

Sephardi Voices UK

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Hakim
Forename:	Aida
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	1929
Interviewee POB:	Baghdad, Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Lettings Management
Father's Occupation:	Trader
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

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[pause]

Today is the 12th of February 2010. We are in London, and we are conducting an interview with Mrs Aida Hakim, and my name is Bea Lewkowicz.

Mrs Hakim, thank you very much for being interviewed for the Sephardi Voices project.

It's my pleasure.

Perhaps we can start with a very general question. Can you tell me something about your family background?

My family background. My parents were born in Baghdad, Iraq, and I have got two brothers, one of them sadly passed away ten years ago. And, I have got my family. My, my husband also sadly passed away nineteen years ago. I have got my children. They live around London, about, one of them lives in Stanmore, it's about half an hour drive; my daughter, Amanda, lives about ten minutes' drive; and Jimmy, my youngest, he lives about fifteen, twenty minutes' drive. So, they are all around me. And, I'm very happy, they phone me every day, or I phone them, you know, we are in contact, we are a close family. That's all.

[01:51]

And when were you born please?

I was born 1929.

And where?

In Baghdad.

Can you tell me a little bit about growing up in Baghdad?

In Baghdad, the only thing I remember, the *Farhud*. I was about eleven years old. I still remember every single details about it, because, we had to leave the house and we went to stay with our aunt, and then, they have got a very large house, and garden. And, they were rich, and lots of Arabs came to, they wanted to, you know, to kill the Jews or... But, their neighbour wouldn't let them pass, you know, he had a revolver and he started to shoot and they went, they went away. We stayed there about three, four days, and while we are there, you know, when those Arabs came to kill the Jews, we went, we crossed the road to their friends, Muslim friends, and they protected us. We stayed there three or four days and then we, everything was quiet, and we went back home. So, that's what I remember.

[03:30]

After that, I was, when I was eighteen years ago I got engaged to my husband, he was a doctor, GP. And, I got married after two months. And then, after nine months I had my first, Ramzi, my first-born child. And, life went there, went OK at the beginning. Then, 1949, after the, you know, after the problems with Israel and the, thing, my husband was a very well-known doctor in Baghdad, they sent him to Erbil. But it took... About a month he stayed there, in Erbil, as a doctor. And, lots of doctors were scattered all around Iraq. And, it took a minister to be able to bring him back to Baghdad. I told him not to work, not to go to the clinic until it's settled, everything settles. So, after one month he started to go to the clinic again. [pause] You know, at home we were OK, you know. He had a good position, we had servants also, you know, there was nothing we can complain about.

[05:16]

Then, in 1950 started *tashchit*, you know, the people were going to Israel. My family were going to Israel. So, I was really upset, I wanted to go myself, but my husband told me, 'Never, as, every day I can earn my living here. Now I'll go to Israel, what do I do there?' So he didn't accept. And, we stayed. But, nothing bothered us at the beginning, because, you know, people needed him, you know, the people who go to see him, they need him. So it was OK. Life was OK. Then it started to be very, much better, very good. And, we managed to get passport but we didn't go, we were going to London for a visit. It was OK, you know. And then, with the Six-Day War, it all went, up and down, you know. First of all they cut the telephone of the Jewish people. My husband, as he, the name Hakim, it could be Christian, Muslim or Jewish, they didn't know, they thought he is, I don't know, Muslim or something. After two months someone came and said, 'Can you give me your identity card?' I said, 'It's not here.' I knew

what they want. They realise the telephone, we are Jews and we have got the line. So he said, 'Anybody's, your children, your son.' He was persistent. So I had to give him one, it's written 'Jewish'. And said, 'Thank you.' He went; in five minutes the telephone is disconnected. We used to use the telephone at our neighbour, they were very nice people, Christian, but very very nice. And, as much as we can, you know, we didn't want to bother them. And then, it was getting worse, life getting worse. We had a Muslim cook at home, we couldn't, we couldn't tell him to go, because we are afraid of him. And, you know, life was very difficult. Then, one day he wanted to, you know, to kick my husband. Yah, he just started... He took his hands up. So I went in the middle, between my husband and him, and I pushed his arms, I was shouting, 'Don't you feel ashamed?' The neighbour heard. He came, and he took his hand out of, you know, out of my hand, and told him, 'You can't stay here a minute. Just get out.' And, our neighbour chucked him out. We were afraid, but, that's it, we got rid of him. We were, there was lots of small things you know, but it didn't bother us. There was a security man standing in front of our gate, and he wouldn't go until my husband goes to the... He knows the time my husband goes to the clinic; when he comes back the security is still there. And in the afternoon my husband goes again to the clinic. He is there, the security is there. He comes, until, my husband comes back and we lock the gate, then he goes. I do remember one day my husband wasn't feeling well, so he didn't go to the clinic. This security was, you know, something wrong you know, we are, he is at home, my husband is at home, we are at home all of us. I went outside to open the gate because we had to ask a doctor to come and see my husband, I didn't know what was wrong with him. So this security man jumped and wanted to see what's wrong, but he saw nothing wrong. And he left the usual, you know, at night, the time that my husband's supposed to come back. And the second day, early in the morning, he was there. We were very careful, you know, not to go out. I do sometimes take my husband to the clinic and come back home. And then go and get him at noon. And, the same in the evening, but the security is always there. [pause]

[10:41]

I don't know, after that, years passed. My... You know, the security took us all, we were going on the way to, to the north, to leave the country illegally. We arrived Erbil, and security told my husband to give him his identity. So he gave him his identity, it's written 'Jewish'. So he told the driver, it's a taxi, ordinary taxi, told him to turn around, and they took us to the, to the police station. I went in, and I saw lots of Jews, you know, my friends, they were also going to, leaving the country illegally. So, I thought, my God, it's, it's a problem. I don't

know what it is. But anyway, I was very tired. I told him, 'Can I sit anywhere?' He said, 'Sit on the floor.' So I knew it's something very bad. Then... [pause] Then, we were there, in the police station. First of all, we know the one who will take us to Iran, he charges 250 pounds – dinar, for each person. So, we had to take 1,000... Because we are four, my daughter and my son. By the way, Ramzi, my older son, the oldest, he was in London at that time. We sent him to school after the sixth grade when he was twelve years old. And, we never brought him back, because... He came twice to Baghdad during the summer holidays, and the last time, in the paper his name appeared, one of those Jews, rich Jews, we will, you know, he will *tashchit*, you know, his, he lost his nationality. And he was not even eighteen, he was younger. So that's it, we couldn't bring him back to Baghdad. And, afterwards, you know, when... We wanted to leave illegally, and, as everybody was doing. We were caught, as I told you. And, I saw people crying, people... So the first thing I did, I asked permission to go to the toilet. I got rid most of... I took my daughter with me to the toilet. I got rid most of the 1,000 pound, you know, I threw it away in the toilet. And, then, they started to say, 'Why are you long in the toilet? Why are you staying long?' So I came out with my daughter. And I asked... And my husband, I told him, 'Don't mention the money, I got rid of it.' And, the only money he had in his pocket, about, you know, 100 pounds, 130m nothing, and, you, you need it there. But we were not caught with money. The thing is, when he started, they started to put their hands, a woman, everywhere, in case there is anything. And she came out, said, you know, 'This woman has nothing,' you know. And, I was OK. And, afterwards they took us in buses, and they took us back to Baghdad. It's, it's the place where the Bahai's, it's their synagogue. They put us there. We were 135 people in one room. It's a big room, but, we all were sleeping on the floor. I mean, there was... As a matter of fact there was a nanny with some people, they had a baby and the nanny also was brought in. She is a Christian, the nanny, but also she was with us. We stayed there about, nineteen days, all of us. After, the nineteen days we stayed, and they, one day they came. 'All of you, get out. You are going home.' So, one by one they let them go. They asked for a taxi for them, and they sent them home. We also... unfortunately we were the last, the last, the last one to go. And my husband, he had depression. He didn't accept it, you know. We accepted it, what can we do, but he thought, he was a well-known doctor, and, *yaani*, and, very well respected, he had, he had lots of patients from the Government, you know, he was respected. He didn't accept it. He had depression. So, anyway, we went home.

[16:36]

Oh, by the way, before that, one day they wanted to go and see, the security, to go and see the houses, if we sold anything. You know, not only as... They took five – four, sorry, four people, to go and see the house. Our house was as it is. So, they ask him, ‘Why the door, the cupboard door is open?’ Things like that, you know. But everything was in place, because we didn’t sell anything. And, he came back to the, to the, to the place where we were. And then, when we left, they, we had, they had to take permission from about eight places, the ministry, the, you know, all those, you know, the Government, the Government, you know, places, you know, I don’t know what to call it, you know. And, we were, we had... They said we had nothing, and will let us go. We went back home, and, life was very miserable, very very miserable. We are afraid to go anywhere, anybody is afraid to come to us. And we have got, on top of that, this Muslim cook, and we were afraid of him. So, on Sunday we had a cleaner also, she goes home, and I stay with... the children, they go to school, so I have to stay with him alone in the house. I never, you know, I was afraid. So usually I used to go to my cousin, when my husband goes, I go with him, and when he comes back, I come back home. We were really scared. But, we couldn’t do anything. We were afraid of him.

[18:45]

So, after that, one day my husband – my son, Jimmy, he had appendix, and we were in the hospital. So, I came back home at lunchtime, and I was expecting my husband to come. Well, someone rang the door, and said, ‘Where is the doctor?’ I told him, ‘He is not here. Not yet.’ So, they waited until he came. They took him in a Volkswagen, the security usually had Volkswagens, they took him with them. So, I tried, you know, before, when we were put in, when they took us all, and, someone, he has a shop near the, near the clinic of my husband, went to him and told him, ‘Why didn’t you tell me, I could have helped you?’ So I thought, it’s true. So the only thing I can do, I went there. I went to ask for his help. I told him, ‘They took my husband today.’ He said, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll contact him.’ So, he contacted the security. They told him, they are staying here, they are not going anywhere. And it was Thursday in the afternoon; Friday we can’t do anything. So, he told me, ‘Look, the best thing, go and get a blanket for him. He is not coming today home.’ So I took a blanket. He used to smoke a lot, I gave him cigarettes and everything. And we were waiting. And I did know there are other people with him, they took other people, as, in detention. Then, on Saturday, someone came, someone, his brother is a doctor, and he was there at the same case. He said, ‘Aida, do you mind to come, I want to send a message to the other people who are, you know, who are in detention with him.’ They were four, four people. So I told him, ‘My husband is in

detention. What...' You know, I'm not afraid of anything. So, I went with him. His name was Albert Rabia. And so I went where he wanted me to go. And, this woman told me she had someone at home with her, he is helping them. And, I told her, 'I was sent here,' I was here. The brother was, 'Edward Rabia brought me here, to give you this message.' And then I left. But, every day... So, on Saturday they told us they are not – on Sunday, they are not coming home. No. Sorry. On Saturday. 'So please take food for them too, at least they have got food.' So I went with this lady, and, I took whatever we had food, and whatever she had, we gave it to the, we went to the security and we gave them the food. And that's it you know. We had no connection with them. Then, someone, a lady, which, I really appreciate what she did for me, she told me, 'Why don't you go and see the minister of, the minister of, Wazir Adul, I don't know, you can... So, I went there. And it was, he was a brother-in-law of a doctor. So, I went... First, I was advised to go and see the doctor, to ask permission to go to see the minister. So, so I went to see the doctor. I ask my, my husband's cousin came with me, she knows the family. So as soon as we went in, she said, 'Hello,' you know. And he told me, 'How is the doctor?' I told him, 'I'm sorry, I came because of him, he was in detention. They took him.' And I told him, 'Please, I would like to go to the ministry of,' where his brother-in-law works. 'Can I have permission, can you ask him if he will accept me? Because I don't know why they took my husband.' He said, 'OK. Give me a call in two days' time.' I gave him a call. He said, 'Yes, you can go and see him. But only on,' such a day, because, he accept people to ask for, you know, for help from him. So I went there, and I told him, 'Your brother-in-law, the doctor, phoned you about me.' He said, 'Go and write, you know, asking me to help.' So I went outside. There are some people sitting, they know what to write, you know, sitting on the, on a chair, you know. I asked them, they wrote it for me, application to go and see the, to go and see the minister. And, after that, I went to see him. He told me, 'Sit down.' He wanted everybody... Because, they were all Muslims. He want them out. Everybody went out. Afterwards he told me, 'What's the problem?' I told him, 'I don't know, they took my husband, and, he is an old man you know, he is, he is not healthy.' He said, 'OK.' So he phoned the security, the security, the head of the security, and told him, 'This Albert is the old...' Because there is another, Albert Rabia was also there. 'The old man. What's wrong?' He said, 'Oh yes. We will let him go soon.' Nothing happened. It's all, rubbish.

[25:57]

So I used to go every Wednesday, the day he accepts people, and I... And he used to phone. But, he couldn't help. So, someone told me there is a solicitor who can help, with money, you

know, he can let him out. Because he let out someone. So I was ready, I went to see this solicitor. They gave me the name and the address. I went to see him. And, he said... When he saw me, you know... He has got only Arabs there. So he told me, 'Please wait a minute.' The others, he told them, 'You go this room, the other, go to the...' I was alone with him. He told me, 'What is it?' I told him, so-and-so sent me, because my husband is in detention. And we are Jews. You know, I had to tell him the first thing. And he said, 'Come again in three days. I have to go and see what's, why did they take him.' So, I came after three, after three days. And, he said, 'I want 5,000 pound, and he will be out in two months.' I told him, 'Two months? I don't know what will happen in two months. And the other thing, I don't have 5,000.' He said, 'You are a case of four, five people. Between you, you can, you know, you can find the 5,000.' Anyway, I told him, 'I'm sorry.' He said, 'Come again.' This word, 'Come again,' I didn't understand it, means, I am willing to reduce the money. That's what they do. I didn't know that. So I went back home, and, I didn't, I didn't have any help from anybody afterwards. Only the minister who used to phone, every week he used to phone, and tell him, 'Isn't it enough? Isn't it enough? Let him go.' He tell him, 'I will let him go. I will let him go.' And, one day I went there. I saw, they brought my husband with, you know, the hands were...

Handcuffed.

Handcuffed to the security, to one of the... I was shocked, I didn't know where he was, when... So, I asked, and they told me, 'Look, there is this doctor. He works there in the security, in the security office.' So I went there. I asked him, I told him, 'Look, I don't know what's happening. Is he in the security or somewhere else?' He said, 'Let me, let me ask, and I'll let you know.' So, he asked, and he told me, 'Don't worry. He needed X-ray for, a chest X-ray. They took him and brought him back. He is still with the rest.' Because, I was afraid they will take him to the, you know, where, someone, I can't, I can't reach him. At least every day we used to take food, you know, my friend, this lady and myself, every day we used to drop food, and, whatever they need, you know, sometimes money, because they want to buy something. And, that's, life went on like that for three months and twenty-one days.

[29:42]

Which year was that please?

That's, 1969 or '70. I can tell you. The day we went out of the detention was the day that Gamal Abdel Nasser died, and we thought they will never let us go. But, they did. After that, in, I think, two weeks, they came and took my husband, and he stayed there three months and twenty-one days. So, at that time, then we heard, you know, that, Alain Poher, the French minister, sent his ambassador to ask about the name of those Jews who are in detention. So he went to see the minister of, one of the ministers. But the minister told him, 'No, they are at home. If you don't believe, you go and check yourself.' When he left, immediately the security – sorry, the minister, phoned the security, told them, 'Send them out, send them back home.' So, they brought them all together, they brought taxi, each taxi they put five people, pushing them out, really, to, to take them out of the, of the centre. So they were at home.

[31:20]

After that, it was, life very bad. My husband wasn't feeling well anyway. We wanted to leave, but, we, we didn't. One day, my husband had someone, he used to come, him and his family, when they are ill, you know, but he works in the security there. And, my husband contacted him, told him, 'Can you help, we want a passport?' Because the passport started, they opened the passport, they give three families, two or three families, about ten, twelve people, every week, if they want to leave the country, you know, they can ask for a passport. And this man helped us to get the OK. And, we left, after, you know, it took us two weeks or something until we had the visa, we had the passport, until we managed to leave. We left, we came back to London.

[32:30]

My son was in the airport, and I didn't know where he is, you know, I couldn't see him. [emotional] Sorry. I saw him, the last time he was fourteen years old; now he is twenty-three years old. And... I'm sorry. And, my son, the other one, told me, 'Oh Mum, he is there.' So, I saw him you know, after, he left at the age of twelve, apart from, he came for his bar mitzvah when he was thirteen, and then he left, and, we couldn't see him again. When we came here, life was very difficult for, very very difficult. I didn't know how to do anything, you know. Because, in Baghdad when I got married, I did finish at the school, you know, and, then, bit by bit... My husband couldn't work as a doctor, they tried, you know, him, they give him the degree of registrar in the hospital, but he was so much deep in depression, he couldn't work. When we tried to push him, he said, he told me, 'Aida, look, here is not Baghdad. If I make a mistake, I'll go to prison. Is that what you want?' I told him, 'No. Stay at home,' until... We

were going from one doctor to the other, we were... You know, he was really deep, deep, deep in depression. He couldn't accept it, he was a respectable doctor, respectable doctor. Then... So, I started, I study how to do book-keeping. And I started to work. We bought flats, you know, in Chiswick, three flats in Chiswick, and I start to, to work, you know, with this, how to do the book-keeping, how to, you know, everything, I learnt it. And, then people, friends, they ask me if I take care of, I manage their flats also. I said yes. And bit by bit I had a lot of people, exactly, I don't know, over twelve, thirteen, I don't know, more. That's the best I can do. I couldn't do... I used to take my commission, and we used to live, there was no problem, except with the help of my husband. He was really depressed. He couldn't accept it that I am the breadwinner now. Then, my son, Ramzi, managed to get a job for my husband, not paying job, just, just to go out of the house, and, as a, you know, in Hammersmith, in the hospital, Charing Cross, with the files you know. So, usually, he goes to the doctor, the doctor tells him by mouth what's wrong with this patient, and he, as he is a doctor, he understand exactly what, the procedure. And he used to prepare it you know. He was having a few hours out of the house, and, which was good enough. So, one day they told him, 'We will give you money for what you are doing.' It's nothing, but still, he thought, you know, he is earning some money. So, after that, when he was the age, over sixty-five, about sixty-seven, sixty-eight years old, they told him that's it, you know, you are over sixty-five, and, we went back again to the same problem, staying at home. Then, my son also managed to ask for him to be an interpreter. That he enjoyed very much. Arabs, they come with drugs, whatever it is, and he used to, to explain to them what, you know, between English. He was very, he used to speak very well English, because, he, he came here when he was I think twenty-one, after he finished the medical school he stayed one year here, and went back to Baghdad to start his clinic.

[37:15]

So, this one, for a few years it was OK. He was enjoying himself. Then he lost his sight, and he couldn't, he couldn't translate. They used to send him, you know, to translate also; he couldn't translate. And that was really the end of, the end of him, you know, he couldn't take it any more. So he was deeper and deeper in depression. It was very difficult. But, that's life. He didn't go out, he didn't come out of depression. That's it, that's our life. And, I kept on working, till about two years ago, when I thought I can't work anymore. So bit by bit I started to tell them, look, I am an old woman, I can't work. So, they, they sold the flat, or gave it to someone else to manage it. So I do just my flats, to manage them. I have got a few flats. That's, that's all. Now my son Jimmy, the youngest, he helps me with the flat, because, I can't

do everything myself any more. So, he helps me, sometimes, when I need help, he helps me. And so...

How old were you and your husband when you came to England?

My husband, he was born, he says, 1911. I was born 1929. So, you know. And, maybe before 1911; they don't, they don't know the age, you know, they don't know, they don't write the date. With my family, everything is written. My grandfather, he used to write everything. So, everyone who was born, the date was written in this book. So.

[39:35]

Can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents please?

My grandparents. My grandfather was, he was an interpreter in the British, for the... He worked for the British people. He was an interpreter, that's when he was young. Then, afterwards he became a Member of Parliament.

What was his name please?

Ruben Somekh. Somek. He stayed years - until he died, you know. He was a Member of Parliament representing the people of Basra, you know, Basra is the south of Iraq. And, you know, every year they tell him, 'You will be a member,' you know. It's not to, you know, they... They make him, yes, or, they made him a member, or not. My grandmother was, you know, was always at home. She had children. She took care of the children.

This is your father's parents, or your mother's parents?

My mother's parents. My father's parent, my grandfather died years before I was born. His name is Dawud Shentob. And my grandmother also. At that time no woman works, you know, they are all... And, I have got lots of aunts, uncles. And that's it.

And when you grew up, did somebody... Who lived in the house when you grew up, of the family?

Of the family? My father, my mother, and my two brothers. We had, we used to rent a house. First we rented a house in Karrada, and then we went to the other side of the river, because my uncle, Heskeli Shentob, lived there, you know, with his family. And we used to go every day to see them, you know. Because they are the type of, the house is open, whoever comes. And we used to go every day there. Because of my father, you know he wanted... He had to go out. So usually, he had a walking stick in his hand, and the other hand on my shoulder or my brother's shoulder, you know, he couldn't walk by himself.

Can you tell us why, what was his problem?

Parkinson's disease. At that time, they didn't know what it is at the beginning. He came to London, then he went, he stayed in Manchester with my aunt. He went to see lots of doctors. The last person, he went to see him, in Vienna, and he told him, 'Look, your condition will be worse and worse. Go back home. Don't let the doctors, you know, try new medicine'. Because they were trying to, to help him, but, they couldn't. And he came back home, and that's when my uncle said, that's the time to part from the, you know, from the company. And...

What was he doing?

Sorry?

What was his, what was your father doing?

He couldn't work.

No, before.

Before. He was an... He used to, he was... He used to bring, what you call it?

Metal? No.

Metals, and, at that time, when I was born we had a big fridge, you know, we used to buy ice you know. That's what he brought. He used to bring, all sorts of things. I do remember the Osram lamps, you know, he brought it to Baghdad. He was... I don't know. *Taajher*. What... I forgot the name of *taajher*. *Taajher*, he brings... Importer.

Importer.

He was an importer. And, he was doing well, very well. That's why his money kept us going, you know, we were five people, my mother, my father and the three children, til, I don't know, the war started, and then... We used to live on the interest only, then, the interest was not enough, and that's when we started to take part of the money to, to live on it.

[45:00]

And, then my brother went into the engineering, the college in Baghdad. And so, he went, he had a job with the, Lynch, they are a very big company, English company, they have got, all sorts of things. As an engineer, they took him. And then, they went to Israel. He left on the 30th of 1950, December.

[45:36]

Just, before we get to the Fifties, just to talk about your father a little bit. How old was he when he first became ill?

Before he got married. He used to, when he walk, he used to, you can see his legs, his leg, one of them, is not straight you know, he used to pull it. That's what people said. But, some people knew that he wasn't hundred percent healthy. Some people didn't know. We didn't know. So, they had my brother first. They got married in 1925. They had my brother, first one, 1926, my second brother 1928, and I was born 1929. So...

How did they, do you know how they met, were they introduced?

Well, it's, the family, they were friends, the family were friends, you know. My grandmother from my mother's side also, she is a Shemtob also. So when my uncle asked for the hand of my mother, she was very happy to, to get a Shemtob in the family again.

So they were related?

Related, yes. Related, I don't know...

Not first cousins?

Not... Not. Second, third cousin, I don't know. They are related. My grandmother is a Shemtob also. And, as I told you, my grandfather, Somekh. And, that's it.

[47:18]

And can you tell us a little about the neighbourhood? You said you moved to the other side of the river. What do you remember of the neighbourhood?

The British soldiers came to take all the houses in that area, except our house, because my father was always... There, you can see him, he can't walk, he...

When was that please?

Between, between, '42 and '44. They never let us go. We stayed, we were the only people in that area that, they didn't take our house. Because before, they used to come, whatever house they want, they send them, that you have to leave in a month or two, whatever, they give them time. And they put the soldiers, the British soldiers, there. In our area, most of the houses they took it except our house, because, they, they can see the, the condition of my father. It's not easy. And, to, to leave the house, we have to rent a house much more expensive, because once the British came, the houses started, the rent started to go up, because, demand, there is a big demand. So we stayed there, I think till 1947. Then, we moved, we moved, I moved to my grand... My grandfather died, but my grandmother was there, and her daughter. So, I stayed with them. My mother stayed with my aunt, and, one brother with my aunt and the other brother with the other aunt. We couldn't afford to rent a house. The money finished, that's it. And that's when my brother finished the university, and he started to work, and my other brother, who couldn't, you know, just he took the high, five, the fifth grade, that's the maximum, then he had to go to university. We didn't have any money to go, so he took a job as book-keeper or whatever. So. And then, I got married.

[49:45]

Just before we get, a little bit more about your own... Can you tell us maybe about your schooling? Where did you go to school?

Alliance Israélite, Laura Kadoorie Israélite. And, I was till the age of eighteen. And during the summer holiday I was, [laughs] I got married. It's an arranged marriage, so... I heard my grandmother talking on the phone, and that's what, and, that's it, they give their answer, it's OK. And, they had somewhere to go that she can see me. We went to this shop, and there was a woman and a man, I thought, woman and husband. And my aunt was with me. So after half an hour, those two, they left. I told my aunt, 'They are not coming, let's go.' She said, 'What do you mean? They were here, those are the people.' I didn't, I didn't know that he was the one. Anyway, that evening, or the second evening, you know, they came and we got engaged. At that time I had no make-up, you know, although I was eighteen, at that time no make-up, nothing. I hadn't got a dress, I took a dress from, decent dress from my aunt, because, my dresses, all school dresses, you know, nothing much.

And how did you feel when you knew, when you realised that...?

I cried. I said, 'I don't know him. Can I see him for a few weeks?' And, they said no. They said yes first. They, they tricked me. So, they said, 'You have, you have to go and get engaged this evening.' I was a very good girl, you know, I was ordered, whatever I do, I was ordered, and I was to do whatever they, I was asked to do. And...

Was your husband older? Because you said he was working.

Much older. Much older. Yah.

How old was he when you got...?

I think... I don't know, but I think, I found a picture with the age. I think twenty-two years. He was born 1907. But he says it's the wrong date; I don't know, maybe it's true or not, I don't know. He was a baby you know. And, well, that's life, that's...

[52:28]

Yes. Tell me a little more about the school. Can you remember, what was the, what was the message, what did the school, the Alliance Israélite, what did they try to teach the girls?

French, English. French from the, *azeel*, from the, the *azeel* is the first two years before going to the first class. And, the first class we had, not five, six – sorry, seven because, the fifth grade is two fifth grade, two years we have to stay in the fifth grade. You know, we finish one grade, we go to the other fifth grade. And then the sixth. That's when we got the Baccalaureate, you know, the, the first government diploma. And then, on the first of the secondary, we had the French *Certificat d'études*, which I took. And then I went to the second grade, and at the, what's, the, at the holidays, I was told that I have to be engaged.

Did you want to finish school, did you want to get a profession?

No, I was, I was lazy. But, I didn't want to get engaged. I don't know, someone you don't know, and you just get engaged, you know. I, I wanted to know him first, but, that's it.

What about your friends, were they also getting engaged at that time?

One girl, she got engaged before, a year before, but someone who used to go to their house all the time, you know, a friend, and he was... As a matter of fact she said, 'I don't think...' I said, 'He is lovely, he's a lovely man. Why not?' And, that's it, that's only one girl before me, and then I was engaged.

So, was there a matchmaker involved in your case?

Yah.

Or did the family... It was through a matchmaker?

Yah, a matchmaker, a matchmaker. And, that's it.

That's how it was done.

Yah, that's... That's the usual. But, I was too young, I was eighteen years old. And, I don't know. It was an order to get engaged, and I was, I got engaged.

[55:94]

Let me ask a bit about your parents. How difficult was it for your mother, because, I guess your father couldn't do the shopping.

No no, nothing. Nothing. He couldn't walk.

Exactly. So, at the time it was difficult for women I guess to go out.

Yes, I don't know, most of the things used to be brought up as...

Who did the shopping?

Yes. But, we had a cook, we had a cook, and he used to, he, he cleans the house and he cooks and he does the shopping also. Whatever we needed, she used to tell him, my mother used to tell him, and he goes and get it from the shops and come back. There was no problem with shopping there. Not the woman does the shopping. It's the servants. And, that's it.

How close were you to your siblings, your brothers?

Very very close. Very very close. And, til, you know, I adored them, and they adored me, really, we are very very... Although, I didn't see them for, I don't know how many years, for years, twenty years or more I didn't see them. First in 1960, my husband wanted to send my son Ramzi, the first one, to England. He thought he will be like an Englishman. I mean, he thought so. And so, in 1960, on the way I stopped in Rome, and my mother came to meet me there. I saw my mother, we stayed four days only. My brother-in-law, the brother of my husband, arranged it, that we met on such a day and this hotel and everything. I saw her for four days, and then she left and I came back to London. As a matter of fact I stayed with my sister-in-law, and, and I took my son to the school. He was in Shoreham-by-Sea. And, he

stayed here. I went back to Iraq. He came... That, he was twelve, he came back for the holidays, the summer holidays when he was thirteen, and he was fourteen, that's when he had the bar mitzvah, and he came back to London. After that his name was in the papers that he lost his nationality. If he doesn't come back within a month he will lose his nationality. At that time we went to see the headmaster of, at that time Frank Iny, the school was Frank Iny, all mixed girls and boys, and we asked the director if it's possible to bring him back. He said, 'Not at all. He will have to start...' Because, he forgot the Arabic, he has to start from the beginning. So, we couldn't bring him. And he lost.

Mrs Hakim, we need to change tapes.

[58:26]

[End of Video 1]

[Video 2]

[58:31]

This is tape two. We are conducting interview with Mrs Aida Hakim.

Mrs Hakim, you were telling me about the bar mitzvah of your son Ramzi.

Yes.

Can you tell us a bit about it?

Yah. He came, we brought... He managed to come back to Baghdad for the summer holidays. And, my uncle and my cousin were there, and my cousin tried to teach him how to, wear *tefillin* and everything you know. And he had his bar mitzvah at home, and, that's it you know. We had a small party, you know. That's it.

Where did he go to school in England?

In England, first he went to Shoreham-by-Sea. I don't know how long he stayed, I don't remember. And, until he finished. And then, he started to work with a company, Chartered Accountants. And it took him a few years because, he used to study, they gave him two months to study before the exam. And he worked, very low wages, because, it's not a university that you can go every day; it's, you know, he used to, to work, and before the exam they give him two months paid to study for, to be a Chartered Accountant. When we came, he didn't finish yet, but when we came here, I think after one year, one year and a half, he passed his exam. And he started to work as, you know, in the companies with, he worked with Deloitte's, he worked with lots of, you know... And then he started to work on his own, he had his own, his own office. He got married to a girl, also Iraqi, and she was in his class, but he didn't remember, he didn't remember her, and she didn't remember him, when he was twenty-seven years old, and she was twenty-seven years old. You know, there is one month between them. Ramzi is older one month. And, they bought a house and they started to have children. And, that's it. I mean, now, his children are grown up. His son lives in America, he got married, he has got two children, a boy and a girl, just about two weeks ago the second girl was born. So now I am a great-grandmother. And the second daughter got married, and she is a Chartered Accountant also. She got married and her husband is in America, and she is in America also. They expect to come back in May, something like that. And, the third one lives in the same building here with, in the same building, at the end of the corridor.

[1:02:14]

When he was going to school, who did he, was it a boarding school?

Yes, boarding school. And, we had my sister-in-law and her husband and family here in London, they used to live in Hendon, and at the, during the holidays, he used to go there you know. We thought, it's like his mother, you know, but, usually, at his age you know, children, they want their family. He is very sad about the life he had here. The school was racist, and that, we didn't know about it. And, that's it until he left the school.

It wasn't easy for him?

It was very, not easy, very difficult for him. And sometimes, he used to say that the money that was given to him, spending money, it finished. You know, as teenager, one night he goes

out, he spent all the money that he had for the week. So, then, he told me, you know, I'm very sad, he used to sleep sometimes in a bus or whatever, you know, very very, very depressing story, his story also. But, we didn't know better.

[1:03:44]

How did you manage to support him from Iraq? Could you send money out for...?

Yes. Yes. First we had some money here in London. And my brother-in-law had a power of attorney, to spend whatever he needs to spend for my son. And then, for two years we managed, the situation of the Jews was OK, we managed to send him a grant you know. And two years and that's it. Then came the war again, and, you know, the Six-Day War, and everything was stopped. At least he had some money here, you know, his uncle, my brother-in-law, used to give him, you know, weekly, monthly, whatever. He used to pay for the clothes, his uncle used to pay for the clothes. But, you know, it's not, not like with his family. It might have been worse in Iraq, because they used to take the teenagers, and, as a matter of fact they hanged a few teenagers, you know. We used to say thank God someone is out of Iraq, someone is safe from the family. And, we had my daughter and my younger son, Jimmy, the youngest. They wanted to leave, because everybody was leaving illegally. So we tried to contact someone who used to, you know, a Jewish guy that will take children, whoever, and send them to, to Iran. But my husband wouldn't let them go. He said, you know, if they take my husband to prison, it's, it will be on their, you know, on their mind that because of them he was... I mean, it was, everybody was going; he wouldn't accept. So, the first time we managed to get passport, we came all here to England.

[1:06:04]

Let me just go back a little bit, because you started, beginning to talk about the Farhud. So...

Yah.

It's something which stayed in your memory.

Definitely. Definitely. I remember it, every single bit by bit I do remember it. Yah.

Can you maybe tell us... You told us a little bit. Tell us more about, can you tell us what actually happened?

With us, you know, we were at home, you know, as I told you, my father was, you know, he was, he can't walk straight. I mean, and, my mother sent... We had a cook, and my mother sent him to the shops – we didn't know there is anything wrong – to the shops to get something, to buy something. He came home, and he told my mother, 'What can I tell you? They are trying - the Jewish houses - they break in, they rape the girls or they kill them, and they take their furniture.'

And who was they?

The Arabs. The, the Muslims, the Arabs. The poor people, the poor Arabs. So, they have nothing you know. They live in huts. And so they, they started loot, looting. So, afterwards, this, our cook, our, came and told my mother, 'You know, they are telling the people, where are the Jewish houses,' and we were in the list, you know, they give our, our house, our address. So immediately, we didn't have telephone or anything, my father and my mother and we three children, we went to my aunt. My aunt, they are very rich, they have a very big house. Their house is half the street, half the avenue, and, they have, they had tennis court. And, they are in the corner of one street. The other corner, a Muslim solicitor or something, something like that, but they are in very good terms with him. So, we went there, and, people, they heard from the beginning of the street that the Arabs came to loot the house. They sent someone to ask the Muslim solicitor if we can come, and they are not a family of, of five. We are about thirty people. They said, 'No, no problem, come all of you.' So, all the family, they went to this house. It's a very big house, and we thought it's the best secure house. Three, four floors. So we went to this Muslim, and they were - I do still remember the woman asking, 'Go and bring the yoghurt for the children,' go and bring coffee, milk, whatever, you know. They were very helpful. And after that, the Arabs came from the other side of the road, from near the river. So this Muslim solicitor, he was the one who stood up and had a revolver, so started to shoot on the, in the air. And they left. So the house of my aunt was safe. And, our house, there was a... They went from the back side. Sorry. First from the front. Also there was Muslims, but, they have seen my father, you know, it's not a family that, we make problems or anything. We were young. And, my mother used to take care of my father. And so they, they stopped the

Arabs to come to loot the house. Then they went from the back side, there was another house at the back of, you know, wall-to-wall, not wall, there is a garden between us. She used to see my mother taking care of my father, he can't get up, she had to pull him. We all had to pull him if he wants to get up or... And she used to feed him in the balcony. And she used to look. And, they knew it's a family, we have nothing to do with anything except to live day by day. And they, their son also, also he had a revolver and started to, to use it, you know. Not on the Arabs but, in the air. And they were afraid and left. So our house was not broken in. And after four days we came back, you know, when all settled. The British soldiers came into the, into Baghdad. And, it was back, very quiet, and we went back.

Those were Muslim neighbours, the neighbours, in your house?

Neighbours, one of them Muslim. The other Christian, he was OK. It was OK you know, the neighbours. We didn't have any connection with them, only they see us walking or going to school or, just... But, nothing.

[1:12:17]

Can you tell us a little bit, because many people won't know it, the political context of the Farhud and then the British soldiers coming.

Yes. It ended... They stayed outside Baghdad. They stayed outside the perimeter of Baghdad. They let them, the Arabs, to loot, to have a good time. And then they came in after twenty-four hours. Once they came in, it was all settled. But in that time, lots of people, you know, they murdered them. Only to the Jews. I mean, they know exactly. In our case, there was someone, my grandfather has got a boat, a small boat, Belem they called it, and, the one who used to... Because they used to go from one side to the other in this boat. It has, not many, nothing, just with the hand, you know, they have to...

A rowing boat?

Yah, a rowing boat. And, the one who used... This boat belongs to my grandfather. And the one who used to work for my father, the rowing, to row the boat, he came to my mother and told her, 'Please, I have nowhere to stay.' That was during the war. 'We have no, can I stay

here in the garage?’ So my mother said... So what, in the garage, the garage, it is empty. She let him to stay. And he was the one who went to tell them, this house is a Jewish house. That’s how sincere he was. Anyway, we left the house before they came, and we went to my aunt’s house.

Did something happen to people you knew, did...?

Sorry?

Did you know people where something really bad happened to them, or...?

Yes, lots of people. And, I have got, my cousin, they used to have furniture, golden furniture you know, and, all was taken, everything. And I heard that they got radios from, I don’t know which one, lots of, everybody had radios. They took the radios and they put it on a table and say, ‘Speak.’ The radio doesn’t speak, no electricity, nothing. And they used to hit the radio. ‘Only with the Jews you speak, and here you don’t speak.’ They didn’t know that it needs electricity. But anyway. I remember, at that time, people, you know, my aunt was a dressmaker, so she had girls who work for her, and, they came and asked her to help, because they were, everything was stolen, if she can give them a bit of furniture. So she told them, ‘Take whatever, beds.’ We had lots of beds because, in Baghdad we used to sleep in the summer upstairs in the roof, on the roof, so we had double for upstairs and downstairs. So she told them, ‘You can take everything, whatever you want.’ She tried to help, she told them, ‘Thanks God we are, you know, the house is still there.’ Nothing, you know, nothing went. Nothing. We were not burgled. So she started to give whatever, you know, to people who were asking her.

[1:16:00]

As a young girl, I mean you were not, you were...

I was eleven.

...eleven years old.

Yah. Eleven.

It must have been quite a shock.

Yes, a shock. And we didn't know what's happening. But, with my mother, I know every single thing. I mean, I do remember my cousin, he had a white suit, shark thing, you know, and my mother ran after him, 'Please, change the suit. It's, it's so, you know, it's so light.' In case they, they, they use a revolver, they can see him immediately. I do remember those small things. The other son, I know he, at that time my other cousin was also with us, and they got married afterwards. I used to see them together all the time. You know, those things. And, when we went to those Muslims in front of my aunt, they put, the woman said, 'Put everything on the floor,' so they got whatever they have, mattresses, things for everybody. She said, except my father, 'Except the old man. He must sleep on a sofa,' or a bed, a bed I think. It was really comfortable. I mean, they did their best. And you know what, my aunt, you know, they had a very big land next to them. After, they give it to them as a present for being such, you know, such nice people.

Did you have any contact in the Thirties, when you were growing up, with Christians and Muslim families?

No. No we didn't have any. Not ourselves, you know, my mother and... No. But, the family of my mother, as I told you, one of the girls was a dressmaker, she used to do dresses for the princesses, the aunts of the King. The sisters of the Queen, the queen mother. And, so, she used to go there regularly. And the other aunt also, friends of the family, my, not us but friends of my grandmother's family.

Let's just stop briefly.

[pause in recording]

[1:19:12]

Yes please.

Yah. And, I have got another aunt, she went to the, she became a solicitor. She was studying. She is the first Jewish girl to go into the university to be a solicitor. And, the second one, there was a Muslim girl before her, but my aunt, the Jewish, from the Jewish side, she was the first. She finished after the *Farhud*, and, she started to work as a teacher in the secondary classes. Because she couldn't be a solicitor, she started to work as a teacher. And, I do remember the princesses, they were illiterate, they can't read or write. So, she started to teach them, as a teacher, she started to teach them to read, just, you know, to read Arabic. One day they went there, they told me, 'Would you like to come with us?' for me to go to the palace. I mean, of course, I mean, who, who wouldn't go? So I went with them. We were sitting in the balcony, they were laughing, they were talking to the princesses. I got bored, I was maybe fifteen, sixteen maybe, I don't know how old I was. I was bored. Then I saw a chair, you know, a very nice chair, and there is a step near. So it was empty, I went to sit there. Immediately my aunt told me, 'Aida, go back to your chair. This is for the queen mother.' [laughs] I didn't know that. So, that I do remember very well. So, I went back to this chair.

What was the name of your aunt?

Marcelle. She was Marcelle Somek, but then she married Naim Yahuda. Naim Yahuda. Naim Judah. They went to Iran, and she opened a school in Tehran. She had, she brought teachers from England, from, you know, it was a very high class school. They all remember her. [doorbell] Oh sorry.

We'll just stop.

[pause in recording]

[1:21: 42]

Yes please.

Yah. That's it. My aunt, as I told you, used to teach them Arabic, the princesses. That's the contact with the royal family. It started when my grandfather was a member of parliament. That's, I don't know how they started. But they were very friendly. Even during the war, 1941, during the one-month war, my grandmother took two daughters, the one that is a

dressmaker and the other one, and went to the palace. I mean just to show that, they love them whatever, you know, they are friendly. At the door they asked her, 'Who are you?' She gave her name, and she said, 'We came to see the princesses.' They phoned somewhere, and they say, 'Sorry, you are not allowed.' And she went back, just to tell them that we came, just to say hello. You know, she was never afraid, my grandmother. She, at that time, to take her two daughters and go by coach – not coach, sorry, you know, they have got those, two, two horses, they pull it.

A carriage?

A carriage, whatever you call it, they, she took one of those and went. And they returned. But, only, they knew that, my grandmother and her daughters came to say hello. They, at that time there were house arrests, the Royal Family.

And what happened to the Royal Family?

Then, yah, they, not that time, that time they were in Baghdad, but afterwards, in 1958, that's when the revolution of Abd al-Karim Qasim, they killed them, they killed the whole Royal Family. The grandmother is about ninety years old, she doesn't even speak Arabic, she is a very, you know, religious woman. I do remember she used to sit on a cushion on the, on the floor, not on a chair, on the floor, and she used to read Qur'an all the time. I do remember her very well. So, that's it.

She was, they were all killed, in '58?

Yah. All killed. Everybody. The only one who was saved, the fiancée of the King, she wasn't in Baghdad, she was away in her country. I think she is a Turkish or, I don't remember. She wasn't in Baghdad. But everyone who was in the, in there, in the castle, were killed, massacred.

And how did the Jews feel about that? Or was it...

It was the, the Revolution. We were all, everyone is sitting at home, very much afraid. We didn't know what's going to happen to the Jews. But, life went on, and then, it was OK. With

Abd al-Karim Qasim, it was the best year for the Jews, because, he was communist, he had no religion. He didn't, he didn't mind. One of my friends wanted to, her husband came to London, and she wanted to come also. So she went to ask, there was a passport office, and they gave her immediately a permit to go to London, to join her husband. There was no problem at all for the Jews. And then, when the Ba'ath came, that's when it went downhill.

That was in the Sixties?

The... Yes. Yah.

[1:26:11]

Maybe just to go back a little bit.

Yah.

You said before that when Israel was founded, that was a big problem.

Yes.

Can you maybe describe in more detail what happened in '47, '48, '49?

It wasn't, you know, all the time. When there is a problem, the Jews stay at home, they don't go out until it was better, you know. But, I don't remember much about it. At that time, 1947, I got married, and we went for the honeymoon to Turkey. At that time in Egypt there was cholera, and we went to Istanbul. And we stayed there for three weeks, and then we came back. We went by train, by the train, you know, the express, going to Turkey, and on the way back. Everything was OK. And then it started after, you know, the '48, '49, it was, it started to go worse.

Where did you, after you got married, you moved in with your...?

With my husband. He had, he had a house of his own. And I moved there.

Was it far from your parents' place?

No, not far. Not far. Baghdad wasn't so big at that time, 1948. I mean ten minutes by car is, is the most. I was about ten minutes. My husband had a car and a driver, because he didn't know how to drive. He started to learn how to drive. So, you know.

And who else, did you have a cook? Who else lived in the house at that time?

Yes, we had a cook. My mother-in-law was there also, was alive, and my brother-in-law. So, although we had a cook, my mother-in-law was, you know, the boss. Every day she tells him what to do, you know. And I was afraid to go downstairs you know, I used to stay all the time in my room. So either I go with my husband, when he goes to the clinic he drops me with my parents, and he takes me when I come back. That was...

So during the day you stayed, you went back to your parents' house?

Most of the time, yes. Sometimes, if I am very tired, I don't go out, I stay in my room. I am afraid to go down. You don't know what will happen if I go down. [laughs]

What were you afraid of?

She was a terror, and she was very well known, she was a terror. And she didn't like me. [laughs]

Not an easy situation.

She had nieces, lots of nieces. She told Albert to get one of them, but, he didn't want any one of them. So I'm the stranger who came and took everything. So I was afraid. I do remember, you know, it's a nice, it's a joke. All the wedding presents, when I came they told me there was so much money as a present, and it went into my husband's account. Nobody told me there are, anything else came. One day, a friend of my husband was here, I don't know how it started, he said, 'This tray, the silver tray I bought for you.' I said, 'What silver tray?' He started to shout, 'Albert, why didn't you tell her, I brought this, it cost me twenty-eight dinars,

and nobody told her that it was the, the wedding present.' So, I was just a stranger in the house, you know. I wasn't allowed to do anything, either, in my bedroom or come down to eat, and, or go out, that's it, I wasn't... I don't know. And, my mother-in-law was, all the house is, you know, under her control. So I had nothing to do. And I was eighteen don't forget, I didn't know how to cook. My mother didn't know how to cook, we had a cook at home. So I didn't have to do anything downstairs. So, [laughs] if I, to come downstairs, I go out, that's it. Mm.

[1:31:00]

So, your husband didn't follow her instructions in terms of the choice of...?

No, as a matter of fact, she, she started to ask about, you know, girls for him. And, that's, as I told you, it's an arranged marriage, so, my family, you know, the Shemtob are very well known, very, a very well-known family. So, she chose me, and it happened, at that time, you know, I was, it seems I was the best one of whatever. And, I was chosen. [laughs] And we got engaged, that same day.

Was there a Henna, do you remember, what...?

No. No. We didn't have any money, my father was ill as I told you, we didn't have any money. As a matter of fact, half of the clothes I bought, you know, my husband paid for it. They paid, only a bit, they had a bit, they managed to.

Did you bring a trousseau or something, or...?

Yah, the trousseau, my husband paid for half and my mother paid for the other half. That's it. So there was no money at home.

No.

Very... Yah. We were poor. [laughs]

[1:32:38]

So, when you had your first child, then you had something to do; basically until then you were mostly...

Yah. Yah, but, usually, I had a, not in any... The wife of the cook for my mother, so, she is a very nice woman you know, and she came to help. But my mother helped a lot. Because I didn't know how to do anything. I didn't do anything. I didn't know. Except, my mother used to bring Ramzi for me to feed him, and takes him from me. That's it. She slept, about a week she stayed, she slept in our house. And then, you know, this woman, she has children of her own, so she knows what to do, and, all the time I was in Iraq, you know, when I had the children, all the time we had nannies.

Did it become easier for you in the house, once you had your own children?

Of course it's easier. But, there was other problems which, you know. My brother-in-law got engaged to a girl, her father is rich. At that time, he gave her 10,000 dinars, and the trousseau. So I was the poor woman, the poor girl. And so there was lots of friction because of that. But then it all quietened. At that time it was very difficult for me. [pause] On the, his aunt one day, it was the Henna party for the bride, and we went to there, and I was, you know, I don't know, I was beautiful or not, I don't know, but I was... She wasn't, she was not, so, you know. So his aunt came to tell my husband, 'Hell with your money. What do you have, and what he has?' So, at that time, my husband started to appreciate me more. But with my mother-in-law in, with us, lived with us until the day she died, for eighteen years, all the time they were, you know, there was jealousy, there was, all the time there was trouble. And I am the type, I was afraid even to answer. So. That's it.

[1:35:33]

So it must have been difficult when your parents left to Israel.

Yah, but my mother used to tell me all the time, 'You are from a good family, you mustn't answer anything.' And I was, you know, all the time she used to put me down. And even when there was a problem with my husband and his family, she used to put me down. 'You mustn't answer, you must accept it.' That's the way, at that time. So, all the time, you know, whatever

problem I had, I have to accept it, I have to accept it. And all the time there was problem.
[laughs]

So was there anyone else you could discuss your problems with, was there anyone who could support you?

Not much really. I had a friend afterwards. And she, we were very good friends, her husband with my husband, and, he, you know, as a, we were four, and we used to play cards in the evening. We were very good friends. This one, it was late when I had Jimmy, we were very close, and she helped me a lot. You know, [laughs] one day she went to quarrel with my mother-in-law. She took my husband and, 'Let me talk to her.' And she, she quarrelled with her, and, you know. But I couldn't, I couldn't, you know. I am so brought up that I mustn't answer. I never answered. But I used to sit and cry, cry, cry. And one day my mother went to the clinic to speak to my husband. She told him that, 'Poor Aida, she is crying all the time, when she comes she is crying all the times. It's your mother.' Yah. So he was cross with her, and he wouldn't speak to her any more. [laughs]

To your mother?

My mother, yes. He wouldn't speak to her anymore, because she told him, 'Your mother is...' Anyway. After they left to Israel, he went to stay with my mother and my brother, he went to stay there for two weeks. He wanted to see if we can live in Israel or not. But he came back, he was adamant not to go to, not to live in Israel. Because, he wanted to stay in England.

In Iraq?

No no. In England. When...

Oh, so he went later, much later?

Later, yes.

Sorry.

Yah. They left in '51, and we came out '79. And in 1960 he went to Israel – sorry...

'71.

1971, yah. '72. He went to Israel, and he stayed with my brothers, you know, all quite, nothing, all closed. Yes.

[1:38:44]

So, do you remember the discussions in 1950 of your parents' side of that family about leaving to Israel and, the decision?

You know, they had to leave, because my brother was in the, you know, there was this, the people that, Israel made them as, working for Israel.

Yah.

So, when they started to catch everybody, we were afraid that they will catch my brother also. And, he, they had to leave, you know, because of my brother.

So what was your brother doing? Maybe, can you describe a little bit?

I don't know. They used to have people to exercise, you know, to learn how to shoot. I don't know what, they used to go in each house, a party, a group. We didn't know anything about it, you know. A party, they used to come at home. They came at home once in my parents' home to learn how to, I don't know, to shoot or, I don't know. No one went into the room. So, it was, he was in the *Tnuah* at that time, so, he had to, to leave, he had to leave Iraq. And, they were one of the, you know, the early people who left. And, so, of course my brother, the other brother, he had, you know, he was an engineer, he had a diploma. As a matter of fact, when he went to Israel they told him, 'What do you do?' He said that, 'I am engineer.' 'Where did you work?' 'In the Lynch, Bet Lynch.' And, they took him, they wanted to ask him a question. He went first to prepare a place for my mother, my father and my brother. He went first three weeks before them. And they told him, 'We want to ask you questions.' They closed his eyes

and took him in, under the floor, under the ground, miles, I don't know how long, a mile or more anyway. Because he was in, working with Bet Lynch, those people, they have got everything, the boats, the thing, whatever, they, you know, it's a very big company. They asked him to give details. So when he went there, he was really scared, he didn't know what's going to happen, they wanted information. They asked him, where is this... So, as he is an engineer, he can design whatever, so he gave them everything they asked, all, wherever the boats were, the company, wherever, I don't know what. They ask him all sorts of questions. And, and you know, and they took him back. So they put the thing on his eyes so not to know where he, where he was taken. That, in December 1950, the last day of December 1950.

[1:42:18]

And how did they manage in Israel, how did they get on, your parents and...?

My brother as an engineer, immediately they gave him a job. My mother couldn't cope with my father, because, you know, he needs help, he needs a man to... So, my other brother stayed at home, and he used to take care of my father. After six months he died. And as a matter of fact, in the hospital, you know, he used to, you know, they took him to hospital, he used to speak German, French, English, Arabic, Hebrew. Hebrew, he can write it only, he can't speak it. So, in the hospital he used to, you know, to talk with the doctors and nurses, they are all German, and he used to talk in German, you know, the German language, he used to use it. Because he was in Germany.

When was he in Germany?

In the... Sorry, not Germany. In... [pause] Oh.

Switzerland?

Not Switzerland, no.

Austria?

Austria. Sorry. I forgot the name. Sometimes I forget you know, the age. Yes, he was, he went to see doctors, and, he stayed a few months there, and he learnt the language. He was very linguistic. He used to learn any language you want, and in, perfect. I do remember, you know, as he was ill, and all the time sitting on an armchair, you know, he can't do anything, we have to do everything for him, even if he wants to go to the toilet, someone has to take him, you know. He can't get up. I or my brother, we have to pull him, and, straighten his back, to do a few steps, you know, from the chair to the bedroom. You know, he was invalid. So...

And where did they settle in Israel?

In, first they stayed for a few months in the *Ma'abarot*, and then...

Just explain what it is please, the Ma'abarot.

Ma'abarot is, all the Jews, they went, if they don't have a house or money or anything, they put them in camps. And, they were in a camp. And, every day my brother used to go and, to work. And, my other brother also used to go, half a day or something. My mother used to take care of my father. But she couldn't really, she couldn't. She wasn't healthy enough to take care of him. So, you know, my other brother used to come back and help, you know. So, until they had some money to give it, to, to rent a flat, one-bedroom flat, they were three. My mother used to sleep on a bed and my other two brothers they had, you know, it's only one bedroom, three people, one bedroom. They managed. And a bathroom.

Where was that?

In Tel Aviv. In Tel Aviv. And, then, afterwards, my brother, my older brother, got married, so he went out of the house, he, he bought a flat himself, a house of... I didn't know, I had never, I didn't have any contact with them at that time. So, he, he lived in a flat with his wife. My second brother, he was, also he got married, and... Sorry. That, one bedroom, they changed it into a two bedrooms, and my second brother was staying in the other bedroom. Then, she started to work also, and he was working. So both of them, they bought a house, a flat, very nice, very large flat, and they moved into the flat. They stayed there til my mother died, and they stayed there until about two years ago, less than two years ago. No, two years

ago, they moved somewhere else, you know, a home, a flat in a home, that's, it's not found in here, only in Israel. Self-contained, and in a very big building. And they have got everything, they have doctors, they have a shop, they have a gym, they have a swimming pool, they have everything in this. It's beautiful. It's quite expensive, but it's worthwhile.

Could your parents, when they left, could they take anything, could they bring anything out of Iraq?

They took, just clothes, nothing. But my brother took his diploma with him. When they saw the diploma at the airport they tore it into pieces. So, even that, he couldn't get it. They couldn't take anything, only clothes. [coughing] Sorry.

[1:48:20]

When you left, what could you take?

When we left... As I told you, my husband was in prison the second time; the first time all of us. And we didn't know if we will arrive safely or not, if they will let us leave at the airport. [coughing] Excuse me.

Do you want to have a glass of water?

Yah. [pause] We were four, my husband, myself and the two children. I was even afraid to take, you know, twenty kilos each one of us. I was afraid to take eighty kilos. At the airport it was only seventy kilos. Just a few clothes, that's all. And we left the house as it is. At that time, a second cousin of my husband came, he used to work in a Muslim company, he brought someone. Because, my husband, as I told you, he was in such a state, he was even afraid to leave the house. He brought someone to, as if he is renting the house. So, I signed, it was in my name, the house in my name. I signed that, you know, I took the money from him. I didn't take any money, just to give us time to leave, without any problem. So... And we left the house. We gave one of the keys to my husband's second cousin. And, and that's it, we locked the door and came here. Afterwards, you know, I heard when the second cousin came to London. Sorry. We had, at that time we had 2,000 dinars in Baghdad. So, we gave it to the second cousin of my husband, and he sent it to us here in London, we received it here. So he

came here, and, he told my husband that this Muslim man, who rented the house you know from me, he was taken to the security and from morning till night asking him questions. He said, 'I rented a house, I don't know anything about them.' They let him go. I don't know how long after that, someone... So, Jews started to come, you know, from Baghdad. A friend came, and he told me, 'Aida, how clever you are.' I said, 'What, what did I do, how clever?' He said, 'You sold the house to someone.' I told him 'Look, I didn't sell anything. We just locked the door.' He said, 'Your name was in the papers that this man,' someone, not the man who rented the house, someone from the security, I don't know, he said, I owe him money, such money, and the house is his. So we don't know if he managed to take the house or not, we don't know til now. But I know that the first thing, this house was a beautiful house. We, you know, we bought the land and, we had an engineer, he was, he came from America at that time, and we went to see him. The house was beautiful, really something beautiful. And, it was furnished beautifully also. And, you know, so we don't know anything. So the first thing we know, that the Yemeni embassy rented the house, that's all we know.

When?

After we left. After we left. I think maybe after the six months that I gave this man. He moved in, this man moved in. I don't know how long he stayed. We had no connection anymore, we don't know anything about it. But only this, as I told you, friend, he told me, 'How clever you are.' I told him, 'I didn't do anything.' So, I told him, 'Please don't repeat that here, I don't want my husband,' he was in such a state, and he expected to have the house, the money for the house one day. I told him, 'I don't want my husband to hear. It's gone, it's gone.' Here we are OK, we are, I am working. My husband at that time, he was working. The children were working. I mean, we are OK. I don't want my husband to hear that the house... Because we were so attached to it, you know, every single tile, every single piece of thing in this house, you know, it was done very... So it's very, I just don't want to tell him. We were attached to the house. But, for me, I said, as long as... As I said, I brought my husband and the children safe to London; the hell with the house, the hell with everything. And, that's it.

Do you have any hopes of ever reclaiming this house?

Not myself. Maybe my children, or grandchildren. My children, I don't think they will be able to get. My son, Ramzi, is sixty-one years old, my daughter fifty-nine, and Jimmy is fifty-four. So, not, I don't expect in their life, but you never know. Maybe. Or, to my grandchildren.

[1:54:18]

Just to come back to the time when you left finally and arrived here.

Yes.

And you said it was quite difficult. Maybe, can you tell us a little bit about arriving, what were your first impressions?

Yes. We arrived, my sister-in-law – my, my husband's, brother-in-law, he rented a house for us, four bedrooms, in Hendon, for six months. We stayed in this house six months, and we were looking for houses. At that time, 1971, every week the houses going up in prices. So, when they tell you 20,000, the second day it's 21,000. So... [coughing] Excuse me. And as my husband didn't make up his mind to stay here or to go to Israel, so we didn't, we didn't know what we are doing. We couldn't buy any furniture. We couldn't do anything. So when he went to Israel and came back, he said 'I'm not going there any more,' because, especially Ramzi, my eldest son, he said he can't come, you know, he just finish his exams here of Chartered Accountant, and then to go to Israel and start studying again, he said, 'I'm not coming if you go.' So, that was, gave my husband to that, we are staying here. So we looked properly to have a house. We looked everywhere. Wherever there is an agent, we went to see him. At the end we found a house in Wembley. I have got my cousin, he lives about five minutes by car. You can go walking to his house. And, we were very close. He helped us a lot afterwards. And his wife also, helped me to learn to cook also. So, we were very close. And we moved to this house, we bought the house, and we told them, no mortgage, nothing, immediately, you know, the money is ready. So, immediately we started the procedure to buy the house. And we moved in. The day they left, we moved in, just we bought beds, and three-piece suite, sofa and two chairs. That's how we started. And then we started to buy every, every week, plates, whatever we need, you know, kettle the most important thing. Until... Dining room furniture, bit by bit, nothing came quickly. And, until, you know, we furnished the house. In the meantime we are going every day to see, to see the doctor for my husband's

health. And, you know, bit by bit. When I started to work, it was, it was a blessing. My husband wanted to... We found, my son Ramzi found a flat, flats in Chiswick, three flats, a building, and my husband liked it, so that's why, I started to work, you know, to prepare, to furnish. You know, and then, rented immediately, with the new furniture, newly decorated, everything is new. So, we started to earn money. And, that gave my husband, you know, a bit of confidence. But it didn't help much, you know. And then we bought my other flat. You know, that was, you know, with the help of my cousin. Then, we stayed here, and he went, as I told you, to Israel, he didn't like to go there.

Mrs Hakim, we need to change tapes.

[1:58:45]

[End of Video 2]

[Video 3]

[1:58:50]

This is tape three. We are conducting an interview with Mrs Hakim.

Mrs Hakim, we are talking about the time in England, and that you got into the business of managing and letting flats.

Yes.

You mentioned before that you managed to get some money out. So where did you get the assets for acquiring the flats?

We got the money. At that time, you know, it wasn't expensive here. You know. Well, I go back to, from, my husband as a doctor, he didn't need his money, because he didn't need it for, for business, or anything. So whenever we had, he had a bit of money, 1,000 or 2,000, he used to send it to London. His brother-in-law, he is fantastic, he was an angel. He made it work in shares. He used to work in shares, and he, he used it for us. He doubled the money by the time

we came here. So we had a bit of money. And, we bought all the flats cash, I mean, money was ready there. At that time, the building, three flats in Chiswick, it was, I think, £32,000, nothing as now.

So it was lucky that you had some...

We had something. We bought the house in Wembley, it was £18,500. You know, it's, not like now. We managed to get a few flats also in the West End. And, I worked, you know, with my flats. And then, friends of mine asked me if I can manage. So, I picked a few flats.

[2:00:50]

And what was it like for you to suddenly have to work?

Well, I had to. I had to, to see the three children at home. Although, my daughter was working as a secretary, and my son, Ramzi, was working also, as a chartered accountant. But, still, money has to come in. Whatever... I had to work, you know. And, it was very difficult. But thanks God, I managed. I don't know. I don't know how it happened. Bit by bit I started, we had, I made a company, my son prepared a company for me, and in the name of the company, I started to have clients. I rented the flat and, you know, each client had a separate account. And, you know, that's how I managed. You know, I got some, some moneys coming in apart from the interest. So.

Did you enjoy it?

I loved it. I really loved it. When I go and get money in my hand for the first time, I earned the money, it was fantastic.

Because this is something you wouldn't have been able to do probably in Baghdad.

No, not at all. I wasn't able to work you know. It's a shame that... [sneezes] Excuse me.

Bless you.

That my husband, a doctor, and I had to work, that's, unusual. Not done. Not at all. No, no women worked. But, some of the girls that finishes school, they started to take secretary things, but nothing much.

And do you think it was difficult for your husband to be in this...?

It was very difficult. He was really, really upset. [coughing] He couldn't accept it. And, especially when he lost his sight, it was very difficult for him. And many times he used to tell me, 'Well you can work, you can see. I can't see.' So, all the time, the eyes were, you know, were a problem. I can see and he can't see.

You mentioned that your husband was very depressed.

Yes.

What do you think was the most difficult thing for him? Was it the displacement, the...?

Everything. He wasn't young, you know, over sixty, to change. You know, he learned at home, we have got the cook, we have got the cleaner. I mean, he didn't do anything. He didn't, even when he comes, he used to, to open the gate for him, from the beginning of the road, he starts to hoot, so we arrive, to open the gate. He never did anything. And he came here, and, it's a different type of life. So, I had to stand on my feet, it's not for pleasure. And I didn't know that I will like it. First, as it's mine, it's different, you know, I can, you know, arrange this. I know what I need, whatever I need in my house I put in the flat. And, immediately, it was let. And, my friend also, my friend, she was in Iran, and then... And she came here, and when she saw what I am doing, she and her husband asked me, if they buy a flat, would I manage it? I told them, of course, you know. And I managed. And the same building, other people, when they saw me working there, and managing the flat, other people asked me also. I don't know how, you know, I started a company, and, it was, people are recommending me.

You built it up.

I built it up. Yah. Until... For years I worked. But then, I got a bit, you know, when you get... In my seventies, I gave it up.

[2:05:40]

So what was it like for you to be in such a different position and suddenly you have to start cooking probably and do things you didn't do before?

I got used... You can't believe it, in no time. I didn't know how to, to cook. My mother came here, and she told me how to cook, she taught me how to cook a few things. And, that's it. And my cousin, my cousin's wife also, she was a jewel, she is a jewel, you know. They lived near me, and, she taught me everything. But, you know, that's how, bit by bit I was accustomed to the... But, I did what I can.

But when you came to England, your children were already older.

Yes, yes.

So how, how easy was it for your children to integrate?

It was OK, you know. Not forget, we contacted the Iraqis only. I mean my daughter was with Iraqi friends of hers. Ramzi also integrated with his sister, when they invite his sister, they invite him also. Jimmy was young, younger than Amanda. Sometimes he goes with her, sometimes not. And, Jimmy first, we registered him in a private tuition for three months, whatever, and then he was accepted in a school near us in Wembley, and he started to go there. Amanda learnt how to do typing, and she found a job. Ramzi, my older son, found a job for her. And, she was very happy, she is earning the money. They give them the wages every Thursday, not Friday. On Thursday she goes out and spend it all on clothes. She was, you know, it's her money. I do understand, she is earning the money. By Thursday night, nothing remains. [laughs] So, you know, we didn't have to spend for her. And then, in a year's time this boy, he is also Iraqi Israeli, he saw her at the club. There was a club for younger, boys and girls. And, I don't know, one day they got engaged. He came to ask her hand from my husband and me. And, our life changed a lot you know, we have something, we have someone coming in the evening, we have to buy plates, whatever, for, for dinner. Because we didn't have

anything really, just the cheapest thing. We started to buy things. We started to, to live a bit. Yah.

[2:09:04]

So did you join a synagogue or...?

The synagogue, yes, we joined in Wembley, with Dayan Toledano. And, really, we never went to regularly, but, we, we belonged to the Sephardic synagogue in Wembley.

So there was, were you part of a community there?

Sorry?

Were you part of a, you felt you were part of a community?

Yah. Yah, because, all my friends, people, lots of people, they lived around where I lived, where we lived. And, we, we used to go, not, not much, but, if there is a wedding or a *bar mitzvah*, that sort of things.

Did you have any contact with non-Iraqis, non, or with, just English people?

No. No. [laughs] I never did. My aunt, she was here when we came. She left I think 19... a year before us. She went to Iran, and then she came here, and she settled in Hammersmith. She was a teacher for the bridge, for bridge, a bridge teacher. And she taught a lot of Iraqis. And, as I was in such, under pressure, she forced me to go and learn. So, I always say thanks to her, otherwise I would have been a vegetable at home, what would I do? But now, with the Iraqis, I joined with them. First there was the club in Kensington, I joined, after my husband died, after a few months, and...

What was that called?

Gardenia Club. And, for years we used to go there. Then they sold the club, and we started to come to the synagogue here in St John's Wood, first, and then, the other synagogue – the hall

I mean, not the synagogue, the hall of the synagogue, in, just across the road from the cricket, the Lords. There is a synagogue there. We go, you know, they pay for the hall, we play, and we have something, light, tea, whatever, with tea. And we play for three, three and a half hours, and we come back. That's the only thing, nearly the only thing I do.

So who organises this?

I don't know. Anyone from the committee. From, the people that, they use, they come to the synagogue. A few changed, you know, one of them started, the other was, you know, fed up, the other one took over. You know, someone takes over every, every now and then. But, it's very nice. You know, the atmosphere, you see only Iraqis here, or Israelis sometimes. And, we talk, you know, as friends, as family you know. That's, that's very good for me, you know, I have somewhere to go.

[2:12:52]

And, so first of all my son bought a flat in this building, and then, I bought the flat on top of his flat, on the fourth floor. I refurbished it, because it was in a very bad condition, and I, just to earn money, you know. But, then, things started, you know, I had to move in this, in the flat. It's a one bedroom. I moved in for some time. And then I stayed twenty years in that flat. And then, my son Ramzi came, and Jimmy said, and Amanda, that, 'You have to go to a bigger flat.' Because my things were all one on top of the other. So, they forced me, Ramzi forced me to buy this flat, it's two bedroom, in case I need someone to stay with me. And, that's...

[2:14:00]

Did you ever have any negative experiences in Britain, being Iraqi Jewish?

No. No, I never... No, I didn't. I tell you what, yes, I can say, yes. I used to, when the Arabs started to come here, lots of people started to contact me, they want flats. As I speak Arabic, they can, you know, they can communicate with me. So one of the buildings, there is a porter, so I told him, 'As a business, I'll give you fifty-fifty, we will take the commission.' So anyone who comes, he'll, 'Oh Mrs Hakim has got flats here, and...' So I meet the people. Otherwise, where from do I bring the clients? That's how I see, the head porter built my business. And

Jimmy was working with me also. At the end he got fed up with this kind of work. And, he is very good with electronics.

So you had lots of Arab clients, I mean...?

Yah. Muslim, Arab client. And, as a matter of fact, some of them give me their flat to manage it you know, when they saw how efficient I am. And...

Did they know you were Jewish?

They didn't. [laughs] No. The name Hakim could be Muslim. And, I tell you, one of them used to phone me every feast, every Eid, and tell me, happy feast, and then I say, 'Thank you very much, and you too.' I never said I am Jewish. Once, [laughs] someone asked me... No, he, he wanted to give me his flat. I went there, I met him in Maida Vale. It seems he... But anyway, I told him my husband was a doctor. That's only the, no names, nothing. Just, he was a doctor. He asked... There was an Iraqi Muslim doctor, she was a student of my husband. Because my husband used to give lectures in the medical school. Oh, she told him, what's the name, 'Mrs Hakim, and her husband is a doctor.' She told him, 'I think she is a Jewish woman.' So the next time he phoned me, the second day, he told me, 'What's your maiden name?' I told him, 'What do you have with my maiden name? Either you want my work or you don't. I don't give my maiden name. And I am not working for you. Goodbye.' And I put the telephone down. I know what he wanted to... And, other times, you know, bit by bit, they started to ask me, 'What are you?' I say, 'Jewish.' And everything changed. Well but, thanks God, we lived, we did, I did a good living out of it you know, we were, first we were five in the house, you know, and, it's not the food only. I mean we didn't have anything, not a spoon, we didn't have a spoon, or a plate, we didn't have anything. Bit by bit I managed to buy everything and furnished the house.

You say changed, so once people found out you are Jewish, they didn't want to do business with you?

No, they didn't want to do. You know, it was different immediately, everything is changed. Before they tell me, 'You get out,' I told them, 'I am not working any more. I am too old to

work. I am sorry, that's the key, and that's it.' Some of them sold the flat, you know, they told us, 'Please help us until we sell the flat.' And they sold the flat and that's it.

So it's interesting that you had the possibility of not revealing that you were Jewish, because other people with different names...

Of course, the name, it's my name, you can see, it's a... And there are Muslims called Aida, Aida. So, Aida. So, they thought it's a, you know, it's a Muslim. And Hakim, you know, Hakim, they, they don't expect Hakim as Jew.

[2:18:50]

How bitter do you feel towards, I don't know, the Iraqi regime, or, you had a very bad experience of...

Very bad experience, especially when they put in prison. I had a very bad, you know, very bad time, especially when my husband was in detention for three months, nearly four months, just under four months. It was very very difficult. I mean, the Jewish were afraid to come and speak to me, or, ask about me. It was very difficult.

And how do you feel about it today?

Out of my mind, I don't, I don't want to remember. Sometimes I remember, I get upset. But, even the servants was, you know, against us. We were afraid of the servants, you know. It wasn't life. But what can you do? Day by day, day by day. Until we managed to leave.

Do you have any desire to go back to Baghdad?

Never. Never. Never. Never.

And how would you call yourself in terms of your identify today?

Still Iraqi. You know, I still speak Arabic with all my friends, they are all Iraqis. You know. My children is different, they, they have got friends non-Iraqi, and non-Jews, and, whatever. But for me, that's how, I'm always Iraqi, an Iraqi woman. I couldn't change.

And how important is your Jewish identity?

Very important to me, very very important.

What impact do you think did it have on your life to have suffered persecution or...

Persecution. Everything. And especially, I mean, if it's not for the, for the war in Israel, and things, I mean, my husband would have been still working in his clinic. But when he was in such a depression, he couldn't work, you know. All, all our life, you know, we came up and down. And, I really, I don't know how I managed. I was so inexperienced. I don't know how I managed. I mean, by the help of God, and here, you know, I learnt book-keeping and I stood on my feet. I worked. And then, you know, for me, to bring money to the, to the house, you know, I don't have to ask for, for anything. So, for me it was... I do remember one day a brother-in-law of my husband, you know, the first time I rented a flat, that man, he is an Iraqi – sorry, no, not Iraqi, Kuwaiti, he gave me for two weeks. It's our, it's my flat, we bought it, my husband and myself, it's in Paddington. And, beautifully furnished, everything. I saw this man, he came and saw the flat, and he said, 'I want it. Come with me to the hotel.' Jimmy, my son, was with me, we went with him. The rent was 250 per week. Never heard of such a thing. Just started the Arab coming and giving hundreds of... So he gave me 500 for the rent for two weeks. And 250 deposit. When I went back home, I was, I had never had money I earned in my... So, my husband's brother-in-law took it from me. And, [laughs] I was shocked. He said, 'Well, I have, I can, I'll give you this, but I'll take this amount from your money,' in the bank, which he has power of attorney. I told him, 'Take from that money whatever you want. This is my money, I earned it.' It was, it gave me... I don't know, I started to feel I am a person, I can earn money, I can live, I can... Not like, when I was in Baghdad, nothing, nothing, just taking care of my husband the most, and the children. Although we have got a cook. Then, the cook, as I told you, he left, the cleaner started to cook. And, that's it you know. Life changed a lot.

What is the most important part of your Iraqi identity for you?

What do you mean by Iraqi identity?

I don't know, is it the language, is it Arabic, is it...? I don't know.

The friends. We had lots of friends. We were in the best circle of Iraqis. We were very happy there, before the war, the Six-Day War. And then, all went.

[2:24:52]

Let's just go a little bit back before we finish the interview to your, because that's very important, to your imprisonment, and to you husband's.

Yes.

When you were in prison, how many people again were with you?

We were all 135 people in one room. One of them was a nanny, Armenian. So, she is non-Jewish, but she is one of the 135 people.

And what were the conditions like?

The condition, it was OK. You know, everyone has, we have got... For four people... We sleep one near the other, you know. My daughter cleaned our... This woman, the next one, they cleaned it. All, it's clean, everybody was cleaning. And, only the problem, the toilet, with so many people, you know. We have, we managed, you know, it was dirty but we managed. It's... And, you know, an Iraqi toilet is just an opening in the, it's not as it's in our houses. Anyway, we managed. Sometimes, water comes out. But we managed, you know, we managed. They used to clean it sometimes, I mean, the security people. The worst thing, on Friday evening they come and tell us, 'Close the curtains, you must not open the curtains.' We didn't know why. A Friday – Thursday night, the night before Friday. Then, one of the men was very curious. I don't know how he managed to move the curtain a lot, and he saw, they brought girls. And when he told us, we were really afraid, in case they need another girl, they

can open the door and take one of the girls. We were really in, out of our mind. But thanks to God nothing happened. The same thing happened the next Thursday. So, every Friday – Thursday night, Friday morning, they have girls. But it has got nothing to do with us. They, they come and tell us, ‘Don’t open the window.’ Some of the men, you know, elderly men, they wanted to go to the toilet. I mean, they used to lock the door on us, we were, we can’t go even to the toilet, but, we were OK, you know, we were young, but elderly people. I remember once a man was knocking, knocking, knocking. He wanted to go to the toilet. Nobody opened the door for him. So, it’s so embarrassing, there was a basket for the rubbish. He went to do it in front of everybody, he went to... It was really, I mean whatever, whatever we remember, it was awful. [pause] That’s when we were, that’s the nineteen days in the detention.

[2:28:43]

And you wanted to add something about your, then you came out, you said, for two weeks.

More than two weeks, I think about two months, and they...

Two months.

They came and took my husband again. They accused him, wants to go illegally to Israel. But, on the paper, it’s written, he was a tramp, a tramp. He has no house, no, nowhere to go. A tramp. And that’s the case, you can see it in this, the paper I gave you. Tramp. And, that’s it. They caught him as a tramp in the street. We had our house. Anyway, at the end we left the house, you know, we did the... We didn’t care, as long as... I managed to get them all safe, I brought them all to London. That’s the most important thing.

Was your... Where were you imprisoned, the first time, where was it, was it in Baghdad, in a...?

Yes, they caught us in Erbil and took us back into, into Baghdad. The synagogue of the, I told you, of the, where they put us, it’s in front of the, on the security, you know, that’s where all the problems is. It was in front. And, we stayed in there, that’s nineteen days. And then, thanks to God they, they came, they sent us home one day. It was the day Gamal died.

Nasser.

Nasser, yes, Gamal Abdel Nasser died. That day.

And the second time, when your husband was in prison, where was that, where was he in prison?

First, the first two nights they put him in the same place. Sorry. In the security, in front of the, they call it *Mahfel*, for the Bahai's, it's a synagogue for the...

It's a temple, the high temple?

Temple, yes. So, I went there, and I gave him a blanket. It was, because it was Thursday evening, Friday, Saturday they took him to the main place where they put the prisoners, also the security. That's the worst place. [pause] But anyway, they never hurt them, or, you know, they just left them. The situation was very very bad, old people lying on the floor.

[2:31:50]

So how many people were detained at that time?

That time, I think five. Five, yah. But there was, before, other people. They took him to the, you know, the castle, the King's castle. They made it into a prison. Those, the other ones before they took my husband were in that castle. They call it *Qasr Nihaya*, that means the end, the castle, the end. That's the end. So anyway, we went there. We didn't expect them to, to leave. But, thanks God, you know, everything changed and, and they left. For us, my husband all the time was in the security place. At least we could take, six days a week I could, I would bring food to him. I bring fresh clothes, and he gives me the dirty ones. We wash it at home, and, you know. And, we used to give him, as I told you, about two dinars a week in case he wants to buy something. That's it.

And could you talk to him, when you visited him?

No; we can visit, we managed to visit once a month when he was there. I mean, for everybody, all, even the Muslims, they go and see, that's, to speak to them. I myself went, as I told you, I used to go to this minister. And, he told me, 'You want to see him?' I told him, 'Yes please.' So he gave me permission to go and see my husband in the security. So I phoned my daughter Amanda, I told her, 'You and your brother, come here.' We have meeting. So they came to see me where, they know where the security was. They came, and, funny thing, when they let us in, I saw two boys, Iraqis, also they were in prison, Jewish, you know. So they went in, they told my husband that, 'Your wife and children are here.' So they didn't know what's happening. Here he was, very, very upset. And, so, I told him the story, how I managed to get this permission to go in. As a matter of fact there was another one, a doctor, Dr Rabia... Not... Or, his brother? No, Dr Rabia was there. And his wife also came to see him, you know. Different, you know, each one apart. So we told him, we are doing everything we can. I have got... To give him, you know, the feeling, security or whatever, I am talking to the Ministers, I, you know. But, I told him, this doctor helped me to go to the Minister. That's it. Still, he felt different, you know. And, when he went back to his room he, they asked him what happened. He told them that's what I said. But, when to go out of the detention? Nobody knew when they will be out of the detention.

Do you think your husband was targeted because he was a doctor?

Sorry?

Do you think he was targeted because he was a doctor?

No. I tell you what. As I told you, he had a big depression. He went... He was always, he was afraid that it's blood pressure. So, he went to see, there is a doctor, Albert Rabia, near, near his office. He went to see him, maybe, every two days, three days, to have his blood pressure. And, this doctor told my husband, 'If we find a way to go illegally, would you come?' My husband said yes. But, as he was depressed, he didn't know what he said. Yah, I mean, committed himself. So they sent... They were going. He was going with his family. They sent someone to the north to prepare the road for us to go. I didn't know anything. I, you know... And even that doctor, who is a friend, you know, I can't say anything about... He saw him in this situation. I never knew what's happening. They took my husband to prison,

as he, he wants to go illegally. And, some people I tell, when, you know, I am trying to get him out, they say 'But he wanted to go illegally.' I say, 'Honest to God, we don't. We never had any, any such idea.' And it's true, we don't know, I don't know; he is the only one who said yes. And he forgot what he said. And it seems they told him how much money for the car, and, we have... So, I even said, I told my husband, 'How do you know that we have enough to, to pay?' you know. They wanted thousands of money. Anyway, that was the same mistake, because of his, you know, because of his depression.

[2:37:58]

So when did his depression start?

Started... The first time we were, we were taken to the detention, started. And he never, he never got out of it at all. The first day we came here, we arrived in the evening, we went to see a friend of my husband, he is a doctor. And, he is, you know, he sent us to doctors, to, you know, in Harley Street we went to see doctors, we went to... Even he had shock therapy six times, it didn't help at all. So the doctor told him, 'You will have to stop, you know, it's, you are not...' We did everything. But, he was, he had, you know, his own world, everything is, you know, whatever he built is going to pieces. He couldn't accept it.

So he couldn't really deal with the persecution he suddenly experienced?

Sorry?

He didn't, couldn't deal with the persecution, he...

He, he didn't accept it. For everybody it's OK; not for him. I do remember the doctor told him, you know, we used to go regularly to this doctor in Harley Street, so, this doctor asked my husband... Because my husband was telling, 'Why me? Why me?' So the doctor told him, 'Is God indebted to you?' So my husband said, 'No.' So he told him. 'You are one of the people, you are... God is not indebted to you.' So, you... Nothing worked. Nothing worked. He used to go to the clinic to earn his money, and come back. And, that's his life. The house is, you know, the food is ready, the cook is ready, the house is clean. I mean, we never went out, we had only the radio and TV, that's it.

So he couldn't cope with this, with his experiences?

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Absolutely not. He didn't accept it. He said, 'Where was I, and where I am now?' So, he couldn't accept it. He thought he is very well protected by his, you know, by his, the patients that he used to, you know, they used to visit him.

Did he have lots of Muslim and Christian patients?

He, he worked nearly only for Muslims, because he is a specialist, a chest specialist, and the Jews, they don't have any problem with the chest you know. TB or things like that, that's, this disease is not for the Jews. But, he used to work also, lots, all our friends they used to call him, you know, as a GP. And, they used to be very happy with him. He is not the type to give a lot of medicines. He tries to, you know, bit by bit you know. He doesn't give strong medicine. And, that's what my friends told me, they like him because, he is very conscientious. Yah.

[2:41:46]

We've discussed many things in your life. Is there anything else which we haven't discussed which you want to add?

I don't know. I don't think so.

You mentioned before your daughter before you were leaving, about the Alliance School.

Yes. Ah. Oh sorry. Yes. They finished the secondary school, and I...

Which year please?

Which year? Sorry, I don't remember.

Late Sixties?

It should be, yes, it should be late Sixties. And, the director, he used to love the children, all the children. And that's why he said he will do a course for matriculation. That time it was matriculation. And, he told them to come into the school before all the pupils goes out. So they used to go in and they close the doors as if there was nobody in. And he used to give them, you know, what they have to learn. And it was very, very nice of him. But, you know, then, everyone went out, you know, people started to go illegally, and...

But why was it necessary to do that at the time?

At the time, because they have nothing to do, no university, nothing. At least if they are staying at home, at least to learn something to prepare themselves to, if they are going out of Iraq. Because everybody was willing to go out.

So the Jews were not allowed to go to university?

No no. For two years they didn't allow them. So the third year they allowed them to go, certain, you know, a few, a few students. And they went in, as a matter of fact my daughter also went in, I think, one year, and then we left. We, we left.

[2:44:03]

Mrs Hakim, have you got any message to anyone who might watch this interview, based on your experiences?

No, but I, I hope God helps all of us, all of us. We are, we really had a bad time, all of us. It doesn't matter, you have money or you don't have money, it doesn't matter. To change your country, to change, you know... It was very difficult. And I am sure everybody suffered, whoever left Iraq suffered a lot. We suffered a tremendous, you know, because my husband was ill, and I didn't know what to do. I was not experienced. Everything he does, you know, he knows everything. But, that's it.

Mrs Hakim, thank you very much for his interview.

Thank you very much for coming. Thank you.

[pause in recording]

[2:45:20]

Can you please describe this photograph?

This is my mother and father the day they got married.

Which date was that?

1925.

And where was it taken?

It was in Baghdad.

[2:45:44]

Can you please describe this photo?

This photo belongs to my two brothers. I wasn't born at that time. The first one is Abraham Shentob, and the second one is David Shentob. He lives in, David Shentob lives in Israel now. But my brother Abraham, unfortunately passed away about ten years ago.

So David is on the left side?

On the right side.

On the right side.

David. And Abraham on the left side.

And when was this taken roughly?

In Baghdad, I don't know were.

In 19...

But I wasn't... Ah, when? David was born in 1928. So I think, he is two years old, something like that, maybe.

[2:46:40]

Thank you. Can you describe this photo please?

This, that's the last year I was in school. The year I left, it's 1947. Before I got engaged. It's, I am the third on the right, the back row. And, on the... Sorry. On the right, yes. The left, the first two are teachers. They came with us and we had those, you know, this picture.

Do you remember the names of anyone?

Yes. Nearly all of them.

Can you tell us the names?

Yah. The first one, Esperance, on the, the first one on the left, the name, she is a student, Esperance, I don't know what. The second one is my second cousin, Doreen Shashoua. Suzanne Peros. And then, the other girl, I really don't remember, sorry. The top level, that's, the first one on the right is, is in Israel, I saw her a few times, she changed her name into Peggy. And, the second one, Bertha Mansour, she lives in Montreal. And I met her a few times. I am in the middle. Then, Violet, Violet Izchayer, or... Her husband died, you know, a long time ago, her daughter is here in London. And the other two, one of them, the first one, the teacher, Rachel el-Waya; the other one, I don't remember the name. They were our teachers.

[2:49:00]

Thank you very much.

This picture, it's before I got married. A few months before I got married. It was taken in a club, the *Alliance Club*. I went there with my brothers.

What was it, what sort of club was it?

It's for young people, younger... Girls, boys and girls.

[2:49:32]

Thank you.

This picture is a family picture, my side of the family and my husband's side of the family. My husband has, I don't know, five, six, seven aunts, and I had five aunts. So, I don't know, only on the right-hand side. The first one is my brother Abraham, wearing white, a white vest – not vest, sorry, jacket. And the second one is my brother David. My mother is somewhere, I can't find her. The one wearing the hat is my Aunt Leonie. My mother-in-law is the one wearing the grey on the left-hand side, and that's some of her sisters. And the children, they have got their children with them.

[2:50:37]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken during the wedding. We had the wedding officiated in *Qa Attal al-Malik Faisal*. It's an open-air, I don't know why, but they thought it's very nice, better than the synagogue. And that's why I was married in this lovely, a lovely place.

[2:51:15]

Yes please.

This picture, that's my wedding picture. We went, immediately after the wedding we went by train to Istanbul. We took the clothes with us, and there, in Istanbul, we went to see a photographer that was good at that time, they said he is a very good photographer. It was, the date was 20th of October 1947.

[2:51:50]

Thank you. Yes please.

This is a picture, was taken in our house, sitting on the grass and my son Ramzi sitting on my lap.

When was this taken?

It looks as if... He was born in July '49. I think he is about two years old, not more than that. So, he was born '48; this one '49, '50, something like that.

[2:52:36]

Thank you. Yes please.

This picture was taken in 1953. We were here in London, my husband and myself, and, that's the picture. It's a nice picture, we kept it all this time.

[2:52:56]

Thank you.

This is a picture of myself and my grandchildren, Amanda's children. Samantha, who is a playwright now, and, Edmund. She has two children.

And where was this taken?

At home in Wembley. We used to be in, we used to live in Wembley. And, there is one year between – sorry, two years between them. So, Edmund looks like maybe, six months old, something like that. They used to stay with me sometimes, and that's one of the, the times they, they stayed with me. They slept with me, and we took, and my son Jimmy took this picture.

[2:53:57]

Thank you.

This picture, my three children. On the left-hand side, Ramzi, my older one. Amanda is in the middle, she is two and a half years younger than Ramzi. And Jimmy on the right-hand side, he is seven years younger than Ramzi.

And when was this taken?

This was taken, the day we had the bat mitzvah of my granddaughter, Amanda's daughter.

When was that?

When? [pause] I can't remember.

[2:54:40]

OK, don't worry. Thank you.

This picture, me and my two grandsons, that's the day of the bar mitzvah. On the right-hand side is Edmund, Amanda's daughter, and the left side is Ramzi's daughter. There is about, two months between them, two or three months between them. They, both of them had the bar mitzvah that, that year. They were thirteen years old.

[2:55:15]

Thank you.

This is my, my great-grandson. This picture was taken a few months ago. He is one year old, and it was taken in Ramzi's house. He is a grandfather. [laughs] And, he is my, I am so proud of him. He is a lovely boy.

And what is he called?

[pause] He has got so many names. Marcus they call him. He has got a few names. I don't know. His grandfather's name, his... I don't know, so many names. And, his mother's side

also, her grandfather. I don't know, so many names. But, Marcus is the name they, they decided to call him Marcus.

[2:56:21]

Thank you. Yes please.

This is my driving licence in Baghdad. It was taken 1953. Before that I used to drive without a licence.

[2:56:42]

Yes please.

This document, I went to Israel to show it to them at, you know, that I have this document. They said they never heard, no one got this document out of Baghdad. It seems I am the only one who got it out. That is why it's precious to me. It was the day we left the, you know, the detention, all of the family, after the nineteen days. It says that the high court stopped taking action about Aida Haron Dawud, that's my father and my grandfather's name, and his, you know, father and his grandfather. Amanda, my daughter, and the father, also grandfather, and my son Jimmy, his, also his father's name. And, that's when they opened the door of the detention and sent us home. It's signed by so many, you know, so many ministers. I can't, you know, there are so many ministers, or whoever, signed to let us go, to leave the detention. It's all in here. Five, six, I don't know how many, they signed to leave us to go home.

What do you want to do with this document? You don't want to give it to the museum? What...

They wanted the original. I didn't want to give the original. I told them I give them the copy. They said, 'No, we want the original.' I, I told them, I can't give it to them.

What do you want to do with the original?

I don't know. Keep it, the children will take it. I don't know. I don't know.

It's important for you?

It's very important. Because, no... Because no one has got it. I am the only one. So, it's really, precious. That's how we left the detention.

Mrs Hakim, thank you very much for this interview.

Thank you very much for, for asking to give this interview.

[End of Interview]