

Sephardi Voices UK

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Levy
Forename:	Solly
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	07/05/1951
Interviewee POB:	Beirut, Lebanon
Interviewee Occupation:	Businessman
Father's Occupation:	Butcher
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

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[0:00:00]

Sharon Rapaport: *I'm interviewing Mr Solly Levy in his house in London, on the 21st of October 2012. My name is Sharon Rapaport. I would like to start by thanking you for taking part in Sephardi Voices. Could we start by you telling us, where were you born? And the date of birth; your date of birth?*

Ok. I was born in Beirut, on the 7th of May '51.

What is... Tell us a bit about your childhood.

Ok. We grew up in the Jewish quarter which is Wadi Abu Jamil, where we have about two Jewish schools and about thirteen synagogues. The population ... the Jewish population at the time of my childhood was between ten to fifteen thousand. So...from early age we went to kindergarten, also in the Jewish school, continuing school we...we, we learned Hebrew. We used to study in French; Arabic in parallel, because we are living in Lebanon. And Hebrew because of the Jewish studies. But at the age of ten, we start English... so, every Jewish kid used to speak four languages easily. So I went to *Alliance Israelite Universelle* till...till the age of sixteen, which the top class we have make the Brevet, what is called the Brevet, and afterwards I went to the *Lycee* to finish the *Baccalaureate*, which I have done three years. And the third year, I have done it in Israel because I left Lebanon in 1969.

I would like to go a bit back, to your family.

Yeah.

Your grandparents. Could you tell me a bit about them; your grandparents from your father's side? And then we'll go to your grandparents from your mother's side.

[00:02:35]

Ok from my father's side, I was the first generation born in Beirut. My father was born in Tzfat which was Palestine at that time. And... my grandfather left Tzfat in 1921. He moved to Lebanon to... It was a famine at that time in Israel, so he moved to Beirut to take the...the, the boat, the vessel, to emigrate to America, with his kids. But they arrived to Beirut, he sees a very nice community, he stayed there. And my uncles had emigrated. And my father only was the youngest one; he stayed with his father in Lebanon. So I was the first generation born in Beirut.

Did you know your grandfather? Did you meet him?

No, he died three years before I - I was born. So, looking backwards, my grandfather was born in Tzfat and they had been there in Tzfat from 1810. We have documentation that they emigrated from Oran, Algeria in 1810. It's documented; I have documents about that. So they had been about...from 1810, all the generation was living in Tzfat. And we were the first generation that have...which was born in Lebanon.

What was your grandfather's profession?

Butcher; and it was in the family for many generations. And...

Did your father say, tell you any stories about your grandfather?

The only thing I know about my grandfather that when he came to Beirut and he lived there, he liked the community, and...he asked to be buried in Tzfat. So it was, at the time, very simple because there was nothing wrong in this time; Israel didn't exist yet. But he died three months after the declaration of the state of Israel. So the border was closed. And they - they couldn't take him to Israel to bury him. So they buried him temporarily in Lebanon for two years till they, my father could arrange the documentation papers. He took, he took it up. He transferred him to Cyprus, and my uncles come from America. They took him from Cyprus to Tzfat and he was buried in Tzfat.

So he's buried in Tzfat?

Buried in Tzfat, definitely.

[00:05:19]

And your grandparents from your mother's side?

I didn't know them, I... Yes, my grandfather died very - very young, from my mother's side, so I never knew him. I bear his, I have his name. And... My grandmother, which is... which I knew her very well. She died in 1969, in Brazil. She wanted to see her son because all my mother's family moved to Brazil. All my father's family are in Venezuela.

Ok. Could you tell me a bit about... you say that you remember your grandmother? What kind of person was she? Can you tell us what her name was?

Her name is Esther. And... we used to visit her or we used to be with her all the time, in our childhood. And she's a ... very nice woman. I remember her very well.

Did she live close to you?

Yes. So that's the reason we was running even we were without my family or without my mother or we could cross the street and go to see her. And, she used to take care of all of us. All our... We used to be a lot of cousins and cousins... That's what I remember from her. And then she went to visit her son in 1969 and suddenly she died and she never came back.

Mnn.

And at the same time I left Lebanon so...

You mentioned that you were named after your...?

My grandfather...

Your grandfather:

...On my mother's side.

On your mother's side. Right. Is there any name Solly?

Salim. My grandfather used to be...his name is Salim. And my name is Salim, you pronounce it, but the day I was born they called me Solly and that's all.

Ok, but you were born with the name of Salim?

Yes.

Did you receive any other Jewish names? Was there...?

No. Salim is all. Salim is all.

Ok. Could you please tell me a bit about your parents now?

[00:07:30]

My parents...

What kind of woman was your mother?

My mother still, I know, we grew up at home. She never worked, so we used to be with her all the time. She used to take care of us. And...family, you know family traditions... everything in the religious holidays, Shabbat, everything in the family life. And we are very ...how do you call it...?

Close?

Close. Yeah.

Right. Where did she meet your father? How did they meet and when?

I think it was a *schiduch*, if I remember well. It was the story they told that there had been a *schiduch*. They had made a *schiduch* for my mother. My father served in the Army, the French Army during the Second World War with a...a friend of him was married to her sister. So she introduced to, to my mum. So they get married, they have five kids; five boys.

Is there anything particular that you would like to document about your mother?

Nothing.

Like foods that she used to do...or...anything else?

Ah. In our... We grew up at home, we had our aunty living with us; my father's sister. She never get married; she lived with us. So, she was in charge of the food, and my mother was in charge of the house. So when my aunty died, my mum took over but she never really was in charge of the food. So all our cooking that we eat is always we remember our aunty.

So what did you like the best?

The Lebanese food.

Which ones?

All. Any. Could be *lahm bi ajeen* or whatever... plenty of things. And my wife managed to learn all the Lebanese food, even she is not Lebanese, from my .

From your...?

00:10:01

When we get married, the beginning of our marriage, we lived seven years in Israel, and my aunty used to - to come because we was living three blocks from her. She used to come every day teach her something else. And today she's a perfect cook.

And your father?

My father was a *kosher* butcher in Lebanon. *Kosher* butcher. Um...nothing special really... we used to be very close, as a family.

You told us before that he was in the Army.

Yeah. As a French citizen, they have to be in the... they have to be in the military service it was during World War Two. He had been in the French Army with my one...he and two brothers of him. So... his youngest one, was a pilot. And... his - his plane was ...down, when he was raided...make a raid on Berlin. And he died. He kept alive; story that he went...he...when his plane was hit, he managed to leave the plane with a parachute with the co-pilot. They get to the ground, and the co-pilot survived and he came to tell us the story at the time, that he had his name on a bracelet, a gold 'Clement Levy' so the German with a bayonet killed him straight away. And the other, co-pilot went to the concentration camp. Two days later, the war finished, and he liberated and he tell us the story. That's the reason, that's how we know how he died.

So did your father tell you on what front he - he fought?

Sorry?

On what front did he fight?

Ah, no, he didn't fight. He was I think in part of Syria, in a, in a - in a port called Tartus. He was writing in the transport department something like that, for the whole war. And

the only casualty was my uncle. So, that's the reason my uncle had been recommended in Yad Vashem.

[00:12:33]

You said that there that there's a story...?

Yes, I have full documentation. If you want to see it I have the whole documentation about him. And this is - from this documentation we have all the backward how to get to Tzfat from first place, how we originated from Oran. This is a document confirmed by the French Consulate.

So your father you said that he was a butcher?

Yes.

Kosher butcher.

Kosher butcher, yeah.

And where... where was his...?

In the Jewish Quarter.

Can you tell me a bit about it? About the Jewish Quarter in Lebanon when you grew up?

How did it...?

Yeah, we grew up easily...we never...we have spent all our time in the Jewish Quarter. We never left the Jewish Quarter to go outside. It's like a kind of ...security. We were not bothered. We lived nicely in Lebanon. But we never bothered to go outside the Quarter, so our – we used to have our sport, our club, Maccabee, and we used to do all the activities between Jewish, we have the Scout. We used to be in the Scout, we have

Maccabee, you have later on we have done some all the young people used to train... to protect the Quarter in case anything happened.

Mmn

So they used to, even we have been trained with the Phalangists in Lebanon, but it was kind of...not official. But we have been trained by the Phalangists, and the arms was part of this keen group that we have been trained.

How were you recruited?

Uh...our late Hebrew teacher, he was in charge of the Maccabee, or lived in the community. He had the... the group, so he collected the... the young people at the age of – who was about sixteen, who started. And we have been training for two years, till I left.

You were actually trained to take care of...?

To protect.

To protect.

To protect the Jewish Quarter in case anything happening or...

00:15:05

And the Jewish Quarter...the Jewish Quarter...how many streets did it consist? How many...?

It's let's say...it's one big street. Take an example like Golders Green one. And...and you have another continuation on the side, let's say of side of the Jewish Quarter about ...three and three on each side. That was the whole Jewish Quarter at the end of the day.

And was the school in the Jewish Quarter?

In the Jewish Quarter, yeah.

And you were also telling me that you lived opposite the...

Opposite the Magen Abraham, the Magen Abraham synagogue. It was in the middle of the Jewish Quarter Wadi Abu Jamil. And I used to live exactly in front. Our building was in front of the synagogue. And we had thirteen synagogues all around, anyway. So if you go out of the all around Wadi Abu Jamil, there were thirteen synagogues for a community of ten thousand people.

So what communities... what communities in Lebanon you said. What other communities?

They are, they used to have one Ashkenazi synagogue. We used to have one Syrian synagogue, and the rest are all family synagogues, let's say, which have been donated by families. Each one which have been donated at the time.

You're quite a young child going to this synagogue. Do you remember how it looked to you as a child?

Yeah. I remember it, you know? That's what ...we still are even here, we manage to have the synagogue more or less, is the same ...the same style, more or less the same style... which is more or less like the Jerusalem. It's very important, I like it, since I was a kid, I remember it. And I always remember the... the Mizrachim and everything that we used to do at the synagogue.

[00:17:42]

You didn't have special kind of tunes in comparison...?

Yes, you know, it was special for us, because we grew up with it. Now, if you look here sometimes, more of the synagogues, most of the synagogues you go, some are similar, some are not so similar. You get used to it but...the original one...we have some disc about that. Somebody have recorded that; my... my, my uncle was a Hazzan.

Your uncle from...?

My mother... married my mother's sister. He was a Lebanese Hazzan which is everybody knew him. And then we moved to Israel, he was the Hazzan of the Lebanese synagogue. So they have recorded this all on a - on a disc, all the Mizrachim, all the tunes of the *Chagim, Rosh Hashanah, Pesach, of Haggadah*, everything.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Brothers, I have four brothers, which are living in different countries. My eldest brother lives in Israel, and my other brothers, one is in France in Lyon, one is in Antwerp, in Belgium, one is in Caracas, in Venezuela.

It must have been interesting living with five boys.

Yeah [laughs].

Who were you the closest to?

We used to fight all the day. That's the reason, it make it different; a little bit different that you don't have any sisters. And...I left Lebanon in 1969 with my eldest brother. We moved to Israel. And my parents have stayed in Israel till 1975, when the civil war broke out and then they have to leave...

They stayed in Lebanon, you mean?

They was in Lebanon when the war broke out. They were still living in Lebanon. I was by myself with my brother living in Israel only. And...my brother get married, and he

had ...and he had a son. My father was supposed to come to *Brit Milah*. So it was before the war broke out; a couple of weeks. So he was supposed to come. He left Lebanon. He travelled to Athena, and from Athens, he came to Israel to be the *Sandek* [an adult honored at a Jewish (circumcision) ceremony] ,and then, the war broke out in Lebanon. And my mother was there with my... my mother and my... other three brothers was there. So they managed to leave everything, and to move to Cyprus, and from Cyprus they moved to Israel. That was the end of the Lebanon story, for us.

00:20:55

You were born actually after....the state of Israel was founded.

Yes.

What was the relationship? Do you remember? How did you feel; Israel is very close to you border line?

Yes

But what was your relationship in the community in Lebanon, to Israel?

The community was all pro-Israeli, for sure. They all liked Israel. They talk about Israel but they have to be very careful, that's all. So we used to be very careful. You couldn't talk officially about Israel. But between us, at school, in the synagogue, we only talk about Israel. We look our...we follow the news about Israel. We used to do all the Maccabee everything. We used to lead the Jewish life, think about Israel, but you cannot go officially. There is no way you can go officially, only in another country. So whatever you hear about Israel, you listen, but you cannot... you cannot comment on it publicly for example. You have to be very careful, because in the Jewish Quarter you used to have also neighbours, Arabs, Christians, Muslims, so you have to be very careful whatever you say or whatever you do. Now, to live in an Arab country is not easy. When you are, especially you are Jewish, you have to be very careful. You have...In the kind of life, we grow up like that, you know? We ...with this sense of security, you have to be

sure that what you are saying or what you are doing in a... you are not living in a free country, not a democratic country at the end of the day. Not you are living in Europe, living is different. You can do whatever you want; you are Jewish, Christian, Muslim you do whatever you want. In Lebanon you was restricted. And we... we learnt to live with this restriction, which became, well... a habit; you get used to it. And you know you are, you are careful where you go, where you visit. You go out of the Jewish Quarter; you go to any city centre, you know, cinema or whatever, club...but you are always ...careful... Sense of self-security, or whatever you call it.

[00:23:29]

You are talking about this sense of insecurity or that you have to secure yourself.

Yes.

Did you... know about any incidents that happened?

Not really.

You didn't know.

Not...not that you didn't know. I don't remember. We was living really in peace. We didn't really have any problems; contrary of the other countries, of Arab countries where Jewish have been ...uh.....persecuted. In Lebanon really we have not been persecuted; we have, we have been living really free with as little bit of insecurity, but... but we was really free to do whatever we want. Even if you leave the country, you're supposed to leave the country you can take your money with you, you can take your assets with you. You was not restricted. And that's what happened. Everybody left with his assets. And only the last...the, the people who left at the end there is a war - civil war...they couldn't send assets, so that's all. But usually it was a free country. There is no restriction of currency or whatever, so it was free! We lived a good life at the time.

[00:25:01]

So what places did you meet the...the Muslims or the Christians? In what ...did you have any meeting points? You said that you actually grew up mainly in your Jewish community.

But, we used... We used to have some friends Christians or Muslims which was in the neighbourhood.

Did they come to your house? Did you go to theirs?

Not to our house. Used to meet in the street, really. But to our house we have never brought any friends which are not Jewish. But then when I moved to the *Lycee*, it was not a Jewish school any more so we had all in the school which are not Jewish. But we never brought them home, or go to their homes.

I'll go back to that part of how life in Lebanon deteriorated, or what made you leave Lebanon a bit later. Could you a bit describe physically your house? What do you remember from your house, how did it look, how did... from your house that you grew up in?

Just we had a big house... third floor, which used to have four bedrooms, big lounge, big salon...

Was it a house, or flat?

A flat.

A flat.

It was the third floor, and four bedrooms, it used to be...these huge houses, these big houses in Lebanon at the time, so the room was big; not like today. Four bedroom, big dinner room, lounge, big kitchen, two big balconies on each side of the house, north and west sides; big balconies. Normal house.

And who were your neighbours in your building?

They were all Jewish. The whole building used to be three floors, it used to be three floors, two flats in each...in each floor. There was all the Jewish – do you need names?

No, no. I am trying to understand. And you, your parents, what kind of social life did they have? You were saying that you were part of all kinds of Jewish organisations...

Yeah.

What kind of social life did they have?

00:27:42

Social life...meeting family...You mean where did they go or they went? They used to go out for dinner.

Were their friends, were they Jewish or...?

Jewish. Jewish. Yes. They are all Jewish. Their friends were Jewish, so they used to go with each other out or going for... movies or go to restaurant or either they, usually they meet, play cards.

And culturally, what...what was the music, let's say, that they listened – that you used to listen to at home? Was it Middle Eastern music? Was it...?

My parents? My parents used to – they used to listen Arab music. We as the kids, was using more, mostly French music. English but more mostly French, French music it used to be, as the kids.

And the newspapers. Did they – did they read one of the...Jewish newspapers at that time? What newspapers did your parents read?

They used to read... my father used to read two newspapers. One is in French, one was an Arabic. The French newspaper and the Arabic newspaper, which is the languages used at the time because...there is occup...at the time it was occupied by France, and it's all everything is French, you know the education, French, you read books in French usually.

And what languages did you speak at home?

At home we used to speak Arabic. Arabic at home and at school, it was educated French education, like I said, with the Arabic in the parallel. And then further Hebrew to... to be able to pray and Jewish studies. So from kindergarten you have one hour every day, one hour you do every day. And then at the age of ten you do the English.

[00:30:07]

So you actually used to speak at home Arabic and outside with your friends...?

With friends Arabic also. It depends...mostly Arabic. Used to speak between us, is Arabic. But if you ask me what I read books? I don't read in Arabic; I read Arabic, but I can't... I'm not interested, for example. If I read, I read in French.

Today, but I'm talking as a child.

At the time, at the time, we read in French. I used to study Arabic but I don't...I, I didn't read books in Arabic, for instance. For me to read a book, it's in French, not only me, the whole...friends, all the friends at school, everything; we used to read in, in French.

And were your family an observant family? What was the... were they religious, were they secular?

We were traditional.

What do you mean by traditional?

Traditional. It's a...we go...we celebrate all the *chaggim* all the religious holidays. We celebrate the *Shabbat*, we eat our *kosher*, everything is *kosher* at home.

So could you describe a typical celebration which is

[Cameraman readjusts]

Yes, ok?

Yes?

Could you describe these celebrations are unique, to the Lebanon community that you celebrated? It could be with the food, it could be with the songs, it can be any kind of ritual that...?

It's a...for *Pesach* for example, the *Haggadah*, the *leyl ha Seder* [*Seder* night] we used to read and my father, with all the family together, sometimes when we was young we used to have my aunties from older times, my mother, and we used all together and this special *Mizrachim*, you know this special...

So that's what I'm interested in, these special Mizrachim. Do you want to say them; do you want to sing them? Do you want to tell us about them, maybe?

We do it in a way it's...we keep, we keep doing the *Seder* till two days, the same, the same way and we passed it to our kids. Now that you are doing it for example here, with my kids and grandchildren, we are teaching them the same tradition, and the same way, that's all. *Rosh Hashanah* the same.

Was there any tradition that was unique to the Lebanon Jewish community?

[00:33:01]

Unique?

Yes.

No, I don't see anything special ...it's only the tune, that's all. But the...the *Haggadah*, is the same.

And on Shabbat...on Shabbat.

On Shabbat...

So could you describe a typical Shabbat?

Typically *Shabbat* is...

As a child...

On a Friday night. Normally is a *Kiddush...Kiddush* done by my father, usually at home. We always had Shabbat at home usually. We never go out. We had, even we are not *very* religious orthodox traditions but, custom is that on Friday night we never go out. So it used to be a family dinner, with *Kiddush* and family dinner at home. And it continue till today. Even with my kids, nobody go out on Friday night. And Saturday is the same. Sometimes...usually we used to go to synagogue, come back from synagogue, having lunch, and *Shabbat*. Playing with the kids.

And your Bar Mitzvah? Do you remember anything from that?

Yes. I remember that at the time that I make, yeah, I have my *Bar Mitzvah* at home. At the time we used to do a party at home, so it was a big...big party at home, which I have, I remember it very well. And we have my uncles coming from America, from Venezuela for the *Bar Mitzvah* specially.

And the Parasha [weekly portion of the Torah]; what Parasha did you - did you?

Vayishlach.

Is there anything about the day itself in the synagogue that you would like to tell us about?

As far as I can remember, it was in the synagogue where my father used to pray. And...we, we had the *tefillin* and also *berachot*, everything. And afterwards we had a big lunch at home with all the Jewish...with the community. That's usually the family and friends, so not like today. We don't do...we didn't do at the time party, dancing and everything. It was only a big lunch at home, and that was the end of it.

[00:35:48]

You were talking before that you had a few family members that were prominent in the Jewish community. That one of them was a Rabbi, one...

My...yes, my uncle, my – married to my mother's sister - was a *Hazzan* of the...at the big synagogue Magen Abraham.

Yes. What was his name?

Abraham Seror. He had been with a...he was a *shochet* also for the *Kehilla*. And he was the producer of the *yayin* - wine and arak, *kosher*, but he used to do by himself, *kosher* and able to sell to the community. Because we didn't have any wine - *kosher* wine, he was the only producer of *yayin* [wine] to be able to...so the community had the *Kiddush*, for *Kiddush* you know?

So he was the only one who actually made wine for the community?

Exactly. He was the only one, and he was the *mohel*; he was a *Mohel, Hazzan, Shochet*. He left in 1968, Lebanon, to move to Israel and he kept living in Israel with the Lebanese community to be their *Hazzan, Mohel* and everything – and *Shochet*.

So what synagogue did he...

In Bet Yacov, in Ramat Hanassi, in Bat Yam, which is the Lebanese community. And... he passed away last year, sorry, two years ago. That from my...side of my uncle. That's what I can remember, yeah.

[00:37:49]

So I want to know a bit about your schools now. You started your schools...your... I would like to know a bit about your schooling. Your primary school was...

My primary school was *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, in Beirut, which I...I have been there till the age of... sixteen. Then you go for the A-Level, like, the equivalent of the A-Level was the *Baccalaureate* which is from sixteen to eighteen, to the *Lycee Lebanais*, so it's not a Jewish school any more.

How was it for you to come from a Jewish environment to a non-Jewish environment?

It was a bit difficult because you didn't know anybody at this period, at this school. When I went you know they all knew each other because they have grown up together. But we managed; it was about... We were about seven or eight ...friends. We were seven people, eight people who went there – together. So at least we feel... comfortable to be together in the same class at least.

Were you known to be the Jewish people in the school?

Yeah. Yes, cert...It was – it was obvious. And, we used to travel for an hour or forty-five minutes outside the Jewish Quarter, to the... to this *Lycee*. We managed well; no problem. And I have done three years.

But did you encounter any problems at some point?

No. No, no. Not at all. It was very friend... friendly. We never had any problems at all. And at the age of eighteen, so I needed one more year to finish; I decided to the...with some of our friends to make Aliya.

Why did you decide? What year are we talking about?

When I moved...I ...I was eighteen, and... I decided to move to Israel. And... me and my brother we made Aliya in 1969. And that's the reason I finished my last year of *Baccalaureate* in Israel.

[00:40:15]

But in the years between, till 1969...

Mnn?

...Was there any change? Did you feel any changes happening in Lebanon, towards...?

After '67.

So between '61...

And '67 it was all right. But then when it start the Six Day Wars, then it start the manifestation around the...they do a big manifestation in the street. And people start to leave the country.

This big manifestation. Tell me about it. Where were you at that time?

I was in the Quarter.

Do you remember ...remember that?

I remember; I remember very well. The first thing, we have been helped by the...Lebanese authority. They send Army to... to close all Quarter, to protect us. That was on each side of the, of the, of the Jewish Quarter they put Army. So the manifestation went around the Jewish Quarter. They didn't get into the Jewish Quarter.

The manifest...

From the window we can see them shouting, swearing...

You saw as a child. How old were you at the time?

Sixteen. I remember it very well how they used to pass, you know the hatred on their face. And shouting and you know, it was unbelievable. So people get, they don't get scared, but they saw that it's no future any more so they start leaving. From '67 to '69 most of the emigration left in this time.

But I'm interested a bit to understand that specific day in 1967. You are about sixteen years old. You were at the home, say.

We was...we were... in the street.

You were in the street?

On the street. And from the, from the...we was playing with...you know because of the Six Day War there was no school. So we used to have... we have to do you know, test, to finish the primary school. It had been cancelled and I was in the street playing; I remember as well, very well. And from the street, from where we were playing, you can see the... the other way where the manifestation was coming. You know, because it was on a higher level, our Quarter. And there was another street, this is ...outside the Jewish Quarter, and there was passing all with, with...panels and shouting and swearing. We watched them, as kids, we understood; we were sixteen years old, we were not a kid. We

could understand; we see the hatred on their face. And they tried. They wanted to come to the Jewish Quarter, but the Army didn't let them. From '67 they started leaving the country.

[00:43:22]

So how did your family, how - you were a teenager – how did you cope?

I was OK.

You went on with your life after the manifestation; for how long did it take?

Only one day. Same day and then a few days later again one more day, you know. But every time there is...but the Army had been protecting the, the Jewish Quarter for long; since the pogroms started. We had been permanently...

So from 1967, in what way did your life change, from that day? What was the date?

Sixth of June, ah, the manifestation it was the same day of the war, so sixth of June '67?

So in what way did you life change from then on?

Not really change, but ...we were, as a teenager; we didn't think much of it. But the family started seeing that there is no future for the Jewish ...for the Jewish community there. And we were, we have been helped to make the *aliyah* through the *sochnut* [Jewish Agency for Israel] which was at the time. So it was encouraging people to leave the country.

So when you say the family understood that there was no future...

MnHnn.

Did your father talk to you...were you...when you say that the family didn't ...I'm trying to...

[00:45:00]

My father was very stubborn, at the time. He didn't want to leave the country and that's the reason he didn't leave it. He left it at the end because civil war started, that's all. But my father didn't have any interest. He was enjoying his life. He liked it; he didn't want to leave. And one of the reasons you know as idealists, the kids... a group of ten people, we left together; we make Aliya together, because we were the same age.

You were saying that the shlichim came to you?

Not *shlichim*, we had the part of somebody in the community used to take care of the people to...to finance them, to leave the country and to get visas.

So what did you need to do in order to...when you say that you, you have to go to that person...?

You ask him you want to go to Israel, he arrange it very quickly, no problem.

What was the arrangement?

The arrangement was you bring your passport and he buys you a ticket, and he used to send you a ticket to Turkey, and from Turkey...the...the... *shlichim* used to take over, and transfer us from Turkey to Israel.

So you and your brother decide to leave; how did your parents take your decision?

Very hard. [Half laughs] They didn't like it. My late father didn't like it, and he didn't want me to leave but...at the end we convinced him and we left.

What were the preparations that you needed to do before your leaving?

Nothing special really. Have to ...we contacted the person in charge, in the, in the community. And he arranged the paperwork with us.

Could you describe the day before you left?

It was a very sad day for the family. I remember my mother crying. They took us to the airport. It was a very sad day for them and maybe for us, but we didn't feel you know, as a teenager you're always happy, you know, going for the adventure. But...what I remember again my mother and my was crying.

[00:47:36]

Was there anything special that you took from your room; that your parents gave you, something to take with you?

Not really. They buy me clothes; they buy me everything you know. All things, everything I need. And we went, and that was the end of it.

And when you say you went, the journey to Israel, you say you were talking about that from Lebanon, from Beirut ...

...To Istanbul. Istanbul. We stayed four, five days in Istanbul. And...we get on a plane and... with the documentation as new immigrants, went to Israel.

Which year are we talking about?

1969.

1969. And in Israel, who were the people that greeted you? Or who were...?

The *Sochnut* at that airport, and they sent us to *kibbutzim*. We arrived and we get our...

One second, what kibbutz? I'm interested to know only your experience...

My experience?

Only your experience ...

Yeah. My experience, I went to the kibbutz. It was...I didn't last...I can't remember the name of the *kibbutz* now.

But what were your first impressions from Israel? Or from the kibbutz? Was it like you...?

I was shocked. At the *kibbutz* I was shocked because...it's middle of August. I'm arriving to Israel with a wool suit and a tie and it was hell, so hot. And I arrived to the *kibbutz* at ten o'clock in the evening. I remember they give us some T-shirts, some shorts to have you know to wear. And they told me 'At four o'clock in the morning you have to be up – wake up for working', picking up the chicken, put it on the track, from four o'clock till eight o'clock in the morning. That was the worst experience in my life. I hated the *kibbutz*. Next day I left.

Really, next day?

I left. My brother stayed there. I left. He stayed with all his friends. I say, 'I'm not staying here. Just arrive, what a welcome. At ten o'clock in the evening I arrive, only at four o'clock already I have to pick up chickens to put on the tracks. That is not for me'. So I left. I left the *kibbutz*; I went to, into town.

To what town? Where did you go?

Bat Yam.

To Bat Yam; and did you know anyone there? Why did you decide to go to Bat Yam?

[00:50:27]

Because all the Lebanese community who left Beirut went to Ramat HaNissim, Bat Yam. And my was there, so I went to my first. And I stayed a few, couple of months with my aunty, then I start school. I start the last year of the *Baccalaureate* which were being done in Nazareth. And I had my *Baccalaureate*; I finished my *Baccalaureate*. As a new immigrant I have a choice if I want to go to the Army first or...or to do the University. So I choose to do the University. I wanted to be a dentist. I went for the test; didn't pass the test yet. I tried in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, it didn't pass. So I said, you can go to the Army; after the Army you still have the right to do it. I...I, so I decided to go into the Army. I finished my...the Army.

Where were you in the Army? Where did you join the Army?

I was in the... DCA in *nun-mem*. I have done two and a half years.

And what was your experience as an emigrant at time, going to the Army? Did you feel comfortable with the Hebrew, let's say?

Hebrew it was comfortable; it's not a problem because we used to learn Hebrew. So for me it took me a couple of months I was already speaking very well Hebrew. I didn't have any problem with Hebrew. But, yeah, ok, it was difficult. Don't forget I was as a...soldier without a family, so when your friend go during the weekend they used to go to their family, I used to stay in the Army or I go to my aunty or something like that. It was difficult. Other soldiers get parcels from the family. I didn't have family. So it was not the same.

[00:52:34]

But regarding the other Israelis around you, how did they, did they embrace you?

No, the Israelis were very good. I made a lot of friends, very quickly. And ...had good times.

And how were your contacts? How did you stay in contact with your family in Lebanon?

I used to write to my uncle in Spain. My uncle from Venezuela, when they had... it was problem in Venezuela, locally. You know there were revolutionary something... He moved the family to Spain in Barcelona and he became the President of Jewish community there for thirty years. So I used to write to him, and he used to send it to my family. In the same way, they write to me, to my uncle and my uncle sent the letter.

So what did they, your family say of what is happening in Lebanon?

Sorry?

What did your family say? What did they, say, describe about their lives from 1967 onwards? What was happening in Lebanon?

They didn't have any problems. The problems didn't start till 1975; it was not a problem for them. They have not been affected, even they have for the, don't forget they had the '73 war, the *Yom Kippur* war. It had been some manifestation again, like in '67 but nothing more. My father was still insisting on living in Lebanon.

And the Jewish community was going on there?

Yes it was, but by the day, it became smaller and smaller. And... we used to, yes, the first year, let's say, after a year being in Israel, I ...I went to Spain to see my parents.

You met in Spain?

We met in Spain, ok, and then I came back. So every other, a few others months we used to meet in, for example in Cyprus, which was near. They used to come from Lebanon, we used to go from Israel, and so we used to meet! Then I...after the...after finishing the Army, I have made again the test to go to university, to do the dentist. I didn't succeed. The problem in Israel, if you go to the test, 3,000 people, they choose 300; so

the others cannot get. So I say 'Ok, so you can do... law'. I say, 'Ok, you know what, I go, start for law'. After doing law at university one month I get bored...so I left went for business.

So when did life for your parents change totally? When was the turning point?

[00:55:36]

The turning point when my father came to the *Brit Milah* in Israel, and the Civil War started, leaving my mother with other with three brothers there. And then it was really a problem. We heard news; speaking with people they didn't have enough food so the community was distributing some food, because it was chaos. And my father had good connections.

So your father was in...

In Israel.

In Israel with you?

Yeah. And he couldn't get back any more. And my...thank G-d my father had good connections there, so he paid some...he could give us some telephone to call somebody in the Army. He managed to take them out from the Jewish Quarter straight to the airport.

Your mother and how many brothers?

Three brothers.

Three brothers.

No, one left already; two – two. Two brothers.

Your mother and two brothers they were - ? So did they leave everything?

Leave everything. They came with the clothes on, that's all. They didn't have a choice, you know. They have only four to six hours to leave, that's all. So they left everything. That's the reason we don't have anything...any...any souvenirs or anything from Lebanon. They left the house, they left the shop...they left everything.

Do you know what happened to all the - the house, the shop?

The shop, they took it over probably, because it had been taken by some other people. The house has been destroyed. Now they destroyed; they built new buildings there. It doesn't exist anymore.

And how did your parents get on in Israel? Cause they were quite...

[00:57:29]

My father have some savings abroad that was not in Lebanon. So with his savings he managed to live on, in Israel. He didn't work anymore.

He didn't work anymore.

No. And with his savings he managed to live ok.

And were they able to be, did they feel part of the Israeli community? Were they happy with living there?

Yes. You know they get used to it at the end of the day. You know, he arrived, he has a family, he has a kid. We were all living there at the time. When they had to finally...first we were all together. But then they managed... each one get married and travel and we have living five brothers in different countries but that's... in the beginning we were all together there. So he had the family, he have his, my father has his, five of the family

also. Sister, cousin, and...that was left behind... from before, from 1920. So we have a big family in Israel.

So could you tell me a bit about how your life went on? You live in Israel...

I live in Israel, Ok. It was, it was difficult without the family. It was really tough time at the time. Then the Army. Then you finish the Army. I finished, I have been finishing my military service in August. Two months later you had the Yom Kippur War. You have been called for the war. Again. It was, it was difficult because I didn't find a job yet. I have still, so I was called to the Army, for the war. I spent two months...

Did you feel uncomfortable fighting for the Israeli Army against the Arab front?

For me it was home.

It was already home?

It was already home. Israel for me it's home; finish. I...if I've done the service, I live in the country; it's my country, that's all. So...we went ...we went to the two months, more or less, people have been liberated from the, from the *Yom Kippur* War. And keep doing the *miluim* [reserves], in our Reserve List every year. 1982, the Lebanon War, number one, in 1982. We invaded Lebanon. They called me at midnight. That was the first time going in. We spent two months again. At this time I used to have two kids already. I was married.

[1:00:32]

How was it to experience for you going back to Lebanon but this time invading it, or...as...?

It was difficult.

As a...

It was weird... a different you know... a weird sensation. We... we went in and you see the places you have been. And I managed to take a tour even went to Beirut. I visited my friends, or some of my friends.

Your Jewish friends?

Not Jewish.

Not Jewish.

I didn't see the Jewish friends but some of the Christians that used to be with me at school... In the... in the area. I managed to you know it's funny; I went to a shop I used to buy my shoes, my father used to buy us since then. So I bought a pair of shoes for me and my daughter. Daughter and son, have I already said that? You know, she still remembers that till today. And... it was ok. It was nice to see the place first, but I wasn't you know... I was not scared or afraid; it was ok. I like it; I like to see back the place. But it was too much already for me I said 'Ok, I'm thirty-four years old. I have been taking part in two wars; it's enough.' And luckily, I had been offered a job in... in 1985. And... I spent, I had to do a *miluim*, a last *miluim* in Lebanon before we leave.

So that time when you were sent to Lebanon, was that some thing to do that you came from Lebanon or was it by chance?

No, no. On the contrary, by chance. By chance. It had nothing to do with because I know Lebanon. And... that was my last *miluim*; I have made my last Reserve List to Lebanon in May '85, and the job I'd been offered, I went to; I come to London. So I pick up the family and come, straight away.

[1:02:44]

So before we move to... to London, in the years you were in Israel, who were your social acquaintances? With who did you hang out? Who were your friends?

Israelis and – and Lebanese. I had plenty of friends, Lebanese, Jewish that grew up with me; we are still friends. We have been friends since kindergarten. So, we used...this is my friends, they are all mostly Lebanese and part Israeli.

In Israel, so actually your friends were, a lot of them were from Lebanese origin?

Lebanon. Yes. Yes, sure.

And how did you feel towards other members of, towards the Moroccans, towards the Algerians, those...did you feel part of them? Did you feel a different community to them?

You know... I didn't feel different. You know, we, we as Lebanese are the community of our traditions, you know. Not exactly the same as other...other – other communities. But, at the end of the day...in Israel we didn't mind. It's the way it is in Israel when you are teenagers and growing up and kids, you don't have any problem with this. And... it's easy to make friends. In Israel it's very easy to make friends.

Was there any community tension in Israel?

You always feel a tension between Ashkenazi and Sephardi. I think till today. It was - have been always a separation between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi. And when I left Israel, I had this problem with the bank. I never forget that. I know. I was a Sephardi and...the Ashkenazi, it doesn't work; it doesn't work out.

But when you say it doesn't work out, what do you mean? For people that don't know.

For example...

For example.

[1:05:00]

I used to be...in the bank, for example we used to deal with foreigners and tourists in bank loaning. I was from the people who started this branch and it grew up to be huge today. At the time I had been spending eight years, a lot of trainee can. I train people, so...and I remember I couldn't get, you know they say, the *chatima* - signature, or whatever... And the guy, I teach him, he's Ashkenazi, yeah? He got it...I said ok. Over my dead body, and I left the bank. And I told him that at the time. I didn't like this. Because it's a problem of Sephardi and Ashkenazi office. I left the bank. That was the reason I left the bank in Israel.

So you felt that there is a kind of segregation.

Sorry?

There is a kind of segregation between the communities.

For sure. For sure.

Where did you meet your wife...and how?

In Israel. She makes *aliyah* and... when I left the Army before - before going to the banks, I used to work with a...a...with a...pick-up truck. This was very good. And she used to be the secretary in the factory of ...factory of quilts. And I used to be a student. This is where we met. After three or four years we get married.

Could you describe your wedding day?

Yes. I was late to pick her up from... [Laughs] I got stuck in traffic. I was supposed to pick her up from the...the hairdressers where she getting ready, with a car. And we get stuck; was so many traffic. And that's what I remember. And we have make it in a, in a salon, the wedding.

[1:07:41]

Where did you get married?

In Tel Aviv.

Where?

In...well...I forgot the name even of the salon, but it was a salon in Tel Aviv. I remember the wedding ceremony and the dancing.

What was the origin, the family origin of your wife? From where did they come from?

My wife's family are originate from Turkey, but her father and her...her father and mother was born in Uruguay. Only the parents came from Turkey. So she's Sephardi like us.

*So did you feel comfortable with the community environment that your wife came from?
Or did you feel there were any differences?*

Their tradition was a little bit different, but nothing special. Tell the truth in Israel, at the end of the day, between us as friends, as...as...we didn't feel the difference. We didn't talk about it for example that ...Sephardi or Ashkenazi whatever you know. You don't choose, you know, you don't check, before now. For example, in England it's different. From beginning you know if you want to go with somebody, you make sure 'Ah it's from our...it's Ashkenazi, not Sephardi.' In Israel you don't make that. You don't choose with whom you go. And...you can...the feeling is different in Israel. Because more and more you don't feel any more the difference, because the mixture is so big now you don't feel...you don't ask where...At the time it used to be ok, maybe twenty, thirty years ago. But, not now. Today in Israel you don't feel the difference any more.

1:10:05

And there was no ...so you felt comfortable with her...?

Felt comfortable yes.

So you were saying that in 1985 you received an offer, to move to London?

Yes.

To England?

Yeah.

From where did you, do it from? What was... What did you work at the time?

I used to be at Bank Leumi.

Sorry?

Bank Leumi. And they make promotion for the tourists you know because it's a branch we deal only with tourists; it doesn't deal with local. They sent...they opened a desk in Hilton, Tel Aviv. And each one had to be by turns during the Pesach week to be...on the desk there, by turns. So... I had to be for four hours. For the whole Pesach only four hours wasn't much. I went there and sat on the desk and then I went to the bar to have a coffee, and I met a client of ours at the desk...at the bar. He said 'What are you doing here?' Say 'I'm on the desk with Bank Leumi, you know?' he say, 'Come, I will introduce you to somebody.' Because he was a friend of my father, the guy. And he introduced me to the Managing Director of the American Bank, which is a Safra Bank. And the guy says 'We are opening a new branch in London.' He interviewed me for five, ten minutes. He say, 'Ok, if you have any interest to come to London, can you leave your CV in the lobby today? I'm leaving tomorrow morning.' And that was the end of it. That was Pesach. I put in I have to go to the Army in May. 'It's ok, after you finish the Army.' He contacts his office, 'He will be provided with ticket, hotel, everything. You come for a trial for a month, and we will take it from there.' So end of June, I came to

London for a month, on trial, we agree, I signed a contract. Went back to the family and after a month I'm back in London with the family. And that was the end of the story.

And what were your first...we're talking in the 1980s...what were your first impressions from England?

[01:12:39]

It was the first time. I had never been in England before. And it was really tough. To start everything from scratches, where you don't have any family, you don't have any friends you know? It was very tough. My wife didn't speak even a word of English. The kids neither. And... the kids, the boy was seven and the girl was four years old. We managed to send them straight away to the Jewish school, but it was a nightmare for them; stay in school from eight o'clock in the morning till four o'clock and everybody speaking English. And they don't understand a word. So it was very...very difficult for them in the beginning. I come...every night he was crying the boy; he want to go back to Israel. It took six months till they adapt more or less. They start making friends, start understanding English. And...we came to a certain time that we, that I was going to decide if I'm going to go back to Israel. I think the kids didn't want to stay; it was very difficult. So I was thinking if we go back to Israel. It crossed my mind, for a few days maybe we should go back to Israel. But I was involved in that job; I couldn't leave. I had a good job. At the end it sorted out, the moment they make some more friends; they start speaking English, and they get used to it.

Where did you settle in England, in London? Where - here? And why did you decide on this area?

Because when I came the ...who, the Jewish, first, all the Jewish are here. The Jewish community, this is what I know about them. So the few friends that I had lived in this area. One friend is Ezra, that was the main...so, they was living all in this area. So I choose - I choose to buy the house here.

[01:15:07]

So before, before we talked about how you felt with your heritage in Israel. How is it different now, in England? When you come to England you were in your thirties, around your thirties?

Yep.

And you decide to - to live here in the area. Who were the people that you, you socialised with? Who are the people that you built your life with here in London? My question is, is there any difference being a Lebanese Jew in Israel or being a Lebanese Jew in London?

It doesn't make big difference; for me, it's the same. It's the same because live anywhere; it's the same. In Israel I have...it's, it's easier in Israel. A lot easier. It's moreYeah, attractive to be living in Israel. Why, because of this big family that I have now. I have a huge family there. While in London, I don't have any family. Now... there are some pluses, some minuses, you know. In Israel for example... people are - stressed. The life, the ...the style of living over there is, is very stressing with all the Army, the security, the problems that they have. They are always stressed; I remember the feeling. I used to live there. In England, you don't have these problems.

But what interests me here is, as a, as a Lebanese Jew...

Mnn?

...did you here, did you here socialise especially with Lebanese Jewish? Did you speak socialise? Who are the people you socialise with, here in London?

Yeah, I prefer it, yes, here it is with Lebanese. My first priority if I hope to socialise, it's usually Lebanese. But we are not so many anyway. After, is mostly Israeli. We tend to socialise more with Israeli. Now, I find the English are very strict. It's very difficult to make friends. So usually I socialise with Lebanese or Israeli, or now that we are involved with more the Iranian people, because my son, my daughter have married

Iranians, so the...so the father ...the father-in-law of my son or whatever, so, now we are in contact more with Iranian even.

[01:18:06]

You were saying that your brothers, each one of them actually lives somewhere else.

Yes.

How did that get to be?

My first...my brother in Venezuela, he get married to a Lebanese Jew. And her parents live in Venezuela; he moved there, without any connections that we have family from my father's side plenty there. My, my brother in France, he left Lebanon after the *Baccalaureate* and he went to France to study medicine. And - and he stayed there, in France. Today he's a dentist. My brother in Belgium... he, he worked in diamonds. And when he came to Israel, in 1975, he didn't like it much. And he left when he got offered a job in diamonds in Antwerp, he left to Antwerp. And he gets married there, and he stayed there. My only brother who lives in Israel, the one that I came with him to Israel when we emigrated, he is still there. And he is a Director at Bank Leumi.

So you are all around the world.

Yeah.

In what ways do you preserve your Lebanese heritage? It can be tradition, food...

Food first. Food, tradition...language.

What do you mean by language?

We speak Arabic still.

Do your children know Arabic?

[01:20:07]

No. They understand. I think the eldest one understand it a bit, but we still speak Arabic.

When you say 'we', who is 'we'?

With friends, with family, or on the phone with any family friends. We always speak Lebanese. When we meet with Lebanese, we forget all the other languages. We speak always Lebanese. That's one of the...

And with your wife, because...

Hebrew. That's the reason we speak Hebrew, because...our kids, we get married in Israel and they speak Hebrew and so the third one was born here even he speak like an Israeli, because we speak at home.

So with your wife you speak Hebrew, with your children, what do you speak?

Hebrew. Hebrew. With my children, with my wife, we speak Hebrew. At home we speak Hebrew.

And how do they look at your Lebanese heritage? Do they have any connection to your...?

Unfortunately, no. For them, what they have left is only the food, that's all. They like it so much they are mad about the Lebanese food, but concerning Lebanon it doesn't mean anything for them. They didn't experience anything. It doesn't mean nothing... which is...is normal. If you have never been in this country, you've only heard about this country... it couldn't mean anything for them. At least Israel, it mean for them because I know they was born there and they have been there. And they still have friends there. And every time they go to Israel they meet friends that they was friends

from when he was...seven years old. So, he had some roots in Israel. But not from Lebanon. Unfortunately. There is nothing left for them from Lebanon; only the stories, the pictures that we show them, or whatever. But...

Are they interested?

Yes.

What is for you the – the most important thing that you would like to preserve? What is the most important thing in your identity, in your heritage, which you would like, that it will pass on to your next generation?

[01:22:32]

You know, I think for me, Lebanon was an episode in my life. The day I left, when all the community left, there is nothing left, only the... souvenir, that's all. Nothing special really. I would like to go to visit but I won't dare. That's all. But for me there is a piece of my life, of eighteen years; it doesn't mean anything more than that. Because for me we...we grew up in this Quarter, because we was born there... for a certain period and, and we left it. So all what I remember is the nice time that we have together with all my friends in the Quarter, which existed. Today the Quarter doesn't exist anymore; it has been destroyed. There is nothing left. There is only the synagogue left. I don't miss anything, really. We had very nice times. Till we was eighteen, it was...really nice time as a teenager even, it was a nice time we spent but, nothing more than that. I'm not attached to the land for example or... of Lebanon or whatever; it doesn't say anything, it doesn't mean anything for me.

And in these years when Israel went out of Lebanon, do you...what do you feel when you see what is happening there?

No, I feel sorry for the country; it's a very nice country. But what's happening there is mad, is madness... is madness. And because there is nobody left from the family or from the friends that we know, so you cannot be attached to it. It is symbolic; it's

nothing. You still remember, ok, some of the traditions, the food, the...whatever Lebanese you are, you feel as a Lebanese, but nothing to the land or the country.

[01:25:00]

So now, how do you pro...If I would have asked you, what are you, Mr Levy? Are you English? Are you Israeli? Are you Lebanese? Are you a combination?

It's a...it's a...

What are you?

It's a difficult question. I was just thinking about it. It's a very difficult question how...It's very difficult to describe what I am, because I have a mixture of – of Lebanese, which have, because of my years of, eighteen years old, eighteen years there, My mixture of fifteen, sixteen years in Israel with the people, so I have some, I have some of the temperament or the character of Israelis also. English: I don't think I have anything of the English. I live in England ok, but it doesn't mean I...I'm more Israeli-Lebanese. I can call myself. I cannot call myself English. It's obvious.

Why can't you? I reckon...I believe you have an English passport. In what way...?

I don't have an English passport. [Gently laughs] I have a French passport. I was born French but, I was never Lebanese passport even, because my father and grandfather, they have...we have been always French, so...in Lebanon I was living with a French passport, that's all. I was not Lebanese. But for English for example I'm living in England ok, but I don't feel like an English. First, because I don't mix to the English, so...I don't feel them. I don't have any feeling for the... I don't mix with the English people.

You don't mix with the English? So with whom do you mix here?

I tell you; Israeli, or Lebanese Jewish, or... you know, mainly Israeli.

So in your profession...what is your profession?

I'm an operation manager in charge of logistics.

Do you... you don't mix?

We are, we are...our office we deal more by...you know I have contacts all over the world. I speak to suppliers with everything over the phone. Ok I meet people. I go to exhibitions. I go, I travel, I what...but... doesn't mean is business, it's straight business. Nothing more than that. But...because I don't mix up with people. I don't go to the pub with the English people to drink for example. I go with my friends really, Israeli or Lebanese.

[01:27:50]

Would you...do you feel that the English society embraced you, or differentiated you, or...? How do you think the English society treated you, in the years you were here?

Socially? Socially I didn't socialise with the English at all. They didn't give you a chance, socialising with the English, that's all. And not that I didn't try. I tried.

What do you mean by you tried?

[laughs] I tried. I invited them. Plenty, a lot of people, I have invited a lot of English people but it doesn't continue. It doesn't work.

So this is your feeling that you've actually you said you're beyn [Hebrew: in between] Lebanese to Israeli.

That's right. Yes.

And your children? Where are they in the scale of...?

My children are completely English. So they mix, they do everything; football, pub, everything – English. For me it was probably too late. I was busy working so I didn't have the time to socialise, and English especially English people, so...so I feel like isolated in England.

Isolated.

But my problem is, I cannot leave England and go live elsewhere; it's difficult. If I go...I will have...for example ok, let's say, I will go to live in Israel. But the problem, my kids and grandchildren are here. And I don't want – I don't want to be so far away. So I'm stuck here at the moment.

And how would you regard yourself? Are you a migrant? Migrant or - Are you a refugee from Lebanon?

No. I have never been a refugee, even from day one I have never been a refugee. Because I was a French citizen, so I have a French passport. I could leave any time I want and...in Lebanon anyway, everybody could leave. There was no restriction on leaving.

Of leaving?

[01:30:07]

Of leaving. Not in Israel. Not like in Syria, or Egypt or whatever. So we was free. Now, the problem refugees you can call people they left, what they left after the Civil War. When the Lebanon Civil War started in 1975, people start to leave. And ok they got a status of refugee in France, in England, in America, everywhere; it was they took advantage. Took advantage. Ok, this is the time to ask for refugee status and they left the country, is what I understand. It was not my case because I had a French passport from the day one. I could leave whenever I want; I could move wherever I want. So I never felt as a refugee.

So this...when you look back at your life history, this experience of leaving the country you were born in, and then leaving once again, from Israel to England and then living here the way you have lived. How did it impact your life? Is there any kind...can you trace... something that you think that leaving your home country whichever it is, either Lebanon or Israel, put a stamp on your life?

I deal with it separately; you know for me each episode of my life...it's separate. When I left Lebanon, it was Lebanon. I leave my years or this short episode of eighteen years. It was an episode. Israel is completely different; it's a new episode in my life, which doesn't connect – which doesn't connect - to the first episode. And when I move to England for me then it started again. So they are not connected. I don't see any connection between the three.

But do you feel that it impacted your life in any way that your life would be different if you would have stayed in Lebanon?

[01:32:24]

No, in Lebanon, definitely not; that is not, that's sure and we was right. From '67 when people talked about it, it was the right decision to leave, because today it's a disaster; there is nobody there left and with Hezbollah, with all these... it was the right decision to move to Israel. Now, from Israel, tell you the truth. After being so much in the Army, the three years first service, then Yom Kippur War, 1982 War, and all the business in the middle, I had enough. I was thirty-four years old. So I was looking for a...for a situation, for a way out of it. Maybe it's not the correct thing to think but that – to say, but that's the way it is. So in 1984 I left; I went for...looking for a job in France. I spent a month, I came back it didn't work out. 1985, it worked out... and I left. Tell you the truth, after what I have done I didn't want my kids to bear the same. That is one of the reasons I wanted to leave. And I don't regret it. You have to sacrifice something in, in your life so, your sacrifice was to leave the family, to leave our father, my late father, my mother or my aunties, all the family that I have there, to try to do a future for me or for

the kids here, so to start with a trial, on a trial basis to say, 'Ok, we came for five years then we go back.' Never happened.

And the heritage...you have brothers in all the world so it will be interesting.

Yeah.

Is there any way that it's...is it different to be a Lebanese Jew in London than in Uruguay or in...or in Venezuela...is it any different than keeping the safekeeping of the Lebanese heritage?

No, because for example in Venezuela also now the situation is not so good, lately. But also they are in community, the Lebanese community. There is a Lebanese community there, which are very close. In France for example my brother is an, is an ultra-orthodox very religious, so he's doing *Yeshiva* all day, half day *Yeshiva*, half day...

But is he keeping something of the Lebanese tradition, can you tell me?

01:35:17

Uh...I don't think so. He is more...he's more religious than we were in Lebanon, so... he cannot keep anything of Lebanon. He's very religious. My brother in Antwerp...he is mixed with...he is mixed with...his bosses are Lebanese but he don't have any friend Lebanese. He is mixed with different kinds of Jews, different kinds of...of Moroccan or Ashkenazi or different...different. My brother in Israel, he is still in contact I think. He have a lot of friends Lebanese, but he have also Israeli friends. But they all keep the tradition.

The Lebanese tradition?

The Lebanese tradition, yes. All they keep the way it was in my father's house. If it's for *Shabbat* or for *chaggim* whatever; everything is the same. What I do here, everybody is doing in houses there.

But are their children different to your children? Are their children keep saving the heritage, the Lebanese heritage, or let's say is it Israel or France or Venezuela?

The one in France is not married, so he doesn't have any kids. In Antwerp,
[Interruption]

In Antwerp they are... they are more, they are keeping everything but they are more toward Israel. They have a lot of friends in Israel and they go often to Israel. In Venezuela they are keeping the tradition also with Lebanese. There is a Lebanese community which is really...big enough. But they are all keeping yes, keeping if you want to say it. Yes, keeping all the, they keep all the Lebanese traditions.

[01:37:27]

The children, the second generation?

Yes. The food; especially the food, so for example all the children still...

Your children or their children?

All the children.

They themselves cook the Lebanese food?

Yes, because my brother in Venezuela is married to a Lebanese also. My brother in Israel is married to a Lebanese. I'm married to my wife but she also have been... she cook all the Lebanese food. And... my brother in Belgium, he is married with a Belgian, but she learned a little bit to do Lebanese food. So food and tradition are kept.

Food and tradition.

Are kept.

And you... here in London as a Sephardi Jew, you know all the communities here...

Yeah.

You said that in synagogue... What synagogue do you go to?

Beit Kineset Yeheskel.

That is mostly...?

Iraqi.

Iraqi.

It's a mixture of Iraqi...and Moroccan.

Moroccan, ok. So you, you know and you've experienced the other communities; Jewish Sephardi communities.

Yeah.

What is the uniqueness would you say of the Lebanese Jewish community in London?

What do you mean by uniqueness?

In what ways is it different to the Moroccan community? Or to the Iranian or Iraqi, is it different? Maybe...

Not any difference, really. Small details that are not important, but nothing... if we would go to the synagogue for example the prayer is the same. Only the tune is a little different between one and the other, ok but you - you can manage. But there is no big difference, because the prayer is the same, exactly the same. All the *Sepharadi*... prayers are the same. There is no difference at all; the Ashkenazi, yes, there's a big

difference I understand. But not the...the *Sepharadi*. And I don't see any difference but for example we've go at *bassus*. We have, we are about maybe 100, 120 people in the synagogue. There are a mixture of Iraqi, Moroccan, Tunisian, maybe...Yemeni... they are a mixture of a lot of people coming to him. And you don't feel any different because they all pray. That's all. And there's nothing...we never even open the subject, even! It doesn't... even think about it. Hundred and twenty people and we are praying, and Shabbat, hug, everything. There is no difference! You don't feel ...there is no difference between us. We are a 120 from different communities praying together - that's all, you know?

[01:40:32]

Is there any message that you would like to give in this video for someone in the future who would watch your life story? Is there any message that you would like as a summary of your experience of your life story? Something that you would have liked your grandchildren one day in another 20, 30, 40 years when they watch your video to know about your experience or about your life, or about something that you think, that you would have liked them to know?

What I want them really is my grandchildren to be able to pass it on and on and on, what they know about their parents, about their grandparents, about our Lebanese community which is, if we look at it from our past is only one episode is one generation, that we spend in Lebanon. All the rest we are back...we are origins from Tzfat and which I didn't know till lately, I think. I didn't know that he have been...I know that we have been from generations we have been in Tzfat but I never knew that we are originally from Oran in Algeria. So it's very important for them to look at it and to hear the history of the family, and to pass it on.

But is there anything you want to say about your life story as a Jew – Lebanese Jew – that you would like them to know. Any lesson you learnt in life? Any... idea?

[01:42:33]

What I want my grandchildren really to remember me and my family backwards, with our history and what I would like to, from them, to keep this tradition. And with my own experience I have I was born to a family which is originated from Palestine, and ...one of the most important I learned in life, you have to work hard to get where you want to get. But three things are very important. One: is to be honest. Two:...to work hard. If you work hard you get what you want. And three: to keep the tradition and be Jewish, the tradition and everything which is important because you were born into that.

Thank you. Is there anything or any person or any situation you would like to talk about? We are getting towards the end of the interview, before we go on to your photographs or documents. Is there anyone that you would like, that you haven't mentioned that you would like to mention or to go back to one of the episodes in your life?

I don't think I have left anybody. I have it all.

So I thank you very much for taking part in the project. We'll now stop for a bit and go to your documents and photographs.

Ok. All right.

Ok? Thank you.

[1:44:52]

The question that we wanted to know is if he's social with the wider Lebanese community. Let's say, Muslims, Christians that live here; Lebanese Christians and Muslims that live here?

Not really. But...I have some...I socialise with some of because part of my job or my work with the company where a lot of Lebanese are...are employed. And so...we, I am good friends with them, apart from the war I am good friends. And every time they come to London, we socialise.

But do you feel there is any connection lets say to a Lebanese Christian that lives in London?

No. Definitely no.

So your connection is to the Jewish ethnicity?

Yes. Maybe I'm not open-minded enough, but that's the way it is.

Thank you.

Photographs

[1:46:12]

Could you please tell me about this picture? Where was it taken? When was it taken?

It was taken in Beirut; in our house...in...it should be around 1956 maybe? I was five years old. It's my father, mother and aunty. And we are three brothers.

Thank you. And this one?

This was a party in our house with all the aunties, uncles, cousins and the occasion was my uncle's coming to visit from Brazil.

What year was the party given?

It should be around 1961...'61, '62.

By whom? Who took the picture?

By a photographer.

Thank you. Could you describe this picture?

This picture was the day of my *Bar Mitzvah*, in 1964, at the synagogue, the Spanish Synagogue in Lebanon.

What's the name?

The Spanish Synagogue, it used to be called.

Who are the people in the picture?

These are people of the synagogue; one is next to me is my uncle, who come from Venezuela, and my father next to me. My small brother...and my other brother on the other side.

Thank you. Could you tell us who... is this?

You are talking about this picture, no?

Yes.

This is my Grandma from my mother's side, and my two uncles.

What was her name?

Esther. And my uncles; one is Jack, one is Mohid.

When, what year did she die?

1969.

Where is she buried?

In Brazil. Because her son is living in Brazil, she went to visit him and she died there.

And what year was this picture taken?

This picture was taken in 1964.

Ok, thank you. Can you tell us about this picture?

This picture is taken at my Grandma in Lebanon, around 1958, '59. It is my father and mother and the four brothers.

Where did your grandmother live?

In Beirut, next to us...a few blocks.

Thank you. Ok.

This picture is the lunch after my Bar Mitzvah, coming from the synagogue, which include all the family and friends; aunties, uncles, cousins, from everywhere.

01:50: 00

Where was it taken, this photograph?

In our house.

Thank you.

The picture with four of my friends, taken at the beach in Lebanon in Beirut, is around 1968, '67, '67, '68.

Are you still in contact with these friends?

Yes, sure.

Could you name them?

Yes. The first one is Khodar, his family name; Saad – Saad Khodar. Second one on the left is me. Third one on the left is Moshe Saleh – he is living in Brooklyn today. And the fourth one is ...Moshe Karil; he is living in Bat Yam, Tel Aviv.

Thank you.

Cameraman: And rolling

So this is a picture taken in 1970...around...around Tiberius with some of my friends, new friends, made in Israel.

Thank you. Ok.

This is a picture of my wedding; 29 of March, 1977.

Where did you get married?

In Tel Aviv.

Could you tell me the name...?

Ah the...Hechal Hader.

Could you tell me the name of your wife? Her full name?

Esther Habibi.

This is a picture with me and my wife and two kids, taken in Israel, around 1983, '84. It was a weekend at Nahariya in Israel, north of Israel. A weekend at the hotel.

Thank you. Ok.

1:52:26

This picture is in my home. It was *Brit Milah* of my third child...on the 26th of May, 1987.

Was this in your home in England?

Here, in England.

What is the name of your son?

Alex David.

Thank you.

This picture is taken in Israel. It's the five brothers, with my mum.

What year was it taken?

Around...2000. May 2000. It was in the *Bar Mitzvah* of my son Alex, in Israel.

Thank you.

This picture is the five brothers...in, in Caracas, Venezuela, in September 2001. The occasion was at the synagogue in Caracas. That was the *Bar Mitzvah* of my two nephews.

Where are you in this picture?

Number...number two from the left...from the right.

Ok.

This picture is of my late father, taken around 1993, '94.

Where was it taken?

In Bat Yam, Tel Aviv, Israel.

What was your father's name?

Farasht Levy.

Thank you.

Ok. This is a picture of the four...of four of my grandchildren, in the flat of my daughter Vicky. The grandchildren are as follow: Solly Levy, Nicole Zachai, Josh Zachai and Maya Levy.

Thank you.

This is a picture at the wedding of my nephew about... three years ago. And in the picture you have more or less the whole family, which are we, the five brothers. Me and my four brothers, my – all my nephews, my kids; most of the family are here.

What year is it?

2009.

Thank you.

This is a picture of my uncle, Clement Menachem Levy, who was a pilot in the Second World War. And he died in a mission on the 17th of June, 1940. That's the only picture we have from him.

Thank you.

End of Interview

[1:56:18]