

Well, I mean it was unheard of that they would send me abroad [laughs]. Oh, I would have loved it but it doesn't exist. It didn't exist. So when I finished school, of course I couldn't go to university because one has to mix with the Arabs and all - and we had a very sheltered life. But there was the British Institute, and I joined the British Institute with a few other friends and it was very nice.

And what-

About two years we were there. It wasn't proper lessons, but we had lectures, we had – it was very enlightening. It was very nice. We enjoyed it very much.

Mhmm.

That's the best we could do at the time.

Yes, so the expectation really was that you'd get married after the school –

Yeah. That's right.

And did people get married in your class once they finish?

Oh yes. I mean I was the youngest in my class and many girls got married while – One day, one girl doesn't come, what happened? She's getting engaged [00:20:00]. So a few girls got married. They used to get married very young.

And you said that you lived very sheltered life. Did you have any contact with Muslims and Christians?

Not as an individual. My father had many good Muslim friends but no social life with these friends. He met them during the day or, um, he had very good – and we had one – a few families

and we are still friendly with them till today. Muslimm very nice family. But on the whole, we mixed with Jewish friends.

Yeah. And what was your father's business? You said in business, he had –

My father?

Mhmm.

He had a printing – he printed all the books and in 1937, um, he printed the Iraqi Directory, which the copies are cherished still today because it has all sorts of information. It took one year for my brother – one of my brothers – and somebody else to compile all this information, going to all parts of Iraq from North to South and everything is very accurate and it was really cherished by the government because it has a lot of information.

And was the idea – was it for businesses or was it for – what was the aim at the time?

No, he didn't do it for business. He just wanted to do it, of course copies were sold, um, he didn't do it for business [00:22:06].

No, I didn't mean for his business, I meant for other businesses to use it or for other –

Yes. Yes, for other businesses, even the government.

Yes, so it was –

Even the government. And when he left Baghdad, he had few copies left and he gave it to the government. And they wrote about it in the paper at the time that it was very appreciated.

And what was it called?

Pardon?

What was it called, the –

Yeah.

The publication?

The publication? He published it in his, um, premises.

Yeah, so it was called the Iraqi –?

The – the *Mutaba'ah Dangoor*. It means Dangoor Publication.

And it came out in 1936?

Yeah. 1937.

'37. So in 1937, that's a time already where – could you feel there were any problems towards the Jewish population? I mean you were still very young. Is there anything –

Really, I don't remember many things of that period. I was very young and we – all we did, go to school and come back and – and be with the family, and we had very sheltered life.

Could you go anywhere by yourself or –?

To my friends? Yes. No, we had, we had good life. I remember and now really, I – I don't know how it was done. I went on bicycles, we had skating, we – while we had sheltered life, but we did all these things [00:24:00]. We were allowed within certain – no, we went to clubs, learnt swimming. I mean, everything, everything was – was done properly. But they looked after us.

And the clubs were Jewish clubs or-?

Jewish clubs.

Yeah.

Not the Alwyiah, The Alwyiah was an English club but other club like the Rasheed Club, the Rafidein, other clubs, they were all Jewish clubs. There were maybe one or two of Muslim people there, but it was Jew – mainly Jewish clubs

Mmm. And could you feel, let's say at the end of the 1930s, beginning of '40s, you know with the Second World War, could you feel any change towards the Jews in the-?

Yes. Yes. I mean few times, for example, they had demonstration in the street and demonstration could start for one thing and change for another, and the Jews were always afraid in case they would be attacked. And many times, for example, my father would send someone from the office to pick us, my sister and ourself from school in case when we leave, we come to any harm.

When was that? Which years?

Any time.

Uh-uh.

Any time. They used to have demonstration from time to time. So like, when we left school, we always had to go to the office to come back home to with my father, and he didn't want to, he didn't want us to walk alone for example. So if there's anything going to – not normal, he would send someone from the office to take us [00:26:04].

And those instances occurred?

Yeah it –

Mmm. And tell us maybe what the Farhud –

Yes. The *Farhud*. I mean it was really very bad time for the Jews. It happened – the month before, there was this coup in Baghdad, in Iraq, where Rashid Ali – they call it, till now they call it the month of Rashid Ali. Rashid Ali made a coup. The King was still young, maybe five, six, seven year-old. So there was a Regent, Abd al-Ilah. So the Regent and the Prime Minister, when they heard there is this coup, they ran away. They ran away, but they kept the king, and they brought another regent, and they were pro-German. Of course, the British would not allow Iraq to fall to the German, to Germany. So because it was very important route for them to India. So they used to send aeroplanes every day and my brother, Naim, happened to be an officer in the army then on the outskirts of Baghdad, and really every time the British aeroplanes came, while we were happy that we might be – that Baghdad might be liberated, at the same time, we were very anxious about my brother, because he was on the outskirts of Baghdad, and every time to aeroplanes left, he used to telephone home and say, ‘I’m alright.’
[00:28:07]

It took one month, and at the end of the month, the British won. The King and the Prime – the King was there, but Abd al-Ilah, the Regent, and the Prime Minister, all the old come back – came back. At that time, for two days, the transition, we had no government, no proper government and the people went mad, and they started looting, and killing, and they call it *Farhud*. Till now it’s remembered. I mean it was – we didn’t feel it at the beginning, till the driver came home to us in the morning, and he told my father, ‘You are not going anywhere today.’ In town, we were a little bit, in Alwyiah, which was on the outskirt, he said, ‘In town, it’s horrible.’ So that was the – they looted houses, they killed people just to take their possession. The gold and all. And I tell you, they say some children who had gold bracelet, that they couldn’t remove, they cut their hand to remove the bracelet. It lasted for two days until the – the army came and, er, everything was quiet again.

So where were you during – at that time? Where?

We were at home. We stayed at home.

You stayed at home?

No [00:30:00]. We went to our Muslim friends. We had Muslim friend. My brother was partner with their son, and they were very nice. We are still friendly with them now.

And you went to their house –

And they asked us to go there. They lived round the corner from us and, er, my father and my brother stayed at home. They said it not safe for the women, to stay at home. It's better if they come to us, and we went to them. We stayed there three days.

So you –

And everything was alright. Nobody attacked our house because my brother was in the army and the major, the general of the army, he – he came that day and he told my brother, 'Don't come today,' to the army, 'Everything is upside down,' and he left two soldiers at the door. He said, 'You stay here till I come back in the evening.' So like our house was protected otherwise it would have been looted also.

In your neighbourhood, the houses were looted?

Not far from us, yes. They did some looting.

So you personally didn't see any –

No.

Looting or anything because you were inside?

That's right. We didn't see anything. Yeah. It's only what we heard afterwards.

But your classmates saw?

Yeah.

Your friends?

Yeah.

Mhmm. And were you – what were you feeling at the time? Were you – you were still quite young.

Yeah of course, you know, we – one gets nervous. Some people left Iraq after that incident you know. And then things settled down and you forget [00:32:01]. That's human nature. I mean where would one go? My father wasn't really happy to leave the country at that time. So yes, we continued to live. And it was – it was good.

But some of your friends or school friends left after the Farhud?

Very few, very few. But it was only after 1948, after Israel came into existence, then that was the big Exodus.

Yeah. Not from 41' to 48'?

Yes. It was normal again. Normal life.

Yeah.

Normal life. As I said before, we were always careful. Always careful.

Tell me a little bit about that mentality. What does it mean, to be careful?

Er. Well – well what it means, I mean, when the Jews never show off. You know, there was few incidents for example on Yom Kippur when people walk home from synagogue. Little things like that, and, I don't know, we came to, accepted it somehow. To live – we lived with it. We lived with it. I mean now looking back, what is the alternative? So people stayed there, and continued to be careful. But I tell you, in general, we had a good life. On the whole, we had a good life.

So, careful. What do you mean by careful? So not too –

Not to show off.

Yeah.

Not to show off. Not to go to certain places you know. This is, er, this is careful [00:34:06].

So not to go to what places? Like –

To what places? No, for example, at night or [pauses] just to be on our guard.

Yeah. And how could you be, at that point, identified as being Jewish?

Well, the Jews, first of all, they didn't cover their faces or – although most of the Muslims didn't. And somehow they knew, somehow it's known who is a Jew and who is not; from what we wear. It not – it wasn't much different, a little bit different –

Like what? [both talking at once]

The Jews were a bit more modern.

Yeah. And language?

And, a language, yes.

Can you tell us about the languages?

[laughs] Well, we studied the language at school which is the same as Muslims schools. But the language that we speak has a little bit different, and you can tell, whether it's Muslim. But we can speak it also with the accent of the Muslim, but what can tell?

So you could switch between the accents or?

Yeah. Yeah, the accent is a bit different [both talking at once]. But the Jews were – the Jews, they were known, they were known. They could tell a – a Jew. I mean, and mostly as I said, when they leave synagogue or things like that –

Right.

Then they know this – these are Jews.

So with the accent? Just – can you give us an example? For example, what would be-?

[laughs] [00:35:58] Well, for example if we say ‘yukool’, we say ‘yuckol.’ They say ‘igool’, ‘igool.’ You know things, things like that.

And what does it mean?

To say ‘he said.’

Okay.

‘He said.’ ‘Igool’, it means he said. ‘Igool’, we say it with a *Kaff*. Yeah. Actually, it’s more proper with ... a *Kaff* than when they say.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So the language – people could tell.

Yeah. You could tell.

A language.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Mmm. And clothing to some extent?

That's right.

Yeah. And names also? By name?

Yes. Names were different. Specially, you know, we always call after grandfather, so these old names, they carry on. And, er, Muslim have different names, but there are some names that are similar or the same. Like my name is Doreen, which is not Jewish and not Arabic and not – so it became more modernised afterwards.

So, and your parents, it's interesting because you and your sister have sort of modern names, but your brothers –

Yeah.

Have more –

More, more traditional names.

Yes. Is that correct?

Yeah, because they always call after a member of the family. And with boys – so when we were born, my boys were older already, and I think, I never asked, but I think they had an influence into our naming [laughs] [00:37:59]

Your brother?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. Like they read papers and all, and maybe they influenced my parents. But anyway, I have the name Habiba –

Yes.

As a second name.

Yes. Yeah. Which is interesting.

So a lot of people were given another name, a more – more modern name.

And do you think there were people at the time who wanted to change names to something more Arabic?

Yes. Afterwards, they started, you know, even though they give a first name after a grandfather or an uncle, the proper name they call – they are called by is for Arabic. There are many people.

For example?

For example, some people like called Sabah, it's very Muslim name. Or, they never call names like Ahmad or too – too Muslim, you know –

Yeah.

But there are names like Sabah, like things like that which is, um, more on the Arabic side.

Mmm. Yeah. And it's related in a way to ones Iraqi identity or how one felt. So when you grew up, how did you feel?

In what way?

In terms of your identity.

Yeah, I was very comfortable. We were very comfortable, I mean, um, as I say, we were always taught to be careful. It came natural, you know –

Yeah.

Not to show off, and all, but we were – we were careful, but it was normal, we didn't feel – We went to school every day, we did all sorts of things, my brothers played tennis, and [00:40:00] we had very normal life and, um, I can say westernised –

Yeah.

Even though we lived in an Arab country. It was very westernised.

Mhmm. and then you said '48 there was a change?

'48.

Yeah.

When Israel came into existence.

So how did that impact on your lives?

Well, again, we got used to the idea of having to be sort of careful.

More careful?

More careful. More careful. And yeah, some people were imprisoned and they say, you know, you had connection with Israel, or, at the time, really, if we had letters from Israel and all, we burned them all. We didn't want, in case they would come and search the house.

And did you have connections to Israel? Did you have some relatives?

No. The connection, like we had, um, we had family in Israel, we had family who lived in the '30s. We had letters, for example. Yeah. These we threw away and in, in case they would come and visit the house and finding something. And some people really were connected in a way, like letters, like things, like just wanting to make trouble for them. And some people went to prison for that [00:41:57]. So eventually, er, Shlomo Hillel came to Baghdad on the – on behalf of Israel but he didn't come as Israeli. He came with a British Passport to negotiate for the Jews to leave Iraq with the Jewish community and with the government. He came with a British passport. He happens to be my mother's cousin actually, but he didn't get in touch with anybody, none of us, because it would've killed us. He knew it wasn't right and he never – nobody knew his identity and um, he used to – I have a book he wrote afterwards. And he was the one who negotiated.

And what was his real name? Or his –

Shlomo Hillel. But he came and – a British name with a British Passport. Very, very British name. I forgot what it is.

Right.

And he's not tall, dark, and [laughs] in Baghdad, we have – they call it, you know, the mosquito of Baghdad. I have one here. It never goes. If it bites somebody, the mark never goes. But he had it big on his face. So one day they ask him, they say Armstrong – his name was Armstrong [laughs], Armstrong, and he used to meet – he speaks Arabic very well but of course he never spoke Arabic, and he used to meet all the Jews and the Muslims and negotiate with them about. [00:41:57] So one day they asked him, they say, 'You don't look British, how come?' He said – I don't know how he invented that story – he said, 'My father was in the army and he served in India and he married an Indian girl [laughs] and I was born.' And they said, 'How come you

have this on your face?’ He said, ‘My father was stationed in Aleppo.’ [laughs] There also they get this, ‘and then I was bitten by [laughs] this mosquito.’

And what was the real story? When did he leave? He was from Baghdad?

He left there; his family left Baghdad when he was eleven years old in the ‘30s.

To Israel? To Palestine?

To Israel. Yes. They settled there but he is very, very pro-Israel. He’s very – he was a minister of, you know, and then he was second to the President. Until now, we are in touch with him so one day he heard that people are starting to recognise him, for example, someone who looked – who worked in the office of his father came one day to my mother. He said, ‘I can swear I saw your cousin in the streets.’ She said, ‘Will you shut your mouth. I don’t want to hear anything about it. You want to kill us all?’ I mean if they know, you know, really, we – we would all be killed. She said, ‘Shut your mouth and don’t speak. I don’t want to know anything.’

But –

So when he – when he realised that – they started to recognise him, he took the plane and left.

So how long was he there for?

He was there for a little while, but he arranged everything. The *aliyah* was arranged by him. Everything was arranged by him. And then eventually, the aeroplanes came to take the Jews, to Cyprus and Israel, and the Jews were allowed to leave only with one suitcase and leave everything behind. Everything. So people started to register, who wants to go. And they registered. And then it’s human nature I suppose, one gets lax. They saw that they did take their belongings then, so people started buying – not selling the houses. At the beginning, they sold the houses and they registered and then nothing happened. They saw nothing happened. People had money in the bank and they could go and draw money in the bank. So they left it. And the day – and this lasted one year, to register, and the day the registration finished, the government put their hands on everything. One man was at the bank, drawing money, and he

took the money and instead of leaving he just wanted to check if it's the right money, and he was counting it and the order came to the bank and seize all the – he took back the money from him [00:41:57]. Had he left a minute earlier, it would have been alright and then the Jews could not sell their houses anymore. And, they had to leave with one suitcase and um, and I know some women really, they put six dresses, one on top of the other. They said when we go there, we need dresses. The suitcase is for – really, they put six dresses.

One woman, she had some gold coins and her husband is very careful, he wouldn't allow her to do anything. So without telling him, she made a cake and she put the coins in the cake, and when they went to the airport, the – it just happened, that person, you know, they ask them anything to declare, they said, 'That's all we have' and all. He was so nice to them, extremely nice. He didn't look into their suitcase. He didn't look into their clothes. And the man was so impressed, he took the cake and gave it to him [laughs]. The women could not open her mouth. If she said something, they will hang her immediately. So she left, leaving the cake [laughs]. I mean this, this person will go home and he will have a treasure with all these gold coins. I mean things like this happened and um, this is - . One year [00:50:00], '51, they closed the passports, no Jews can go anywhere because they wanted to distinguish between those who want to leave and lose their nationality, or those who want to stay. They didn't want the people to go to England, to America. So, that was one year. So after the *Aliyah* finished, they opened the passport. So that was '52, and my father said, 'Let's go on a holiday to Europe.' England didn't give visas so we went to France and this is the beginning of my life [laughs].

So just to go back a little bit, um, to this Shlomo Hillel, I'm curious –

Yeah.

So he's English with no accent? He managed to speak –

No, he speaks very good English.

So he could pass as an Englishman?

Yeah. He – yeah. He pretended to be Mr Armstrong [laughs], an Englishman. He wrote a book, I have – I'll show you the book afterwards.

Okay.

Yeah. He pretended to be an Englishman and he invented that story, and after he finished with Iraq he went to Persia, to Iran. Iran was under the Shah. My brother lived there at the time, my brother Selim, third brother, and when he was there, he was in a restaurant. He went to arrange with the – that they accept the Jews who are coming illegally. That was after the Jews left Iraq, when the passports were closed and the Jews could not leave, he arranged with Iran, the Shah who was there, that they close their eyes to the Jews who came there [00:52:20]. He entered the restaurant, and my brother was there and he saw my brother, recognised him, although they didn't see each other for a few years, and immediately he sent a note with the waiter to my brother. He told him, 'Please don't come and speak to me, I will contact you tomorrow.' And he contacted my brother the next day, and my brother helped him a lot. He knew many people there. He helped him a lot. But there, it wasn't like in Iraq. I mean in Iraq, it was forbidden, but he preferred – he was with people and he didn't want to be known the any – to anyone. Yeah. He did a lot. A lot of – and he used to sit with the Jews and they said he's so – afterwards he was telling us, they say, you know, 'He's so nice,' 'Let's make him Masgouf.' Masgouf is the fish. It's a very Arabic dish. 'Do you know what is Masgouf?' He said, 'No. What is Masgouf?' You know [laughs], pretending he doesn't know anything [laughs].

Amazing.

Amazing. Yeah.

But – what – but your family, did they consider to go to Israel or to take [both talking at once]

My – our family? No. My father didn't want to go and my brother didn't want to go, and we stayed in Baghdad. And life after that became normal.

But then of course the community was much smaller?

Much smaller [00:54:02].

Yeah.

Hundred thousand Jews left.

So did many of your friends leave?

Oh yes.

Yeah.

A lot. A lot. But my father wasn't interested to go to Israel.

And you? You were a teenager.

We did. Yeah. We did want – yeah. We had comfortable life there. We were alright. We didn't – we didn't want to go. I mean, you're asking me now, it never occurred to us to even think about it.

Yeah.

So we – we didn't go. And life became normal after that. 1952, we took passport, we came to Europe, everything was fine and, er ...

What happened to all the properties? I mean the Jews left – must've left lots of things –

Well it depends. Those who went to Israel, those who could sell before register - during that year or before registering - it's okay. Those who left, it was confiscated. And then afterwards they say Jews cannot sell any property – those remaining, they cannot sell any property. And then eventually, they said, 'Okay, they are free to sell.' My father had a big property. Shops underneath and flats above and, um, they called him, and they said, 'Sign a paper, you will not sell this property.' My father is very brave person, he's not – not a coward, and he said he

thought about it [00:56:02]. That was the time when Jews were disappearing. You don't know where they are, and he said, 'If I didn't sign that paper' – afterwards he signed it and when he came home, he told my mother, 'If I didn't sign that paper, they would have taken me and the property,' you know. I mean, he's the type who is brave, he's never be – he wasn't a coward at all –

But he realised.

But he was very wise. He realised, if he doesn't sign, they will – he won't get out of that office.

Which year? When was that?

In – in the ... maybe in the '60s. In the '60s. I – I don't know what year exactly

Later

In the '60s, because for a long period Jews could not sell their property. So, this is – and the property is still there.

What's the address? Where is it?

It is in – in the north of Baghdad. It's very nice. Our Muslim friends, they used to go to Baghdad and come back and all. She said one day we went there and we pretended we don't know – they know about it, and they said, 'Oh it's a nice property, who does it belong to?' [laughs] They said, 'It belongs to a Jew who left Baghdad.' [laughs].

So they know about it?

They know about it. Yeah. So –

So what about you when you received the passport?

My passport?

Yes. You received your passport, in order to travel?

Yeah. We – we – yeah [00:58:00]. We, it was normal after that. After the Jews left to Israel, it was normal. We take a passport and they give the Jews three months only. If you don't come back, you lose your nationality.

Mhmm.

Like those who went to Israel, unless you are studying or you are under treatment. So when we came to Paris, and Albert came and we met and, um, you know. So, like, there was a Jewish doctor, he gave my mother that she is in the treatment and she needs someone to help her. Me. So they extended our passport. We extended it twice, you know [both talking at once]. But we can't go on – my mother went back to Baghdad, so – so it was really very normal, and of course I can't extend my passport anymore, and as I said, the Ambassador was at our wedding. So I can't extend my passport, and he told me, he said, 'What do you do?' 'What do you need there; the Iraqi passport for? You need to have visa anytime you travel anywhere and restriction. Go and follow the nationality of your husband.'

So when you came to Paris, you had no intention of staying.

No.

You were thinking of going back to Baghdad?

No. Absolutely not. We just came on holiday.

And that's what happened?

Yeah. And that's it.

And tell us, how – did you have a relative in France?

Yeah.

Why did you go to France?

Yeah. My brother, my younger brother, was in France at the time and the brother of my husband, that's my cousin, he [01:00:00] was in France that time.

And what were they doing in France? What was your brother doing in France?

My brother just came. He wasn't doing anything yet. And my cousin was in business there.

What?

Having business. And my future husband came to visit my parents and we – we came close and he asked me, you know, to marry him, and yes. And that's how I stayed here.

And –

And they went back to Baghdad, but after few months. I mean they didn't go back immediately.

And at the time, what did you about not going back or moving to England? You knew, probably, because you knew probably that, because your husband was

In England. Yeah. In England.

So, yeah.

Yeah. It was a bit difficult for me to start with. No family. No friends. Everyone in the Iraqi community was much, much older than me [laughs]. Much older than me. And then my husband said, you know, 'All those people, they used to invite me all the time. Now we have to invite them.' [laughs] I thought to myself, with what? [laughs] Once I phoned the butcher, the kosher butcher, and I said, 'I want one broiler and one roaster. Can you please put a thread on the roaster?' He said, 'You mean you can't tell the broiler from the roaster?' I said, 'No.'

[laughs] So, yeah [01:02:00]. This is how it started, and I started asking recipes. Even I wrote my – to my mother to ask her for recipes for certain things - slowly, slowly.

Because you were not used to cooking?

No, no. In Baghdad, we didn't have to do any cooking, you know. I knew how to make some cakes. But having said that, maybe I knew a bit, what I saw. I mean, all I needed, the proper recipe and that I could, um –

So when you met in – in Paris, so Albert was your cousin?

Yeah.

But he was older than you?

Yeah. Oh, nine year older than me. He came to study. In England, his two elder brothers were in business, in England, and – and he didn't want to go back, he felt he want to join them. You see at that time, the Jews, they were all big families, and not like now, the bank and this and that. You know. One has to trust somebody –

Yeah.

So big families, they always had somebody outside that did business with someone in – in Baghdad.

Mhmm.

Even my uncle who lived in India, he had a brother in Manchester.

Yes.

And like this, they make accounts eventually, you know, they trust each other and they make, er, the account – not like dealing with strangers.

So you have a network or –

That's sort of network.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So it wasn't unusual to have –

Yeah [01:04:01].

Family members in – in different places?

Yeah.

Mmm. And what was the business, what were they doing, the brothers, that your husband – in England?

They – they were doing export in Iraq and import and things like that and –

What were they exporting and what were they importing?

All sorts of things. All sorts of things. Yeah. And my husband had another brother living in Germany at the time and they all thought – it was very friendly with the Iraqi Ambassador. And the Iraqi Ambassador gave him a flag to put on his car. Iraqi flag. So like he – as if he belongs to the Embassy. And he was very comfortable there until one day, somebody said, 'He is Jewish. He's not Muslim.' They all thought he was Muslim – 'He is Jewish.' That was the time of Hitler, you know, and when he heard that, he left his apartment and the office as it is. He left money in the bank for his secretary because he didn't know how long he will be outside. He said, 'Every month, take your money from this account, until further notice.' And he came to London. Of course he never went back. After one year, everything went.

That was lucky.

Yeah, that was lucky, really, that was very lucky. Yeah, because he thought he was under the protection. The Ambassador knew he was Jewish, but we had no problem at that time with the Muslims. But the Germans, they thought he belonged to the Embassy because he had the flag on his car. Yeah. So he came to England. [01:06:06]

Just tell me, so, what was it like coming from Baghdad to Paris? I mean, what do you remember of that trip and of the arriving?

Yeah. Well, I tell you, it was very good. In Baghdad, we had good clothes, good, you know. I mean when we came to Paris, I tell you the truth, they all asked us where did we buy our clothes from. Because in Baghdad, you know they import fabrics from Europe, from France. We get magazines, and we have dressmakers. So for a fraction of the price of Paris, we can have a dress made like we see in the magazine. So we buy the best clothes there and we go to our dressmaker and she - and when we came to Paris, they didn't believe we brought this from Iraq, you know because Iraq, they think it's all Arab and all, you know. It's very difficult for an outsider to imagine there are different cultures in the same place.

Mhmm.

And they – they didn't believe these dresses were brought from Iraq.

So you were quite well equipped –

We were –

To come to Paris?

We spoke French. I came here, I speak English and we are at home. We didn't feel – of course it's different sort of life but it's not very – not – it wasn't very hard ... for us. [01:08:05]

What about the gender issue, that suddenly you could probably move around easier and France, I would assume, were – were not-?

No. Although we went to a French school, I felt it was easier for me in London.

Than in France?

Than France. I don't know why. Maybe because my husband was established here already. So things were easy. We didn't come as strangers, both of us.

You felt closer to British culture?

Yeah. Iraq is more like, yeah. British culture. Exactly.

Mhmm.

And um, the only thing I miss the family.

Once you came to England. But just one sec. Just tell us a little bit what happened then in Paris. Your – when you got engaged?

Yeah.

And then what happened? Could you get married? Did you get married in Paris?

Yes. We got married in France. Of course, and at that time they didn't give visa to Jews to come to England. It would have been easier to come to England, so we stayed, we stayed in France –

But you told me that the Rabbi didn't want to marry you.

Yeah.

Tell us a little –

Yeah. So we decided to get married and like it was in Baghdad. In Baghdad, they plan the wedding three weeks before [laughs]. So, my – Albert, my husband to be and my father, they went to the Rabbi and they said, ‘We want to get married.’ He said, ‘Yeah, okay. Who are you?’ I mean he needs some papers. ‘Where do you come from?’ My father [01:10:00] said, ‘We come from Iraq.’ He said, ‘But I need some papers. Maybe she was married before, maybe she can’t get married, or there’s any obstruction.’ So my brothers were already in Paris. My brother, one from Sweden, came and one brother was there. It was impossible to get anything from Baghdad. Impossible. So Albert asked, ‘What about papers from England? A civil marriage in England.’ He said, ‘Yes. Civil marriage of any country in Europe I recognise.’ So my husband came to London immediately and arranged marriage on Town Hall. Three days. He paid extra to have it quick and he – my brother Naim was in London and he told me, ‘Come, we get married here.’ So at the minute it was just a formality to get married. So I came and we went to the Town Hall just for me to register that we are married. And at the time they asked my husband his name and he said Albert Dangoor, and they asked my name. I said Doreen Dangoor. He said, ‘No not yet.’ [laughs] I didn’t marry you yet. ‘What is your maiden name?’ I said Dangoor [laughs]. Okay. Dangoor. ‘What’s the first witness?’ Albert’s brother, Abdullah Dangoor. ‘What’s the second witness?’ Naim Dangoor, my brother [01:12:00]. He said, ‘You have no other name in your country?’ [laughs] ‘Only Dangoor?’ [laughs]. So, that was the joke at the time, everybody laughed. Yes, so we got our paper, we flew to Paris and we arrange with the Rabbi after little while. Three weeks, we got married there. So, now every time they asked here, if there anything, you know, ‘When did I get married?’ I have to remember the date I got married here. Not in Paris. Not the real, um – yeah.

Mhmm. And then, so [both talking at once] –

So my parents went back to Baghdad. My brother went back to Sweden – the one who came from Sweden. My parents went back to – and my sister Eileen, they went back to Baghdad. And I came to London.

And what were your first impressions coming to London?

Yeah. It was difficult, I tell you in what way it was difficult. They were still under the influence of the war. They still had ration books, for the food, and in Baghdad, we had the food. Plenty. Plenty. So, yes, I had to adjust myself. I mean, although, it wasn't very difficult with the food, you know, it wasn't like how it was during the war. But still, it wasn't plenty. In Baghdad we had really, we were spoilt. Plenty. Plenty of everything. And very fresh, very good. [01:13:59] Here it was difficult. But slowly, slowly, you know. I – I got used to it and I asked recipes from here, from there. I used to write to my mother to ask her, and um, yeah. It – it was okay.

And your husband, was he part of a community?

Yes.

Yes? And which community was that?

Yeah. Yeah, and they had also many English friends.

And what synagogue did he belong to? Did he belong to a synagogue?

Yeah. Lauderdale Synagogue.

At that time?

At that time. Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

So there was some Iraqis there already?

Yeah. Oh yes. But not as much as they have now, now they call it the Iraqi synagogue sometimes [laughs].

So there was a community?

Yeah. Yeah.

And where did he live? Where did you live at the time? Where did you come to?

The first flat we had was off Park Lane, Carrington House. It was one bedroom flat. It was very difficult to get a flat at that time. Not, not easy. And we got a flat, one bedroom, one sitting room which was very nice, and we only paid at the time, I still remember, eight guineas. At that time they still dealt with guineas. Eight guineas a week [laughs]. Maybe now its £1000 or more, even that one paid more with the station where it is. While we were looking for a permanent flat, my husband with his brothers, before the war, they lived in Barkley Court.

Uh-uh.

Yeah.

Which is where we are now.

With – with his two brothers, the one who came from Germany, and the one who lived here [01:16:03]. They lived in Barkley Court. And then, during the war, the government came and they wanted – you know we have four sections in Barkley Court – it just happened that section, they wanted it, so they had to evacuate everybody. They could to the other side and my husband said, he asked, ‘Would you want the other side also?’ They said, ‘We are in the war. We can’t tell you whether we need the other side or we don’t. It depends how long the war stays, how our needs are.’ So they took a flat in St Johns Wood, Wellington Court. So when we were looking for a flat, they brought this one. And, I thought, um, it’s too dark. I was used to different at – in Baghdad, we were by the river, very open and all. I said, ‘It’s a bit dark, let’s look at places a bit further, a house.’ He said, ‘You know I go to the office every day, from 9, I won’t get back till 6 o’clock and you are new here. I prefer that you are in a place that I know is safe. I don’t want you to stay in a house alone.’ We take it for five years [laughs], and we, and then we can move, we find something else. So.

And then –

The rest is history, we are still [laughs] – we are still here [laughs]. We are still here. [01:17:59]
I brought my mother here, in another flat downstairs where my sister is. I found it for my mother. And after my mother passed away, my sister took it, and, um –

Here you are.

We are, it's history now.

So I think we should just have a little break now.

[Pause]

So we were talking about your arrival in England.

Yeah.

So I wanted to ask you, so what, what helped you settle or how did you get into your new routine?

Well, it helped a lot that my husband lived here before. That made a big difference. We didn't come both of us struggling to find our place here. So he was well established here. He had friends, and that helped a lot. He knew the shops, he knew where I have to buy things and, um, so I – it didn't feel 100% as a newcomer.

Yeah.

That's how, um –

And what did you miss most from Baghdad?

Now or then?

Then and now.

[laughs] Well, then – that's saying I miss the family. I miss my friends. I miss the life there. It was really very hard to start with, and when friends came from Baghdad, really, I devoted all my life, I left everything to be with them all day. They wanted – they are new here, they want me, they wanted me to take them here and there [01:20:00] and I was very happy about that. It – it was my friend from Baghdad and even if were not my friend, older ones, but the life, it was different here. The, so this is what I, what I missed. The family and friend.

And now?

Now? Yes. I do think about it sometimes. But just think about it. I – I, you know, I got established here but it's – it's different now. Yeah.

So in fact your sister Eileen came to visit, did she not?

Yes.

When did she come?

She came in – let me think. It was, um, '57. I think, early '60s. Early '60s. Everybody came and stayed here with me. Everybody [laughs] and I enjoyed it, I mean everyone who came from Baghdad stayed with me.

So it was nice for you to –

Yeah.

Connect

I enjoyed, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it very much, and at the beginning it helped that my brother, who lived in Sweden, is also – I mean although not in London, but in Sweden, we were free to talk anything we want – not like, you know – because to Baghdad, I used to write a letter and read it ten times. Not for me, for them. I am afraid to ask how you are in case they open it and they say why you are not well, are asking about them or [01:22:03]. So I didn't want to create any trouble for them. So I really – I read the letter ten times before I posted it.

And the phone? Could you speak to them on the phone?

But they had no phones.

Nobody?

They took their telephone, and even then, I wouldn't – I wouldn't have spoken because I don't know what they will accuse them of.

So, you were very worried?

I was, yes. Of course I was worried about them. Yeah. It – it wasn't easy.

What about going back to Baghdad for visit? Could you visit them? Could you –

Only once. Only once. Only that once.

So tell us about it. You haven't told us on camera.

[laughs]

What happened?

Yeah. I told you how I got my visa. I told you earlier.

So tell us again.

About the visa?

Yes please.

Yeah. My father said, 'You don't like to come and visit?' But I'm repeating myself –

No.

It's alright?

We haven't said it on camera. You told me before.

And I said, 'Of course I would like to come, but I can't. I can't get a visa.' So he went to his friend, the Minister of Interior, who eventually, after the revolution, got killed, he's from the old regime. Yeah. He was a very, very good man, very good man. And my father said, 'I want to see my daughter. I haven't seen her since five years.' He said, 'So why she's not coming?' He said, 'She has a British passport.' He told him, 'We don't give visa to foreign Jews.' He said, 'She became foreign?' He knew him very well. 'And here, her brothers are here, the family are here.' He said, 'Okay tell her to go and get the visa from the Embassy, from the consulate.' [01:24:01] So, my father told me, he said, 'Go and get your visa, it's sent by the Minister of Interior.' So I went there. They gave me papers and name, address, this, this. 'Religion?' 'Jewish.' They said, 'Sorry, you know we don't give visas to Jews.' I said, 'Yes, I know. I didn't come to ask you for a visa. I've come to collect my visa, sent by the Minister of Interior.' So, he said, 'Okay, I'll go and see.' It took him half an hour and he came back, and he said, 'Give me your passport.' He stamped the visa and he said, 'By order of the Minister of Interior.' It means he has no responsibility, that's how I got my visa, and I went to Baghdad. It was so thrilling, really, I mean, after all the – here, without proper friend. I mean I'm not saying I had a bad life but I missed the friend and the family and I – I went there. They were all waiting for me at the airport, all of them [laughs]. Yeah.

And you took – by then, did you have the child – the children?

Sandra.

Yes. So you took –

Only Sandra. Yeah.

So you took Sandra with you?

Yeah. She was a baby. I took Sandra and um, here, I struggled to have someone to help me with Sandra and all, and I went there, and my brothers, although they had houses both sides of my parent, they lived in the house with my parents. [01:26:07] It was easier for them they thought. And each one had a nanny for their children. So, my mother said, 'I'll get you someone.' I said, 'No, none are there. I make do with everything and I'm alone, I don't have the help of anybody. It's enough.' For two days, one was ill, one wasn't taking the children to the park. She said, 'You didn't come here to stay at home.' So she got me someone to look after Sandra. I mean really luxury [laughs] beyond – beyond my expectation. I didn't know, here, such luxury. And, really, I had fun this time, parties. She said, 'They won't let you stay one minute at home, so you can't neglect Sandra.' Yeah. It – it was really um, wonderful trip, and things settled. Everything – everything was alright there –

When was that?

1957

Right. So at that time [both talking at once] –

So those who wanted to leave to Israel left. The passport were open and it was a – and, you know, completely new era, if you want to call it. A new era.

So at that time did you think, that maybe one should come back to Baghdad?

Well, my father suggested it. He said, 'Why don't you come back to Baghdad?' I said, 'I'll tell Albert.' I don't know whether he will want to. He said, 'Life is much easier and you are with

the family and everything.’ [01:28:01] I said, ‘We will see if Albert will accept.’ I mean really, he was serious about it. He was serious. But one should know the Middle East is never a peaceful place. So, really, and Albert was very nervous the whole time I was there, he was very nervous. But um, I mean he was right. It was – it was only after one year, not more, that the revolution happened. Can you imagine? For one whole week, I didn’t know whether the family was alive or not. One whole week. Nothing. Not a word. All we hear was killings and we – we – I didn’t know anything. Really. I – I went mad.

Which was when? When was the revol –

In ‘58.

Yeah.

The year of the revolution. I mean my brother, in Sweden, he used to call me, I used to call him; ‘You heard anything?’ Of course we knew, even in the middle of the night, if we – one of us will hear something, we’ll tell the other, but even then, we asked; ‘You heard anything?’

And who was still in Baghdad? Your parents?

My parents, my sister, Abudallah my eldest brother with his family, Naim with his family. Yes. And my sister I said, my sister.

So only you –

Yeah.

And your brother?

And my younger brother, Sasson. The only one who was out, me [01:30:00], and my brother in Sweden.

Yeah.

We were out. Yeah. So, I mean it was very hard.

Yeah, and it was not that long after you'd come back? When did you come back?

I, um, after, I stayed there five months, and –

Five months?

[laughs] I went for three months. No, I mean I didn't go for a week or two weeks, and not worth all this trouble that he goes through, my father goes to the Minister, and ask for visa and so, I went for three months. That was the initial. But then, Freddie was born, my sister – my sister's son. I had to stay for everything, and a little more [laughs]. So it was five months. My husband was really very cross with me at the end. Very, very cross. He said, 'When are you com–' [laughs]

Yeah. When you come back?

Yeah. Well, that was really, you know, a trip – they pampered me so much-. Not my family only, my friends.

Yeah.

Really. It was so nice. I tell you, every one of them, they gave a party, not just invitation, a party. Big party. I had no time for all.

And what did you find had changed in Baghdad since you left from 52' to 58.'

Yeah. New buildings, new bridges, life was more open, you know. [01:32:02] Because one forgets, you know, and after all the austerity of this and all, it became – people starting to enjoy themselves again. Yeah. I – I tell you, to the extent, my father wanted me to go back. Little did he know after one year, they would want to come here. So, yeah. That's how it was.

So it was quite difficult to come back here then again?

[laughs] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, but this time round it was different. It wasn't as new to me. Yes, it was difficult to leave the family and all, but I had my life here, my husband was here, so. Yeah. I didn't have to struggle to settle down.

No.

I came back home.

And how did the revolution affect your – your family in Baghdad? How did it affect them?

Well, not much. Not much because for five years, everything was alright. While Qasem was there. It was very good for the Jews. In fact, it was better for the Jews than it was for the Muslims in a way, because the Jews would not create any trouble, while the Muslims, they are different; one is pro this one, one is pro that one and all so, the Jews were left alone. And everything was quiet. Everything was good. It was only after five years, when Qasem was killed, Arif came and he's anti Jews, and that's what changed everything [01:34:05]. The schools became different and all, and that's when my brothers left, because of the schools and because of the children, and my father didn't want to leave then –

He did or he didn't?

He didn't.

Still not?

No. I mean, they left really because of schools, they needed schools for the children, they – it wasn't that bad, but one had to be careful, and you know it was his home, his place, his language. Yeah. He – he didn't want to feel – he didn't feel he wanted to start a new life anywhere. It wasn't that bad that – and then afterwards, you know, there were different stages, like they didn't give passports, they didn't give exit visa, they – people started leaving through the north. And he said he would never leave through the north. Never.

Why?

He said he will never, whatever happens to him, he will, if he can't get a passport, he will not leave on a donkey's back and through the north. He said, 'I was born here,' and 'I'm not young. Whatever happens, happens.' And only when they gave visa at that time, that in 1973, he took the opportunity and it was so lucky.

Why? Tell us the story -

Yeah, because afterwards they – it could leave this – closed the passports again for the Jews. You see, whatever anything that happens, the Jews are the first to be attacked. **[01:36:03]**

So in your family, from 63', then who, who left first? Tell us what happened to your brothers. Where did they go?

From 73'?

No, for – in the '60s, before.

Yeah.

63', you said then, your brothers [both talking at once] –

Yeah. My brothers. They went to Beirut.

Yeah. So who went to Beirut?

Both Abudallah and Naim – with their children.

Yeah.

And they stayed there maybe, around two years. They stayed there. Maybe half-heartedly thinking they can go back to Baghdad. Sometimes, one doesn't admit it even to oneself, you know. Eventually, they came to London.

In 1965? Roughly?

19 – Yeah.

Both of them?

Both of them came. Yeah. Both of them came. Again, I found flats for them and [laughs].

So that must've then been a change for you, suddenly to have family –

Yeah. Of course. Of course it was very nice to have family and um, things change. I know. And by that time, I settled a bit more and more of the people from Baghdad came since I came. There were other people who came. Because really, when I came, I can't – I don't want to go back on it but the people here, they were very nice, but I didn't know them.

Yes, it was nobody from you – when you grew up –

No.

It was nobody your Baghdad?

Not my generation at all. You, you know, so everything was different, for them and for me.

Yeah.

You know, we changed with the time. Here, there were like they left Baghdad, from before.

[01:38:01]

So, more conservative?

Yeah. More conservative. Yeah. No, more friends came and it was easier for me. It was easier.

So, your sister still stayed behind in...?

My sister stayed behind and they only came in 1974.

After your parents had left?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, after my parents left, there was no passports, they couldn't leave. They couldn't leave. So they had to wait one year after my parents leave to get a passport.

So, what, they were the last ones –

They sent Freddie and Robbie, they send them to me for one year [laughs]. So I had to find them school, and you know, I mean, In Baghdad, you don't need to find a school, you just go and you have the school, like you go to Tesco. And they don't realise how difficult here and she said, my sister said, 'Find them a school.' [laughs] So where do I find a school? They were the wrong age. They were the wrong age. Robert, my son, was at Carmel College, at the time, and we were friendly with the headmaster and not through – not through the school but we knew the family of his wife and we were friendly. So I went to him and I said, 'This is the story and I need a school.' 'How old are they?' I think at the time, Freddie was [01:40:00] fifteen. He said, 'You must be joking,' [laughs]. I said, 'Why?' He said, 'How can we take children that age? I have the think of my classes, I have a responsibility towards my children. Two students come from Iraq? I don't know what their qualifications are and I take them like that? You must understand, as much as I want to help you.' I said, 'No you are not helping me, please.' I said, 'If I don't go to a Jewish school to help, who will help me? No one. No one will help me.' I said, 'Okay, what do I do with them? Leave them at home if you don't help?' He said, 'It's not my responsibility.' Okay, after a lot of persuasion, I said, 'I tell you one thing, I know the

studies in Baghdad are very good, maybe even better than here,' because there they don't have sports and things, although they are sporty, and all the time they spend on study, 'and I promise you, they are good. So do me a favour, take them only three months. The schools are going to open, no one will take them, no one. They won't even give me an appointment. So please, take them for three months and after the three months, if you think they don't fit, I promise you, give me a paper and I'll sign it. I take them. In the meantime, I'll try to find them something.' He said, 'Promise?' I said, 'Yeah.' 'You don't need to sign if you promise.' I said, 'I promise.' So he took them. So is started to tell them, 'Please be good, study hard.' Everything. [01:42:01] I tell you, every week, I used to write three letters. One to my son, Robert, and two to them, because they have to write letters to the parents, as they can't write to their parents. So every week, they write to me and I write to them. Every [laughs]. Just now, I give them each one their – the letters that they wrote to me. And I begged them to study and after three months, I went and I said, 'What's the verdict?' He said, 'They can stay. They are alright.' So, 'thank you very much'.

So they went to Carmel College?

Yeah. So really, I had responsibility, lots of responsibility when I – I was, and from far, they think I can press a button and do everything. So, I was happy anyway, and they stayed here at the beginning, they didn't want to go also. Coming from a close family In Baghdad to go there, it helped that Robert, my son, was there.

How old was he at the time?

He's younger than Freddie. He's in between Robbie and Freddie. So it helps. And of course every holiday and every half term, they come here. I go and fetch them, somewhere from Regents – Regents Park, with their dirty washing, all of them [laughs].

But they adapted. They managed.

Yeah. Yeah. They adapted. They adapted eventually. Yeah.

What about your dad? How did he manage this leaving a city which he didn't want to leave?

Who? [01:44:04]

Your dad.

My dad?

Yeah.

My dad, he could not adapt. It was very, very difficult for him. Very difficult, because he lost his independence. This is number one. The driver in Baghdad was at the door and he goes wherever he wants, and here one of us has to take him somewhere. Of course, even if I went shopping, I took them with me, you know, just a journey. But it's not the same. They lost their independence. It was really very, very hard.

And what made him eventually agree to leave? What was it?

There?

Mhmm.

He left because of my mother. He said – he was ninety-three at the time and – and ninety-three. What will happen? No, he was ninety. Sorry, I said ninety-three. He died when he was ninety-three. He was ninety. He said, 'How long is he going to live?' My mother was much younger than him. So, because of her, he left. How can – how can she be left alone in there? So, even though at that stage, yes, he wanted to see us, but he had his comfort at home. He still had the – still had the help at home, they still had the car at the door, he goes wherever he wants, he was – he didn't have to ask anybody, he was free. So, okay.

And how did you find out they were coming?

How? [01:46:02]

How did you find out that they were coming now, that they managed to...?

How – how did I find out?

Yeah.

Of – they wrote to us.

Yes.

‘We are coming.’ And they sent a telegram, ‘We booked, we are coming on...’ such and such date. It was the day after Yom Kippur, when the war started of Israel.

So what happened?

So when the war started on Yom Kippur, we were all in synagogue and we didn’t know whether they will come or not. So, I looked at my brothers, they looked at me and we said, ‘Are they coming, are they not coming?’ and, finally, the next day we found out the plane is coming. So we knew their coming and we all went to the airport. All – all the family. My brothers, their wives, everybody went to the airport to meet them. And finally, they came. At the time it was even, things were a bit more relaxed than now. And the one, and the – the police were there, I gave him my passport and they allowed me to go to the aeroplane to meet them. So, and that was, you know, it was difficult for them to imagine somebody at 90 leaving his place, knowing not going back and – and of course my father has to leave his property there, as I told you earlier, they made him sign not to sell it. It was hard. It was, it was hard for him. [01:48:03] But what is the alternative? And then he came to be with his children. He knew he will die one day, he reached that age. He – not only he thought of my mother but of himself.

Yeah.

Who is there for him? So –

And you, you took them through immigration? They arrived. You took them to the immigration?

Yeah. Yeah. I took them to immigration and they said, 'How long are they going to stay?' I say, 'You answer me. How long are they –' [laughs], 'Can you see them? They are not going back.' [laughs] 'I live here, and they have come to live with me. They are not going back'.

And then –

He said, 'Okay, at one stage, whenever you want, go to the Home Office and arrange the papers.' So they were very nice about it. So it wasn't difficult because at that time, I don't know how it is now, there was the law that anyone can bring his parents to live here.

So they came because- of you?

Yeah, yeah.

But in fact, with his passport, he couldn't have gone back because it gave-him only –

Yeah. Exactly.

A single –

A single journey

Journey out

Yeah.

So he couldn't even if he wanted to. He couldn't have gone back.

Exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

And did they move in with your or were they [both talking at once].

No, they stayed with my um, brother. They couldn't stay here – well, my brother said he wants to – to help them, Abudallah. So they stayed with my brother till my father passed away after three years, and my mother remained there [01:50:00] for a few years more. Abudallah at the time used to travel a lot for his, for his business, and although she had the help, we were not very happy about it. So, Naim said better they go to a flat than a – goes to a flat. Yeah, but we didn't want her to go just to any flat. So I found the flat below me, one of five. I mean it was really godsend, because the way I found it, as if it was meant to be. We wanted flat. We looked here and there, nearby, and here it was out of the question to find a flat, and here, it was out of the question to find a flat, all occupied and one Friday afternoon, I had an appointment with the hairdresser, and I was about to go. My mother was here staying weekend, and my aunt and uncle stayed with me. The picture is there. They stayed with me here in the flat for thirteen years. And then all of a sudden, my help came and she said, 'Something wrong with pipe – with tap in the kitchen.' Big Friday afternoon, we have somebody who works here permanently, downstairs, but he's off on weekend. So immediately, I phoned him, before he goes home and I said, 'Can you come? I need something.' He came. He looked, he said, 'Yes, I can fix it, but I will come in half an hour.' [01:52:04] I said, 'Sure?' He said, 'Yes, yes because I'm downstairs in the flat below you. The lady wants to sell the flat.' [laughs] I didn't believe what I heard, 'The lady wants to sell the flat and I have to fix something to hand her the keys to give it to the agent. I said, 'The lady's selling the flat downstairs?' He said, 'Yes.' I said – I forgot about my tap [laughs], I said, 'Who is the lady?' He said, 'Somebody from Kuwait and she's going back to Kuwait, she doesn't want to stay here.' I said, 'Can I see it? Anyone in there?' He said, 'No, it's empty, she live somewhere else.' I went downstairs. It was lovely. Exactly like this one. I came up, I told my aunt and my mother. I cancelled my appointment with the hairdresser [laughs]. Really. All my life was like that [laughs], doing things. And I cancelled my appointment and I took my aunt and my mother. My mother liked it. I phoned my brother, Naim. I said, 'This is the story, what shall I do?' He said, 'Make an appointment tomorrow.' So I told this worker, I said, 'Where do I find her?' He gave me her number in Dorset House. I phoned her, I said, 'I'm interested in the flat, I hear it's for sale, can we meet?' She said, 'Yes, tomorrow morning, ten o'clock.' [01:54:02] I phoned Naim. 'Naim, ten o'clock tomorrow.' He said, 'I'll be there.' She was about to give it to the agent. She – can you imagine how – how it worked, really. My mother, really, is a good – was a good person. Really. It worked, how our

tap needed help, it would have gone to the agent without me knowing. So, Naim came, this lady came, we spoke, shook hands and that was that. Not even twelve hours since, er, just like that. Just like that. So, we took the flat for my mother and it's like being in one flat. You know, here, I would have loved to have her. My aunt and uncle were staying with me.

So your aunt and uncle were also your husband's parents?

Yeah.

Yeah.

I mean I can't tell them, 'Go out.'

Yeah –

And 'My mother is coming.'

Yeah

You know, when they stayed here –

When did they come?

They didn't come from Baghdad. They were in India. They lived in India. His business was in India, my uncle.

Okay.

Yeah. And they went to Israel. That is – that has nothing to do with our life in Baghdad, and they came here and they wanted to live in Israel but my aunt was not well, and we were very close because when I – she has no children, and when I was alone, she was the greatest support for me when I came from Baghdad. She used to come from India and stay six months in

Europe, and she really, really, supported me a lot. So then she was not well and she needed me, and I asked them to stay here, we had the place. [01:56:03]

So they, they were not your husband's parents.

Nah.

No.

She's my aunt.

Your –

Sister of my mother.

Right.

She was the sister of my mother, and they had no children and we were - we were always very close. Very close. Always. And I tell you, she was alone, she had no family lived in India and she came to London, and I was alone and she helped me a lot, to settle. A lot, you know, when I had the children, she would cancel a trip to stay with me. So she wasn't well and she stayed here, supposedly, it was for few months and then she couldn't travel, and I was very happy to have them. She stayed here thirteen years.

And then your mother moved in downstairs.

My mother moved in downstairs.

So they were sisters?

Sisters. It was, it worked so well, and my mother, like, she was staying here in this flat because er, sometimes she had a very good help and she used to phone me at night and with my dressing

gown, I go [laughs], I go downstairs, I have the key, and open the door, and talking of the key – it's alright that I'm talking?

So, yeah.

One day, the help of my mother, phoned me at seven o'clock in the morning- my husband was still around- and she said, 'I can't open, the door is locked and I can't open it to go out from the room.' She slept with my mother in the room, and there is nobody else in there. I said, 'I'm coming down, I have a key.' [01:58:04] So I went down, opened the door, left my key by the door and went there to see, I opened, it opened. It seems from the outside, you can open it. I opened the door and went in. She felt like, um, somebody who doesn't, you know, who did something wrong. She called me, and I opened the door so easily. She said, 'Maybe you don't believe me.' I said, 'No. I believe you.' You know the, the lock was a bit loose from the inside. She said, 'You don't believe me.' Before I could – could finish the word, 'Of course I believe you.' She shut the door [laughs]. She shut the door, and we were both, only three of us, locked inside. My mother was still half asleep, she said, 'What's going on? Why you are here?' I said, 'Nothing.' So, what, what shall I do? Really. What shall I do? I have – I have no idea what I'm going to do. So I telephoned to my husband. I wanted him to come but how can he come? I opened the door and I have the – the key of the flat. He can't come. So my mother was half asleep, so I told her, 'Nana, I remember you have a key.' She had a key, you know when you bought the flat, she felt she wanted to feel she has the flat, 'Do you remember where it is?', She said, 'Yes, it's in my handbag.' [02:00:00] I prayed that it is in the handbag. I opened the cupboard, took the handbag, the key was there. My mother was very organised. So I phoned my husband and they said, 'This is the story and we are locked, short of breaking the door, we are there to stay. What shall I do? The key is here.' And Naim had a key but I don't want to phone him seven o'clock in the morning. How will he come and bring the key? And we are all – he said, 'So what do you want me to do?' I said, 'You know what I want you to do. I have a key here of my – of Nana.' There, her room is immediately under my room. Immediately. I said, 'Bring a string [laughs] through the window and I will attach the key to the string [laughs] and pull it out.' [laughs] He said, 'Alright', and he did that. I said, 'Please be careful. We don't have another one.' Okay and I tied it very, very hard. I said, 'Pull it.' He pulled it, came through the door and all [laughs]. I tell you; I had many incidents in my life, many, many incidents. I survived them all [laughs].

You solved the situation.

[laughs]

You get through it.

[laughs]

Yeah.

So.

So you recreated your sort of family – close-knit families situation.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. Mmm.

So, yeah, this is that – and Eileen came after one year, after the boys came. **[02:02:02]** After one year they gave them passports and they came.

Because you were saying that your parents almost didn't come because of the Yom Kippur War.

Yeah, yeah, but it was the last plane that left Baghdad. They closed the airport. I mean, it was so lucky they didn't think of closing it a few hours before.

So Eileen had to wait for another year.

Yeah. Afterwards they closed all the passports.

And then she came.

Yeah.

By that time you've already had two children. What sort of – when you raised your children, did you speak Arabic with them?

No.

No.

Because my husband said, you know, the Arabic at the time was not as important as now. It was a forgotten language. I mean, now I wish I spoke Arabic with them. He said, 'What do you want them – how many languages you want them to speak? They learn French, English, Spanish, Latin, and English. Arabic also, it's too much.' Which is true.

Yeah.

They understand. When I speak, they understand, but they don't speak it, yeah.

So when you raised them what sort of identity did you want to give your children?

I don't know. We are Iraqi. We are Iraqi, maybe the next generation, their children, will feel more British, but we are Iraqis. [02:04:01] Our food is Iraqi influence, and they love it [laughs].

And you feel you pass that on? Did you feel you passed on your heritage?

Half/half, you know. They are half here, half Iraqi, yeah. Yeah, it has to rub on them. What we feel, it has to rub on them.

Mhmm.

Yeah, but they went to school here, they have friends from here, so...

What particular tradition – apart from the food which is very important –

Yeah.

What other traditions were important for you to pass on or to – is there anything particular?

No. The closeness of the family which you don't find here for example. The closeness of the family. They are close to me, to us, you know, we are very close. Yeah. And the food and – well, what else, there is nothing else. The way of – not the way of life, they are more – they were brought up here, so they are more British than Iraqis, but they still have our values which is very nice, very important. The closeness and the – yeah.

So from '74 basically you had a lot – you had your sister here, your brothers here.

Yeah.

So life...

It was very nice. It was very nice afterwards, yeah.

So did you celebrate the holidays together? The Jewish holidays.

Yeah. When my mother was around we did the holidays at her place. [02:06:05] Of course she didn't cook. We did everything, and we took it to her, and we did everything together. Yeah.

And I know your brother did the magazine The Scribe to really collect everything, you know –

That's right.

On the Iraqi heritage. Do you feel that's important?

I think it is important, yes, because it's going to be forgotten.

I mean, he worked for many years. How long was the magazine – how long was it running, The Scribe?

Well, how long it has been?

Yeah.

For a few years.

Yeah, but – yes.

Yeah, how long it will carry, I don't know. How long it will go on, I don't know. But my children they have a lot of this culture. They understand. Robert's children, they know something but of course it's less.

Yeah.

But also, they have it in them.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Do you feel more could be done to perpetuate – do you feel people talk enough about their background or...?

Yeah, I think it's enough. Yeah. Because, you know, they live here, and I don't want them to feel, you know, segregated in the corner. They have to live with the country, so...

And do you feel that when you came – you were not a refugee when you came because you married [02:08:08].

Yeah.

Or do you feel – were you a refugee? How did you feel? Do you see what I mean?

No, I didn't feel a refugee because my husband was here.

Yeah.

I didn't feel a refugee. It was much, much easier that he was here, and he had friends. So for me it was much easier than both of us coming. He had his business, and both of us will come and struggle for everything. No, I didn't feel as a refugee.

And how do you feel today? How would you define yourself today in terms of your identity?

Well, I'm from Iraq. I'm from Iraq. I mean, I'm not a British, even though I have a British passport [laughs]. I think it's the right thing.

A Londoner? Do you see yourself as a Londoner?

Yeah, I mean, I feel I belong here, and all that, but really my roots are Iraq.

What about your home, where would you think is your home?

Yeah, the home – yeah, I'm telling you, I feel very much comfortable here. I don't feel a stranger, but still my blood and my roots are Iraq [laughs].

Would you like to, if it was possible, to go back to Baghdad and have a look?

No. No. [02:10:02] No. I have such good memories of Baghdad that I don't want to see it now. I want to keep what I know because it will really change things completely for me. And I have very good memories and I'd like to keep it like that.

And are you still in touch with – you said you are still in touch with some friends from your childhood.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I have friends from my childhood, yes, yeah.

So that's a way of keeping...

Yeah, because the majority left and some of them are in Israel, you know. When I go to Israel I look up some of my old friends.

And what about some of the Muslim contacts, your family contacts? Do you have any?

Yeah, we have. We have, yeah, with family that my brother and their son were partners. And we are still in touch. They visit us and we visit them, and we speak on the phone, and really they are very nice, they were very nice to us in Baghdad. And when they came here we helped them a lot. They don't forget it. Even the other day they told me, 'Without your help we would have been...' – we helped them to find a place to live, we've helped them going to the doctors to – I went with them many times to the doctor. I helped them a lot, and they appreciate it.

They came also to London?

Yeah, they used to go and come, before because they were free to go and come, although after the revolution and after all that they had to be a little bit on their guard. [02:12:04] And they are very clever, not to do or say anything that would offend anybody. But now they don't go, they

don't go back, finished. Sold everything, and they came. This is the difference. They could sell everything when they want and leave, while we couldn't do that.

Yeah.

That sort of thing. And they're here now, and we are always, always in touch.

Hmm.

Very close.

Do you think your husband because he left earlier, was – did he feel like you? Did he feel Iraqi, or did he feel a bit more British?

No [laughs].

What did he feel like?

No. Well, he left very young, and because he alone here during the War – not alone, with his brothers, but still alone, not a family or something, and they have English friends and all, he felt a bit more remote to the Iraqi culture. But still, he enjoyed the Iraqi food, we have Iraqi friends and all. I'm not saying he went the other way, but he wasn't as homesick as I was.

Yes.

Yeah.

So you feel a certain nostalgia for...?

Yeah, because his parents also left to go to Israel, his sister went to Israel, and he had no body left in Baghdad. So he doesn't have the same feeling that I have. **[02:14:00]**

So his parents went to...?

To Israel.

When? Quite early?

Yeah, early, early.

Not in the '50s, before.

In the '50s. In the '50s, yeah. During the Farhud they were in Baghdad.

Right.

And their house was attacked, really, and they looted everything from their house. But thank Gd, no one was hurt. They just took the things.

So following that they...?

So after that they didn't feel they wanted to stay. So after a few years they left.

Right.

Yeah.

And where did they settle in Israel?

They went to Palestine, when it was still Palestine.

Yes, and where did they settle? Where?

Where? In Tel Aviv.

Mhmm.

Hmm.

So he had a different family history.

Yeah. Yeah, a different family.

So when you think about Baghdad today, you say you feel homesick or nostalgic, what do you think about?

Well, really, I don't want to go and see it. This is – because I hear it changed a lot, things change, people change, and I want to remember it as it was. So that's what I think about it. Of course I like to see pictures. Sometimes they bring me pictures, and this is our house there, and this is the – they made it a hotel [laughs].

Uh-huh, yes. What is it called today? [02:16:00]

Huh?

What is it called? What's the name of the...?

I don't know, just a hotel, yeah. But no, it's a different country to me now. It's a different country.

It's not the country you left.

Yeah.

Yeah.

When I went to Baghdad in '57 with a British passport I was invited to the British Embassy for the Queen's birthday, and it was very nice, you know. Automatically made a member of the

Alwiyah Club, which they accepted only British citizens. Automatically I became a member there.

Hmm-mm.

It was – I tell you, it was a lovely time I went. Very, very nice time from every respect, yeah.

Do you sometimes still think about how life would be if you'd still be in Baghdad or...?

Yeah. Well, I don't think it would be a bad life. Not the Baghdad of now. I mean, if things remained and continued to be as it was, yeah, nothing wrong with it to go out for holidays and things. But Baghdad as it is now, no, I wouldn't want to live there anymore. It was becoming more and more modern country.

Yeah.

At that time. And a lot of people came from Turkey, and it was under the influence of newcomers and – I mean, you never saw in Baghdad so many people wearing this *abaya* and covering their faces. As to the ones who are cover their hand and face, it didn't exist in Baghdad. [02:18:04] Not even one. They are not like that.

Things change.

Yeah, they wear *abaya* and – some of them, not the modern one, not the educated one. So it's a bit different. These people come from Pakistan or other places, not Iraq, but people here they think all the Arab countries are the same. The Arab countries are not the same. The most advanced was Egypt, was really European. Arab countries are not the same. Each one is different.

And you feel today that Iraqi Muslims and Christians, they know enough about the Jewish history?

No. Not at all. They know nothing about the Jews and the Jewish history. My brother in Sweden mixed a lot with embassies, ambassadors, and all, and he used to be invited. And one day he was invited to one embassy where the Iraqi ambassador happened to be there. That was long after the revolution. A young ambassador was there, and he was speaking, and happened to speak to my brother, and in the conversation he found out that my brother came from Iraq, born in Iraq. He said, 'Really? You are from Iraq?' He said, 'Yes, I'm Jewish, from Iraq.' And he said, 'That's not what we know about the Jews.' He said, 'If the Jews are half as good as you are, where is our problem?' [02:20:03] You see, the new generation they don't know the Jews. It's only what they write about the Jews, and what they tell them about the Jews. And they mixed Israel and the Jews, and they are enemies, and they don't know the Jews. At the time we were there, and more than us when my parents were there, yes, they respected the Jews.

Now there's a generation that can't remember.

Yeah, it's a different concept of who the Jews are completely. They don't know. They haven't seen Jews. It's what they teach them. He said, 'Well, where is our problem? Why they are making all this about the Jews?' So he said, 'What did you expect? Like I would have horns or something?' He said, 'I don't know. You are the first Jew I see in my life.' So life is different.

Yeah.

Different for them also.

Yeah. So the Jews have been slightly written out from the history books.

Yeah. Absolutely. The new generation, they don't know who the Jews are. You know the Jews contribute a lot to Iraq. Have you heard the story of Sassoon Heskell?

Go on, tell us.

You know it, no?

Go on, tell us.

Sassoon Heskell was a Jew from a nice family who was educated in England, Switzerland, Istanbul, all these places. And in the '30s the Arabs were not so widely educated. [02:22:04] And in the first government King Faisal I was a very, very good king they say. I mean, I don't remember him. He was very good. He went once to visit a school. He has a picture with my grandfather. This picture, the painting –

Yeah.

It was taken at the school when he went to visit with my grandfather. And they told my grandfather, 'Here we don't have Jews, Muslim, or Christians. We are all Iraqis.' Unfortunately it changed after. So this Sassoon Heskell was made Minister of Interior in the government of King Faisal I – no, Minister of Finance, because he was well educated in Europe, so they gave him, which is very important. Then in the '30s the British discovered oil in the north of Iraq in Kirkuk. Of course as I say, they had the influence in Baghdad, in Iraq, so they said, 'We want to have, like, the right to take the petrol.' Of course they have to pay for the right. So there was a meeting with all the ministers to discuss how much would they pay, and this, and that. They reached a price, whatever the price per gallon, per barrel, so much. [02:24:01] So the British took the paper to sign. As he is the Minister of Finance he has to sign it. Like if you want to say £50 per whatever. So he said at that time the pound and the gold pound were exactly the same. The gold sovereign was worth £1 at that time, so he said, 'I wanted you to write 'gold coin,' gold sovereign.' They said, 'But it's the same, the same price. The gold is worth £1.' He said, 'If it's the same then write gold.' They said, 'No, we don't write gold.' You know, the British are clever, all of them educated, and he was educated. All the other sitting at the table, they told him, 'What's the difference? Sign. It's a good price they gave us. Sign.' He said, 'I don't sign. I want it in gold.' Finally, they left without signing. The next day, the King called him. He said, 'I order you – I hear that you didn't want to sign. And we got a good price, and they did want to sign. I order you to go and sign this paper.' He said, 'Your Majesty, it's not in the good of Iraq to sign this paper.' He said, 'But I order you.' He said, 'Okay, then I give you my resignation and appoint another Finance Minister who will sign it. I don't want my name to go down in history that I treated Iraq badly. It's better we sign in gold.' [02:26:04] When the King saw that he is losing his job, he knew how much it meant. He said, 'Okay, do what you like.' And the British had to sign for gold. So you see the difference?

Until now they are getting the royalties in gold. Now, what 150 – I don't know how much the gold sovereign, over £150. So this is – the riches of Iraq came from that.

Mhmm.

So the Jews were good to Iraq, and those who worked in the government were really very loyal to the country, very, very loyal.

Yeah.

So this is the history of Iraq. I'm sure you heard these things many times.

Do you feel – how – what impact did it have on you that you had to – that you left as a young woman and couldn't go back that easily? What impact did it have on your whole life?

Yeah, at the beginning it was very, very difficult. I tell you, very difficult. I used to cry sometime. Not – alone, you know? I had nobody. Nobody. With the children young, I used to cry. What if I get ill? Who will look after them? And that's where my aunt helped me a lot. Really. This is why I helped her also. I would have, but I mean, she was so good to me. I felt really alone, really alone. [02:28:04] But slowly, slowly, things changed. Slowly. Now, I hardly – really, I hardly think about –

Yeah.

I passed that stage, but there was a time it affected me a lot.

Yes, well you had to grow up – not – grow up is the wrong word. You had to...

Not that I want to forget it, but slowly, slowly – you know, now I have nobody there.

Yes.

So I don't think about it anymore.

But then it was hard.

But at the time yes, at the time it was very difficult for me. So this is – now, nobody's left there. Not from the family, not from friends.

But some graves? Graves? There's some...?

Now?

Yeah, there must – your –

What, Jews there?

No graves. I mean, the cemetery.

Ah, yeah.

Yeah.

We don't know. I don't want to even think about it.

Yeah.

It's very hard, what happened to it. It's very sad. Very sad, but what can one do? What can one do? I don't know whether – at the time of Saddam I think they said he respected it.

And now?

I don't know. I don't hear anything about it. What they did, I don't know. I mean, all the property of the Jewish people, not individuals only, but the Jews, you know, they had land and things. [02:30:10] What will happen with it afterwards? It will go. It will go.

And do you have any hope that you'll ever get that house back your father left behind or...?

[Laughs] I don't know. I don't know. Many times they say they are going to exchange, and give, and then it goes quiet. So whether any hope in that, I don't know. I don't know. You know, we remember it sometimes when we talk, but we forgot about it [laughs]. We turn a page. Like in Germany they left everything and like – this is the story of the Jews.

You move on.

Yeah. Exactly, exactly. I don't know. Many times we hear, 'Oh, they are going to do something, they are going to...' and then it goes quiet.

You're still a member of Lauderdale Road and you go to services regularly. Is that important to you to belong to a community?

Yeah, of course. Of course it's important, yeah. No, now here we have friends, we have – not like when I first came. It was a struggle. I mean – but – I don't know. I don't know. I must have been brave at the time [laughs]. When one is young, you know, you don't think [laughs].
[02:32:01]

It's lucky that everyone came to London. Except your brother. Did he stay in Sweden?

Selim from the beginning went to – first he was in Iran. He never liked to stay in Baghdad, Selim. So he was in India, he was in Tehran, and from Tehran the business took him to Sweden.

And he stayed there?

Yeah. He settled there. It's a shame because we'd have loved him to be here, but we are very close with the family. Very, very close. They come and they stay here with me, and we are very close. Maybe also – we were always close, but maybe being the two of us outside, away from the family, made us even closer. If possible. And also, he was close to my husband before we married, being cousins, and that helped a lot. Being so close to my husband, and they did business together. So yeah, we were very close, and I'm still close with the family.

What business was your husband doing here in London?

Who? My husband?

Your husband, yeah.

Yeah, he was in export and this sort of business, yeah.

He continued.

He con – yeah. Yeah.

Okay, I think we've covered many, many, many different areas. Is there anything I haven't asked you you'd like to add or something we haven't said, you haven't said, you feel is important? [02:34:01]

I think you heard from others about everything. I don't think you heard anything new today.

Yes, we did. Your voice was missing.

Except my feelings [laughs]. But you remember how many times you asked me [laughs]?

Yes, I'm very glad –

[Laughs].

You finally succumbed, after so many years of asking.

[Laughs] And finally [both talking at once]...

I hope it wasn't such a bad experience.

You found an ally in Sandra [laughs]. So it was an inside job [laughs].

Doreen, is there – do you have a message for anyone who might watch this interview based on your experiences?

No. Like what?

Like what have you learnt from your own life, how you approach things and...

Really, I just live from day-to-day, I don't – I take everything as it comes. I decided that long time ago. Because we don't have any power to change anything. I try my best in every – and I was so busy always. Really. So busy. Until now I'm busy. I mean –

What are you busy with today?

No, no, busy with people coming from abroad [laughs].

You entertain. You help them.

[Laughs] I always – yeah. I had – a month ago the granddaughter of Shlomo Hillel with a friend, they came and stayed here, then she left and my niece from Stockholm came, and she left, and a niece of my husband came from Israel and she stayed, and next week I'm having someone from China who was in business with my husband, and we are very close. [02:36:06] And she asked if she can come and stay one week. I said, 'With pleasure,' [laughs].

So you're very busy.

[Laughs].

So I'm glad we got the time to talk to you.

Yeah [laughs], exactly. So Sandra said, 'Name the day,' [laughs], 'name a day, name a day.' Okay, so I looked at the calendar and that was a free [laughs].

Fantastic.

I said, 'You know what, let me finish,' [laughs]. But really, it's a pleasure to meet you and I'm sorry I was so difficult.

That's okay.

But you have so many other people that you hear these stories, you can teach me something I suppose [laughs].

You watch this interview and then you let me know after you've watched it, what you think.

[Laughs].

Doreen, thank you very, very much for telling your story.

Yeah, thank you. Really, thank you very much. It's a pleasure having you here.

And we're going to take a break and then look at some of your photos.

Yeah.

And documents.

Yeah.

Thank you so much.

Thank you very, very much. Thank you, really, and sorry if I was difficult.

You were not difficult. Absolutely fine.

To accept your invitation before, and I hope I have been some use to you, or it is...

You were fantastic.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

[Break in recording]

[Recording resumes]

Okay, in this photograph it is my – it was taken as far as I know in Rangoon when my grandfather was asked to go there as a Rabbi, and in the picture, my grandmother, and the one standing is my father, and the one sitting on the floor is my uncle. [02:38:07]

Your grandfather's name?

My grandfather, Hacham Ezra Dangoor.

Yes, please.

Yes, well, this is a picture with my grandfather sitting on the left, the first one, and I think it was taken in the synagogue in Baghdad.

What was the name of the synagogue?

The Big Synagogue that – they used to call it the Big Synagogue.

On what road?

Oh, I wouldn't know which road, but we never went by names of road at that time.

[Laughs] Okay, thank you.

Yeah, this photo I think was taken – of course it was taken in Baghdad in 1927. My grandfather and all other Rabbis, a committee of Rabbis.

Yes please.

This one, this picture is my grandfather Hacham Ezra Dangoor and my grandmother next to him, and the other side of him sitting, his daughter Farha and her daughter Musli. And the little boy is the son of Farha. His name is Saleh. And I guess it was taken maybe around 1910 or something, judging by the age.

Thank you.

Right. This is the picture of my parents with my four brothers. That was before I was born.

And their names? Their names please?

The name?

Yeah, their names.

[02:40:01] Abdullah, the eldest on the right standing. Naim the second on the left, and then on the right again is Selim. And the one near Naim is Sassoon.

Thank you.

This photo is my parents at their wedding. My father Elihayu and my mother Khatoun. It was in 1913.

This is an album. My brother Selim always took great interest in us, in me and my sister, and he made this album so that the pictures will be safe. It was in 1938.

Yeah. This is a picture of me taken I don't know what year, and they put me on the chair. I think I fell down, and again they put me up, and they gave me flowers to keep me happy [laughs].

It must be roughly 1929 because you look like two?

No, after, maybe 1930.

Thirty, okay, thank you.

Yes, please.

This is a photo of my paternal grandmother Habiba, the wife of Hacham Ezra, and sitting next to her, my sister and myself. And actually, I was named after her. Habiba Doreen.

Thank you.

Okay.

This is a picture with my sister in the River Tigris near our home where we lived.

Yeah, this is a picture taken near our house of my sister and me with my brother Sasson.
[02:42:07] I think it was around 1938.

This is in our sitting-room in Baghdad beside a radio with my sister and a friend.

Yeah. So this is a photo of our school Laurie Kadoorie, the *Alliance* Laurie Kadoorie. It was taken I can see in 1925, so I don't know how I came by this picture, and when I went to school it was still the same setting.

This was at the school, prize-giving day, and the five of us who got a prize with our teacher.

And where are you?

I am the first one on the right.

Thank you.

This is taken on the roof of our house. It's me on the right and two of my friends.

Yeah, this is our house in Baghdad, *Shaar* Abu Nawaz, Abu Nawaz Street, facing the river.

Yes.

And this is the view from our house by the river. This is the view of the river. It was next to the Alwiyah Club, the British club.

This is a view of the sunset taken from the balcony of our house. [02:44:02]

Yeah, this is an old bridge in Baghdad which was eventually removed and replaced by a new bridge, and as a matter of fact, my brother Naim when they built the new bridge, he just came from London with a degree of engineering, and he was one of the engineers of the new bridge at the time.

And what was the bridge – what was it called, this bridge?

Moud This is called – this one is called Gisa Moud, Moud Bridge.

And the new one?

I don't know [laughs]. Yeah, this was taken sitting on top of our car, our new car, with my sister.

Yeah, this was taken with my friend. We used to go cycling sometimes.

When?

In Baghdad, by the river. Again, Abu Nawaz Street.

Thank you.

Yeah, this was taken on an outing together with friend, and we were by the women who were baking bread.

This is with my sister and my brother Selim. He is the one actually, he was very interested in helping me to do all these albums and take all these pictures.

Yeah, this is a picture of some of the girls in my class with our teacher. I am sitting first one on the right. [02:46:00]

This is a photo with all the family taken in Baghdad. I think it was taken in 1939 or 1940. Yeah, with my sister – my parents and my four brothers, and sister. And my brothers actually, they used to help me a lot at the school. Like Naim was very good with all the maths and algebra, and also I always was very advanced in this subject. And Selim was very keen to do a lot of entertainment, and to have us with a friend, and outings and all – each one of them helped in a different way.

Thank you. Yes, please.

So I am standing on the right, and next to me, my brother Selim, and then my father, and then Sasson and Naim, and the one sitting, Abdullah, my mother and my sister, Eileen.

Thank you. Yes.

This is a photo of our wedding in Paris, November 1952.

And the name of your husband please?

Albert, my – Albert.

Thank you.

That was taken in Baghdad, 1957, on my last visit there.

And who is in the picture?

Which one?

The middle one with the children. Where you are on the right.

Naim's children. One is Naim's Robert, and one is Abdullah's Alfred. [02:48:01]

And you on the right.

And I am on the right.

This is again on my trip to Baghdad. It was Purim and it was taken at home. And in the picture from the left, Claire, David, me, my father, my mother, Abdullah, Eileen, Naim, René, and sitting, Sasson.

Thank you.

This is with Eileen and Sandra at my last – at home in Baghdad at my parents' house, on my last visit to Baghdad.

Yes, please.

Yes, this is – the photo was taken when my parents came from Baghdad in 1973, so we assembled as many of the family, children, and the grandchildren, as many as we could do at the time.

And where are you?

And I'm sitting with the white dress next to my mother.

And was it a happy occasion?

Yes, it was a happy occasion really, very happy occasion.

Yeah, this is the wedding of Robert, my son, to Joy, 1998.

This is the photo of my granddaughters, Natasha, and Lisa, taken at the Bat Mitzvah of Lisa.

Doreen, thank you so much. And now we're going to look at some of your documents.

All right, all right, yeah. Okay, this is a photo of a painting, full-size, of my grandfather on the right with King Faizal I, Safwat Pasha el Awa and Menahem Daniel. [02:50:13]

And where was it hanging? Where was that painting?

I have the painting here, full-size yes, but the picture is taken only half.

Hmm-mm, and it was in your...?

It was hanging in my parents' house in Baghdad until the revolution, and they removed it being caution, you know, instead they say you are – it was a Republic, and they were hanging a picture of the King.

Thank you. Yes, please.

Yeah. This is my Iraqi passport when I left Baghdad, issued while it was still – while we still had the King there. Yeah, this is my passport when I left Baghdad in 1952 which was when Iraq was still under the King.

Yes, please.

This is my visa when I came to London for the first time.

When?

October 1952.

Thank you.

This is the passport of my father when he left Iraq in 1973 for good and came to London.

What does it say on top there – oh, [both talking at once]?

And on top – not here.

Not here, on the next page.

On the next page.

Okay.

And it says here on top on the left, *nahid lesafra wahida*. It means it's good for one journey only. [02:52:01] So when my parents arrived, they were very kind at the airport, and they let me go beyond the barrier to go to immigration. So when they asked them, 'How long you are going to stay in London?' I looked at the person there and I said, 'You look at their age and you answer that question. They are not going back.' So he said, 'All right, you go to the Home Office, and you get permanent stay from there.'

Doreen, thank you very, very much for sharing your story and your documents and photographs with us.

Thank you.

Thank you very much again.

Thank you.

And for your hospitality.

Thank you, thank you very much for taking the trouble to record everything. I never thought it was that interesting [laughs].

See? [both laugh].

Yes, please.

Yes, what is it Doreen?

This is the Iraqi directory, one in Arabic translated to English in 1936, and all this information, which was very, very important to everyone, was compiled by my brother Selim with the help of a Muslim person Mahoud Farhi Darwish. And whatever in this is really the first and the last of its kind that was done in Baghdad. It has all the information about everything.

So Doreen, thank you again.

[Laughs]. [02:54:00]