

Sephardi Voices UK

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Sephardi Voices UK.

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

**Oral History
The British Library
96 Euston Road**

**London
NW1 2DB
020 7412 7404
oralhistory@bl.uk**

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

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	Sephardi Voices UK
Ref. no:	
British Library C. Number:	SV030

Interviewee Title:	Mr
Interviewee Surname:	David
Forename:	Khalastchi
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	05/01/1926
Interviewee POB:	Shamiya, Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Agriculture and Imports
Father's Occupation:	Farmer
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

Date of Interview:	03/07/2012
Location of Interview:	Ascot, UK
Name of Interviewer:	Dr Bea Lewkowicz
Recording Format:	Video
Total Duration (HH:MM):	02:01
Copyright/Clearance:	Yes

Additional Material:	Photographs
Interviewer Comments:	

Today's the 3rd of July 2012. We're conducting interview with Mr David Khalastchi. My name is Bea and we're in Ascot, UK.

Today's the 3rd of July 2012. We're conducting interview with Mr David Khalastchi. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we're in Ascot, UK. Can you please tell me your name?

My name is David Khalastchi.

And where were you born?

I was born in a village south of Iraq, which called Shamiya.

When were you born?

1926.

Mr Khalastchi, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for Sephardi Voices. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

Well the family background, my great grandfather they were originally from an area, which is twenty miles from Babylon. It's called Al Kifl where the Prophet Heskial is buried there and it is a very sacred place. And now sacred even for the Muslims now. And they were born there, which is twenty miles from Babylon. Then they were dealing with seeds with wheat, rice, barley, dates, and transportation used to be on the river. While on the river they came to this

village Shamiya, and there are some Jewish community also living there. They decided to settle there and they settled there and I was born there.

So who settled there?

My grandfather.

Can you tell us a little bit about your grandfather? [00:02:01]

My grandfather, well I mean, he was, at that time he was trading with the Ottoman rulers at that time and then when he came to Shamiya, my eldest uncle, he start enlarging the business in the agricultural, he start having some orchards and [inaud] rice and expanding. And we had a very good relation with the head of the tribes of the area. And it started mostly that we expanding on the agriculture 1920 when the British occupied Iraq. When they occupied Iraq after few years there have been a rebellion by the head of tribes of the south, which is in our area. And the British, they couldn't allow a rebellion in their area, so they managed to completely – they stopped it completely. And the head of a tribe, they become in such an awful difficulty. They want to go and negotiate some kind of good terms.

At that time only my father speak English, so they came and ask if my father can go travelling to about thirty miles where the headquarter of the British, which used to be in Najaf. They travelled on horseback for about all the night, then my father tried to mediate with them and he got them all the terms they wanted and this is how we started [00:04:05]. Then the British they want to settle the tribe, because the tribe they used to fight each other all the time. They want to settle them in land. When they are settled, they don't have to move and fight each other, even to

cross the border to Saudi Arabia and others. So they decided to give land for any people who can invest in agriculture and they plant them and irrigate them.

To irrigate the land it's very difficult because the river was much lower than the farm. You need pumping machine, and the pumping machine area the more difficult part, very expensive at that time. So the British, they say, if you can arrange some kind of partnership with some of the head of tribes, and start on that. So we had about four head of the tribes of the area who are the most influential at the time and they gave us lands, which quite a lot, at that time land is not producing easily because we don't have the mechanical things. So put up about 10/15,000 acres and we start importing all the pumping machine. What happen is that the arrangement was with the head of the tribe, that they have to supply the farmers. I mean, each sheikh perhaps has got about 300 people – of his people, they become farmers, they do their plant the land. We supply the irrigation, the pumping machine, their maintenance and all these things [00:06:04]. And we deal with the product, the sales of the product. And this is how we started expanding from perhaps 1920. It lasted till 1950 in a proper way.

From 1928?

1920.

1920?

Yes till 19 – till 1950. After 1950, for about ten years, halfway, because in '58 they created the Agrarian Reform. We used to be a feudal country, like any other feudal things, and farmers have got nothing. The arrangement with our partners was that the farmers would get one-third of the product, of the yield, during the harvest season. And the balance, we get it half ourselves,

half to the sheikh, to the head of the tribe. And when – and the farmers they were really in poverty at that time. So when 1958 came, the revolution, when they killed the king, they created the Agrarian Reform. The Agrarian Reform you are not allowed to own more than about 500 acres per person. So from 15,000 acre to 500 per person, the yield, hardly anything. And this is how the agriculture – the agriculture, it changed. The farmers they start doing the thing and how it worked.

So what are your earliest memories of growing up, of Shamiya, do you have any memories at all? [00:08:02]

My best memory was in our farming area, in Shamiya. I used to love it, not only how we stayed the three years there but every holiday, you know, we used to have in the school, three months holiday. They used to send me to our farm area, I go there, I used to love it. This is my best memory.

Tell us, can you describe the landscape a little bit?

Well we have got quite a big house, sometimes they used to come and visit us [ph] from Baghdad, they come just like a holiday, they come two, three days, big family. And they can – they can feel them just like hotel, there. The used to bring me a horse from the farm, for me to ride. I've got everything. I mean, the area was so beautiful, the river, we are not far from the river. And about perhaps about five minutes walk from our house, we used to have the centre – the storage centre for rice and dates. So that part, till 1941, when my father killed, that was my best memory of Baghdad – of Shamiya.

Tell us a little bit about your siblings, you had other brothers?

I have got two brothers, Maurice and Frank, and two sisters, Margo and Violette.

So your memories are yourself, or with your brothers and sisters?

Few times they used to come to Shamiya. I mean, Maurice, my brother, was also born in Shamiya, and he used to come sometime also. Frank was quite young; he was born in Baghdad at that time. [00:10:02] So really I have got the memory, we used to have a driver, which is living in our house, he's related to us, and he used to love animals and this is why I start to like animals. I mean, he used to have gazelle, sheep, partridge, pigeons, I used to love that.

In the house in Shamiya?

Yeah. The house is very big, there is one area for the kitchen, one area for the chickens and things. And one area for office, one area for guests. It was beautiful.

So who lived in that house?

My uncle. My uncle he is the eldest of the three brothers, Eliyahu. And he's married and he hasn't got children, so we were just like his children at that time. My father used to spend most of the time in Shamiya and part of the year spend it in Baghdad, in between. My other uncle, Nisim, was running the office of Baghdad at that time.

So the business was run by the three brothers?

Yes.

Did it have a name?

No, no. Only the name at the end is Eliyahu, Nisim and Menashe, and then Eliyahu, Nisim and David. The agreement is like that.

And can you tell us a little bit about your mother and how your parents met?

How they met with my father?

Yes.

[Laughs] I really don't know; we know only they are married [laughs]. [00:12:02] At that time it's very difficult, but her family they used to live in Hillah, which is about – at that time we didn't have roads, we have got no tarmac road, they are all sandy. And used to be perhaps about two hours from our place to Hillah. My – her brother used to run the electricity of the city of Hillah, all there. So when we used to go to Baghdad we stop there, halfway, have lunch and then go back to Baghdad.

So you don't know whether it was arranged, or?

I really don't know.

And how old was your mother when she got married?

You're asking me difficult question.

How old was she when you were born?

Perhaps she was eighteen.

So her family was also close by?

Yes, well about two hours, another place, also in south of Iraq, halfway between our place and Baghdad.

And do you remember the grandparents, your maternal grandparents?

My – I know only my grandmother from my mother's side. And I know my great – my grandfather from my father's side and with his wife, which when I was the age of three or four years old, she died. She was walking with my cousin, Fouad at that time and a car – she saved him, she push him and she was gone, under the car, and she died.

And your – you said your mother's mother, do you remember?

Yes, my grandmother?

Yes.

Yeah, her husband he died I think before I was born from cancer. [00:14:06]

And do you have any memories of this grandmother, what was her name?

Massouda.

Do you remember going there?

No, she was living in our house.

She lived with you?

Yeah, and she died perhaps 1946, '47, something like that.

And you said you moved when you were three, what are your early memories of Baghdad?

You know, it's funny, I have got memory, which I try to find from my sisters, from my cousin, it's unbelievable. I mean, the first house I remember it at the age of three, we were living, then we moved six houses, every year we moved a house, why we moved, I really don't know, nobody could give me the answer. Nobody alive for me to ask him this question. But then we build our house in Betawin in Baghdad, we built two houses, exactly identical for my uncle and ourself. 1935 we start building, we moved early 1937 to that house. And we stayed till 1957, then I moved from '57 to another house where I mention to you Arasat al Hindiya near the river. And I stay there till I left Baghdad.

So when you moved, who lived with you in that house in Baghdad, your grandmother, your mother's mother?

[00:16:00] My grandmother was in that house which we built, yeah.

And did your uncle have family as well?

Yes, my uncle, I mean, my uncle has got, Eileen you met, is married to the eldest son of my uncle, David, David Nasim. And he used to have a brother of my age, he died from heart problem. And then you have got five sisters, one of them living in Canada, one of them in New York, two in Canada, one in New York – two in New York, sorry, and one in London.

So you lived with quite a big extended family?

Oh yeah, yeah, always, you were part of a very big family all the time. And we were very much attached to each other.

Can you tell me other memories you've got of the house, maybe Shabbat or?

Well, you know, we used to remember the – when we come to *Yom Shabbat*, everything become white, it's so beautiful. It would distract you from any kind of activities. And during the feast, I mean, everything's become white, they change everything and all these things.

What do you mean by becoming white? Explain that please.

You know, they change the cover of the seating, because we used to have always we used to have dust, it used to come, so on *Yom Shabbat* they changed them and everything looked clean, white.

And then you remember the meals and who would come?

[00:18:00] It's the family, always you will see people come, we're very much attached to each other.

And did you have cook?

Yeah, sure, sure. It's easier, it's the easiest part in that country, always. When you have – not like in England now. In Baghdad it's – middle class people they used to have the housekeeper or cook or things.

And tell the listeners about school, you started going to school?

School, the Alliance School, which is one of the best really. We used to learn Hebrew, English, French and Arabic. Four languages. But I think in the '30s, mid-'30s, they stop the Hebrew, we used to learn Hebrew - virtually nearly we can talk Hebrew. I mean, it was very intensive courses, but then they stopped – the government stopped the Hebrew, then it become only Arabic, French and English.

And what memories do you have from school years, how many people were in your class?

Well, you know, the class not like here, every class used to be about sixty people. I mean, you can't remember all the sixty people, you remember some of them.

There were sixty people in your class?

In a class, yes. I wasn't at the front; I was mostly at the back [laughs].

And what subjects, you said there were languages?

Well economy used to be my favourite, others I wasn't so keen like algebra or science, I wasn't so keen on that. Economy more. You see, life in Iraq – the Jewish community in Iraq has got three stages. [00:20:00] For me it's separated in three stages. The first stage is up to end 1948, that area we have got one black spot in that area, which is 1941. 1941 was a tragic year for the Jews because I think about 600 people was killed at that time. When the three days, the city was without a government and that – that 1941 also my father was killed, in our farming area because he thought it's more safer to go there, than being in Baghdad. So this was a black spot that year. Then afterwards, during the war, because there's a shortage of goods, the market, the economy, start moving, there's a lot of activities. A lot of activities. The Jews, at that time virtually they are representing about one-third of Baghdad and they were I can say 90% of the economy they are running; in the government, central bank, minister, the finance minister, they are really doing a hell of a job. I mean, they are running the government. Nobody would think that one day we are going to leave, this is not our country. Nobody would think about that. Few families, they thought about that in 1941 and they left. But after that, activities start moving and life start to return to normal and people they say this is everything went to normal. But then

1948 come again, the worst part in 1948 for about three, four years, it was the most difficult, this is coming to stage number two. [00:22:05] This is different life. The first life we thought this is our home. The second life, either you emigrate or you stay in Baghdad because you don't have security outside, how you can emigrate if you have got a chance to build yourself by staying, hopefully, you can make some kind of security and you can leave. But whatever the people who left to Israel, the bulk, 1950, '51 and the people who stayed, which we were one of them, I think about 10,000, 15,000 people they stayed. This 10,000, 15,000 people, nobody will think that this is going to be our home. Everything has been changed. So this is another – then things after 1952. What happened there had been a rebellion in Iran. The British used to be the most influential in the area at that time. Mossadegh was came and he rebelled against the Shah and the Shah escaped. At that time, the British they want to punish the Iranian, they close the tap of oil, they open the tap in Iraq. So Iraq starts having more money, having more money in Iraq as an income. Then this kind of economy started creating prosperity, roads building, dams, you name it, everything start going on up and start moving so well. But all the programmes they done, it didn't touch the man of the street, it takes time [00:24:00]. So they have done another revolution, they killed the king and that was a terrible. At that time, when they killed the king, we thought we are going to be communist because communist embassy non-existent in Iraq, during the royalty. When the revolution came in, they opened all the communist country, Russia, Belgium – no, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, China, all of them. We heard we were really in a very, very difficult situation, because at that time our business was expanded and mostly of our customers are head of tribes. I mean, they have got farms, we sell them combines, harvesters, tractors and we sell them on credit, three years credit. So when the revolution coming in, what happened? These people they have got no asset anymore, the Agrarian Reform took their assets. When they took their assets, it's finished. I mean, they came to me and say, 'David, we can't pay you.' I tell them, 'Okay what you want?' They say,

‘Government took all our asset without compensation.’ So say, okay we expanded, we extended to ten years without interest, we have no choice, we have to accept. This is one side, the other side, we have got about big cars, Lincoln, Mercery, and these cars, at that time, it’s beautifully worked with the regime of the kingdom, before ’58. [00:26:00] The roads has been expanded for them, so we start bringing more cars. When the revolution come in, if you have got a middle-sized car you go to a mini car, because you are frightened in case they will catch you on the road and they might kill you. I mean, it was an awful six months. The communism, we even want to learn about communism, because we thought definitely we are going to be. But things had been changed, so we can’t sell the cars, I mean, if the bank will ask us for money we are bankrupt. So you cannot believe it within three months we sold every car at full price. How we sold it? Only to the Russian ambassador, Chinese ambassador, and then they come and tell us we buy these cars on one condition that we have to have the formal government prices. We couldn’t believe our eyes, if they give me 50% discount I will sell it. And this is how it happened. And things start moving.

But then after ’58, which we are on stage number two, after ’58 Qasem came in. I tell you one thing, Qasem was for us, was a prophet. Qasem in the history of the Arab world, in the history of the Jewish people, they didn’t have a good time as during the time of Qasem. He say, the first his motto is that no differential between people, between religion, no differential between poor and rich, we want to – and instead of reducing the rich to the poor, we want to increase the asset of the poor to the rich people. And after six months, seven months of the revolution we are frightened, there was curfew, we don’t know what’s going to happen for our future. [00:28:10] Then one of our dealers, we have got tyre dealers, in small area, about twenty miles from Baghdad. He came and he said, ‘David, you know if you have got any – if you need any help, I have got my brother-in-law, he’s the head of the intelligence service.’ I couldn’t believe my eyes when I heard that. The head of intelligence, everything in his power. I told him I don’t

need anything; I need passport only because I know passport is very difficult to get. He said write me an application now. I gave him the application, after one hour he gave me the approval. And I started travelling every year, four months, five months, outside for business and all that and come back to Baghdad. And this was made us stay and expand. I mean, the time of that Qasem, it's unthinkable in the history.

So that's from '58?

'58 to 1963. In the end they killed him. They killed him 1964, I came back to Baghdad, I was overseas, I brought my daughter, Linda, in a school to spend her birthday holiday with us there. They say no more passport, we were shocked, we thought perhaps only few months. By luck we managed to get her passport, she left and I stayed, but it lasted her three years. Till again one of my brother's friend, also he was head of intelligence service and he managed, he say whenever I find a way to get you a passport, we get you, and he got the passport. [00:30:00] And after a week we left everything and we left to England and we thought things might improve. Because at that time, they were planning to open the passport on all the Jews, things are start improving. What happen is another revolution. And the June war came in – the June war, this is coming to stage number three, and this is - it was the most awful time. I left 19 – 12 March 1967, June 1967 the June war started and it was the most miserable time for the Jews since then. After a year, or year, two years, Saddam took over, and he used the Jews as a scapegoat when he want to hang some army officers. And then in 1973 I think they – some of them they went illegally to Iran, including my brother and my mother, and after when they open the passport for the Jews, it was very limited number left and today they are about five or six Jews, or eight Jews, left in Iraq.

So you left but your mother stayed behind?

My mother, because at that time, we don't know what will be our future. We thought things start improving once I got passport. So we say we leave and I will see whether I will come back or not come back. My mother stayed with my brother, with Maurice, at that time. She was happy to stay there because we don't know where we are going to stay and all these things. Then 1972 I believe, then Maurice he managed to leave illegally, to Iran, with my mother. [00:32:10] And they came to Israel and this is the first time I went to Israel in 1970 or – I believe '70, 1970 I believe, I went to Israel because I didn't want to go to Israel in case our business still in Baghdad going on, and my brother's still there in Baghdad, so I don't want to – people say he went to Israel or something like that. So he went to Israel for a year and then he came to England, he settled in England. My mother, we wanted to come to England, she say I will die if you get me here, the weather I can't stand it. So I said okay and we got her a place in Tel Aviv and she's living with my sister and she lived very happily with her.

That's the beginning of the end of phase three?

The phase three when most of the thing went. Coming to the relation with the – with our Arab, Muslim, as I mentioned, I mean, in the farming area, they are all head of tribes, they are all our partners. We have no problem with them at all.

So you were in an unusual position compared to other Jewish families?

It is – yes, unusual. There are very few families who are dealing with agriculture. I mean, usually a Jew can't be a – not in agriculture, only on the trade. So we had excellent relation, all

these head of tribe who are our partners, they appoint them as member of the parliament, they don't know how to sign, they have to put their thing [00:34:00]. So they come to our office. At the end of the year they come to office, when they come, they withdraw the money, 100, 200, 500, they draw the money on account. There is no question of receipt or something like that – or recorded. At the end of the year we submit account for them, how much we sell the product, how much they have withdrawn, and this has been going on all the time.

It was a relationship of trust?

100%. The trust was the number one, was far better than an agreement. The other thing is that when I went into business myself, one day I received a call from – I was at the age, I think it was twenty-eight, 1954. 1954 I received a call from a manager of a company. This manager is a Jewish, and he used to be running all the Iraqi railways, he was very powerful. Coming 1948, '49 they retired him. This head of tribe, we have got head of tribe who is near Baghdad, the family called Al Souhel. Al Souhel tribe from the family of Bani Tamim, the tribe, it was a very big tribe. He went into partnership with another Jewish fellow at the time, on condition that he appoint this manager, because he trust him. And he was a fantastic personality, he was unbelievable. So he was like my father, about twenty-five, thirty years older than me. So he called me, he say, 'David,' he doesn't know me, first time I met him, he say, 'You know, we are having difficulty of expending and we are having problems and would you like to join us?' [00:36:04] And this is the best partner you can have, the head of a tribe, he's a senator and all this. You know, he is important to have a backing like that. Anyhow, to cut it short I decided to go with them. He said, 'If you are happy to come I want to make – to have a meeting with the Sheikh. I want to introduce you to him,' such a lovely, lovely personality, this fellow. The first time I met him he knows about our family because we are farmers and we are connected with

head of the tribes, and we know about him very well. He say, 'David, I am so happy that you are going to join us, you know, I know your family and you know our family, and I heard from the manager that you have got some terms which you want to be – to join us.' He got up from his desk, he signed on a piece of paper, empty, he say, 'David this is your piece of paper, put whatever you want, I'm your partner.' Shook my hand and he went. This is how I started with him. Until I had one of the nicest relation for three years with him. Every day he used to come to my office. The last time he came to my office, poor fellow, he had heart attack. He came to my office, I seen his face, yellow, and I say, what? Get me a doctor. I went like a bullet to get him, Gergi Rabiah at that time was a good doctor. And he came, after one hour he died. 1957.

So you had very good relationships with the Arabs, on a business relation, what about personal relationships, as a child, do you remember friends? [00:38:00] Or was it more on the business side?

We didn't have really this personal relation with the kids, the Muslim kids, because always we have got our relation with our family. I don't remember we had a strong relation with Muslims, only when I came into the business and we start to be associating with them. Then this as I say 1954, I went with this head of the tribe. Then 1955, my brother was studying electrical engineering in England. And he want to come to Baghdad, to live in Baghdad, it was a great opportunity for me because I have got another Muslim friend, which he want to have a kind of connection in business with me. So I took the opportunity to form another company with this Muslim, a new Muslim friend, to come. And my brother, Maurice, can run it, and it worked extremely well. And this is how – and one of them is Shi'a, one of them is Sunni, we didn't know were they Jewish, Shi'a or Sunni. The problem is when you have got a government, weak government, they use the Jews as a scapegoat. There's the problem.

There's lot of people who you had a good relation with?

The people in all our life I didn't find really problem with the people, all the problem we had is from the government. When we have got good government, we are at peace. When we have bad government, they start the problem, not the population. I mean, during the 1941, 1941 there are so many houses had been protected by Muslim. [00:40:05]

Where were you in 1941?

1941, before the Farhud we were in Shamiya. You see, what happened because we are connected to the head of a tribe, the head of a tribe of Shamiya, he was a senator. He was royalist. When Rashid Ali came and he make the rebellion, he fled out with the regent, with all the government, they fled out. So Shamiya become without a head of the tribe, who is influential. He used to be our partner; he was to be influential with us.

What was his name?

Hajji Rai Al Atiya And when he left, then we had a very difficult time in Shamiya. My father took all the family, the kids and the women, my uncles from our side, for about ten, fifteen people, we were there. The governor of Shamiya, at that time, there was so much poisonous radio from Germany, all controlled to Iraq. About the Jews, about things, they are really inflaming the population. So the governor, he say, 'I would rather prefer, have all the Jews in one house'. In one house, so what they want to call it a protection or confinement because they are a very, very difficult atmosphere. Very Nazi atmosphere.

Pro Nazi?

Pro Nazi. Then the family, there is nobody, my father was the only fellow. [00:42:05] So we contacted – he managed to allow my father to go out. One day my father was coming from the – our area where we have got all the stocks and everything, it's only five minute walk, he go there and he come back. On the way back the fellow who took over the head of a tribe, he was a real gangster fellow. He was banned to be in the village when the head of the tribe was there. When he fled out, has got first opportunity to come and run the tribe. He came, in order to hurt his uncle, which was the head of a tribe, he went to kill my father, just to hurt him. And this is how it happened. Then after that we went to bury him in Hillah, where the Jewish cemetery there, and we went to Baghdad. After few days, we start hearing – we are having the *shiva* in our home, and people coming and then they say there is a problem in that area. It's better each one to go to his home. So they went and we start – we don't know what's going on but when we go to the roof, we start hearing the noise of people shouting and all these things. It was a horrible memory at that time. Although we were about ten, fifteen people in the house, but we don't know whether they come to us or they don't come to us. Fortunately, they didn't come to us but Gd help the people who has been attacked, and every kind of problem they had. [00:44:08] That was a terrible time.

When your father was – this was during the Farhud or not?

Before the Farhud.

Before the Farhud?

Yeah. Before the Farhud. I think it could be one week before the Farhud.

So he targeted specifically your father?

Sorry?

Your father was specifically targeted by this person?

Exactly. Oh yeah, oh definitely. Because, I mean, just to hurt his uncle.

Because he knew they worked together?

They know, they know we are – everybody knows each other in this kind of place. Everybody know everyone.

And nobody could protect your father?

How you can protect him? I mean, they were hiding at the corner of when he's coming to our house. One of his slave person, at that time, like – they call them abed, slave, I mean, he went, then they caught him, they put him in the prison and they put this fellow also in prison, the fellow – the baddy, for a while, and then everything – things changed, policies changed, everything has been changed.

It must have been a terrible shock to your family?

It was the worst thing, it was very, very, very difficult time. [Pause] This is part of our life there.

But your family, did they see it as antisemitic incident or did they see it as a --?

Well, I tell you what, when you say antisemitic I don't know whether this is antisemitic in the Arab world. [00:46:00] But the problem is, when you have got a mob and you are incited by the radio and by the government, kill the Jews, do that, do that, do that, these people are poor people, they are illiterate, what do you expect from them? I mean, we, as I said, we lived in harmony, but when there is a problem, the problem coming from the rulers.

And justice was done in terms of the killer, you said he was put in prison?

Oh yeah, yeah, he put in the prison, and the fellow who killed my father, also it was a for life sentence.

So, after this happened ...

And then this fellow, the baddy, he used to be known as like gangster of the area and then after was changed, after fifteen years, I did used to know about him, I used to know him, and he become a head of a tribe and things become quite normal.

But you said you were in Shamiya, and then the Farhud happened, so what are your memories of the Farhud?

Farhud, we were in Shamiya, and I said few days before the Farhud we came back to Baghdad because my father was killed, as I told you, we went to bury him, and we came to Baghdad for the *shiva*. My uncle, who hasn't got any children, was living in our house, and this is how we have to do the seven days *shiva* and during that time the Farhud is started. [0:48:00]

Were you under threat then?

Oh yeah, I mean, we were frightened. I still remember we were sitting, some of them they go – some of the men they go up to the roof to see what was going on and come back and people are sitting in the hall, very quiet, we don't know what's happening. If you make slightest noise you irritate the other people, at that time, because you are frightened, you are on your nerves. And we were lucky, I mean, that they haven't come on our area. I don't know what we would have done. But we can hear the noises at night because at night it's very quiet and you can hear the shout of the women, it's awful and you can't do anything about it.

You were hiding in the house?

We are – we have no choice, there's no other area. Until the government came to town and the army took over.

So you also said that after that you had to stop school?

After two years, after two years I joined my two uncles, on the agricultural side. We stayed for about five years, four, five years, then I start to do my own work, my own business.

So you were the oldest in the family?

Yeah.

So you had to take over the responsibilities of your father?

Yeah, exactly.

Did you want to stay in school or were you quite happy?

Well at that time really I was hoping to get to go to university, only not to study really, to enjoy life outside Iraq. [50:00] And even I start writing letters, to like Egypt or Turkey, some of the universities there, hoping I can continue there.

What did you want to study?

I don't know, to tell you the truth, I don't know. Just I want to go and study, perhaps economy or something like that.

But you had to – in order to make a living for the family, there was your sisters and younger brother?

Oh sure, sure.

What other things do you remember in terms of your Jewish life, synagogue and other things, from Baghdad, in your youth?

Well, the synagogue not so much I am keen about the synagogue, I tell you why. I mean, it's sad really, I would have loved to be really more toward believing in synagogue and all these things. But when my father died, me and my brother, Maurice, every day for the full year, morning and evening we went to the synagogue and during the – Shabbat, we go three times, morning, *Minha* and *Arvit*, for full year we didn't miss one day. We thought this is not a question of compromising, it's one of these things. And then after that for two, three years, my uncle was more orthodox, he was living with us and he obliged us to go to synagogue every Shabbat. All my friends they go and have fun and all these things, I go to the synagogue. When I have got the chance to get out of it, I have, and that is a bit sad, but that's why I am not so keen about synagogue. [00:52:00] I could have been a good believer.

But you're not?

No. Well I don't know about believe, but not going and praying all these things.

What about any clubs, did you belong to any clubs?

Yeah, we used to have a lovely – I mean, I tell you the Jewish community, it used to be a state in a state, when I say state in a state, we used to have the parliament, the head of the parliament is the chief Rabbi which appointed really by the government. And we have got the court, religious court, if there is any problem for marriage and all these things, they deal with that. We have got committees, committees, committees, one for schooling, the committee for schooling,

everyone who cannot afford to pay his fees, they pay for him, free. The poor people they go free. And then you have got the hospitals, anyone who cannot afford to pay, the hospital is paid by the community. Then you have got – even they have done a school for the blind people, the blind people they try to teach them the music and one of the best musicians came from that school. Then you have got a school for the poor girl, the poor girls, who cannot – who want to find something to live, to work when they grow, start teaching them knitting, sewing, they are teaching them kinds of things. It was fantastic organisation. And this all you can say from where the income? It's all the income coming partly from the tax on the meat, and the other part there are some people who can afford to leave a trust to the community and mostly the wealth Iraqi Jewish people who are abroad, like the Kadoorie, like part of the Sassoon. [00:54:09] There are quite a number of them; they contribute and this is how they used to run it. It used to be a state in a state.

So what about the clubs?

The clubs, they're beautiful the clubs, I think they have got about four or five clubs. And the social life, I'm talking before 1948, at that first stage, I mean, the evening is one of the nicest evening. Anything you want in the club, if you want to play bridge, if you want to play card, if you want to have dinner, if you want to social with people, everything in the evening, it's only in the evening because during the day they are working. The evening it's a beautiful cooler, so everything is there. At the end even they start building new clubs to renew their club, it was a beautiful social system.

And you went to the evening clubs?

Oh sure, sure, it's one of the best meeting area. It's a lovely area. They have got nothing, they go to the cinema or you can go to the club, and you meet all your friends and all these things. Then 1948 came, refugees coming from Palestine, they settle them in the clubs. And also we have what's special in the club, which I really have got a good time with it, the Alliance School club, anyone who is graduated from the Alliance School he become a member. And they were a committee which was running it, which is beautiful, it's really modern. The used to do some shows, there is a tennis, a lot of events, but lasted only about four years, four, five years. [00:56:00] And one of my best friends, he died now, Shlomo Ishayak he was in Israel and he created this club, he ran it fantastic, beautiful. This is one of our best time we are there, because you meet girls and other friends and all these things. You have got good opportunity to do that.

And that was the idea?

Yeah.

But you said the refugees from Palestine they were housed in the club?

Yeah, yeah, they have taken over all the clubs, nobody could touch the clubs anymore.

Tell us a little bit what changed after '48.

When you say change, what do you mean by change?

Well, obviously, the foundation of the state of Israel, what impact did it have?

It has got a very severe impact for about three, four years. I mean, I used to have my brother – I mean, during that time you need only somebody to give a notice that you are a Zionist or something like that, you go to jail. I mean, how we started 1948, you know, a Jewish person, non-existent to hear he's in jail, you don't hear a Jewish person to go in jail, out of question. There are some gangsters, I mean, in every community there are gangsters. These – they are minority, but a respected person to go to jail, unthinkable. All of what we heard ten people, ten trade people, in the trade which are known, they arrested them, and this was the first shock we had.

Which year?

I really don't know, it could be '48 or '49, okay. They arrested them and then they have got nothing against them, they are traders, so when they start – still you have got friends at that time, influential friends and all these things. When the pressure start going on, on the government, they say, okay we release them, each one has to pay 10,000 Iraqi Dinar. 10,000 Iraqi Dinar, it's a hell of money at that time, 1948, 1949, it's a lot of money. And they release them afterwards. Then the real problem started when they hanged the four others in Basra, that was in a nightmare. I mean, some time I used to go in the evening, my brother-in-law who married to my sister, he used to be the head of engineering, railway engineering, for the south of Iraq. He used to have his own wagon, everything, his own cook, everything, house, it's a beautiful life they used to give them. Then somebody wrote a letter, there are three Jewish engineers, north, middle and south.

[Inaud]

Yes, so they wrote a letter that they are trying to exploit the railways, in connection all the three. The censor saw this letter, they came to arrest them, they're resistant, we spend six months really in an awful time. I used to go some time, in the evening, I drink a bit of Arak, very sick like that so I can sleep, because we were nervous. When we see police coming, we don't know which way they are going, at that time. And at the end when they release him because if they court martial him, either he will be hanged or he will be relieved. [01:00:08] And he has got my sister with – has got one year old son and she imagined the feeling at that time. Then they released him, he say, 'I won't stay in Iraq,' he registered and he went, immigrated to Israel.

After this experience?

Yeah. He got terrible experience. His father – his father was one of the oldest member of the parliament. He knows the king, the rulers, he know everyone.

What was his name?

Ibrahim Haim. He's a very known person when the constitution of Iraq started in the United Nation in Geneva, he was one of them to go there, but still didn't help. He go to – people they are frightened to help him because they say, oh you are getting money from them or something like that.

So was he the only one to leave in your family – the early migration – emigration, the '50s?

Well yes, well I've got from like Jaqueline's husband and a lot of cousins with them, they are all of them, they left, they emigrated. This side of the tribe, all of them, they went there. Then my

second sister, her husband tried to go illegally, they caught him and he was only for a short period in a prison. Then he managed to try again and he went to Israel, then my sister followed him afterwards. She got a passport. After 1952 things start to improving if you are staying there after, when all the Jews they left.

They had to give up their citizenship.

They have to give citizenship, imagine the confidence they used to have. Some of them they didn't sell their property, although they sell it with quarter of the price, they didn't sell, they say we can give power of attorney to somebody who will sell it when we leave. They didn't realise they will confiscate everything at the end of the year.

And tell us a little before – about your own private life, when did you meet your wife?

Well '48 as I said, it was a very difficult time, very difficult time. Then my wife, they came from Basra and I have got one of my friends who made a party, dancing party in the evening, and she was there and that's how we started. And 1949 we got married.

Tell us a little bit about it, do you remember the wedding?

Well not in detail, to tell you the truth, not in detail, at that time we had a difficult time. It's not – when you are in a quiet time, you remember everything. Of course, you remember the wedding, where we have done it and all these things. But it is a question of just things we have to go along.

It was low profile?

Yeah, and all her family they were not in Iraq, only one of her sister. And the first time she was separated from her family. It was very difficult for her.

Where were they?

From Basra. When they came, again, her father, they put him in a prison, why they put him in a prison, somebody say there's a machine, it is I think sending details to Israel. [01:04:00] What is this machine? Sewing machine, a sewing machine. They put him in a prison, poor fellow. When he left, after I don't know how long he stayed there, he can't see, the shock affected him. So when they found what happened, that we're going to get married, they get married and then they left Iraq and they lived in Geneva from 1950 till when he died.

They managed to get to Geneva?

Sorry?

They managed to get out to Geneva?

Well he went to Geneva to live there because he has got his brother-in-law working at the bank, he was there partly, and partly for doctors because for his health and his eyes. And there was a good centre at that time, and they were happy there, and they settled there.

So when you married were you discussing leaving or was it where you want to stay, or it was between you and your wife?

It's not in our hands where we stay. We don't know. We thought this is the end of our life in Iraq. But the problem is, if you haven't got security outside, how you can go there? What you work? Labourer? What you can do work? We are not used to that. So the time solved our problem. When things start changing, improving, then you take the opportunity.

And your daughters were born in...?

Well Linda born in Baghdad, and Lizette born in Geneva.

You said in the '50s most of the family was still there, your family?

From my side? Yes. When the family, I mean, only like my uncles, they are all there. **[01:06:02]** But the larger tribe, which were from the south originally, they are – all of them, they emigrated.

And you said you didn't experience any personal problems with the antisemitism?

After that?

Yes.

No, after that we didn't have any problem. I used to have – I used to get the passport, for me the passport is the number one. If they lock me, it's difficult for me, but when I start travelling, I go to see my wife's family and my family in London, and we come back, there is no problem.

But you said your daughter was in school?

When the revolution started, 1958, there was a kind of a funny judge, court martialling all the ministers, the government ruling party. My daughter, she was in a convent. In the convent all the daughters of these ministers, they were there, they were there. And when we see on the televi – we used to have a curfew for six, seven months, curfew, so we have got nothing, you have to sit and watch television. By luck it happened that they created the television four years before the revolution. So you sit and watch television, what you watch is the court martial, all Baghdad, you don't hear anything, everything is closed. Everybody in these houses, curfew and they are watching television. This judge, he bring one minister, he kill him three, four times before he is killed, by humiliate him. [01:08:03] And the people support him, shouting, they say, 'Let us hang him, let us hang him,' and all these things. And this to see it was a terrible thing. She was suffering from a bit throat problem, all the time coughing, catching cold, so we thought the mountain is much better for her. She was at the age of nine, and we said we can send her to the mountain in Geneva, in Switzerland, which is one hour from Geneva, her grandmother is there. And we are travelling, I mean, part of the time we spend with her, part of the time we bring her to Baghdad. Things are start moving much better. Till 1964, when they stopped the passport, this is the time was also difficult for us, for three years. We couldn't get a passport.

Apart from that, was there any other restrictions?

No, no, I mean, now you ask about the club there was, I think Christian club, which are – and there was also Iraqi club, which the Jews were there. In '67 this club, they wrote a letter to – the Jewish, that they are dismissed from the club. And my brother send me the letter of dismissal to London when I was in London.

On what grounds? What did they say?

Jews, that's all.

No Jews in those clubs?

No. '67, you see, '48 humiliation for the Arab, first time a shock that a Jew can overrun the Arabs, they said they don't dream in all their history. [01:10:01] And '67 the way the war in one day finished, it's unbelievable, it's a miracle you can say. This is another humiliation for them. So how they put their humiliation? They put it on the Jews.

And did you personally know anyone of the people who were hanged?

Oh, we know few of them, we know few of them. They are – they are no question about it, they are innocent, they are traders, one of them is because he has got a good agency, I suppose, they want to take the agency, they do that. One of them in Basra is such a gentleman this fellow, nobody they couldn't believe that this was going to happen to them. It happened.

Which year was that?

I believe 1969, this is when Saddam was in power.

So your daughter was in Switzerland in the school, then at some point you managed to get the passport in '64?

In '64 I came to – I got a passport, '64, I came to London for a week, I went to Geneva, I took her with me to spend her birthday in Baghdad. And we had a good birthday party and we didn't realise the passport has been stopped at that time.

Her Iraqi passport?

Iraqi – Jewish Iraqi passport, the Jews, so when we apply for exit, no exit. By luck we have got an army officer who is working in our company, and he was very influential. [01:12:08] He went there, he fought like hell with them until he got the permit and she was the last one to leave Baghdad. And we stayed, we thought perhaps in four, five months we – they will release the thing. But this hadn't been released, we stayed till 1967, three years, until we got the passport and the passport is the best thing in my life. You know, I mean, during this three years, we have got Muslim partners in the two companies, which I have got. And our business are increasing, expanding, but I don't have anymore – I don't have any feeling for it, for me I pay anything to get a passport.

And you couldn't see your daughter?

For three years we didn't see her.

How did it affect your ...?

It affect her very much, and it affect us very much.

How?

Well, I mean, sometimes she used to send us some – we have got bank manager, he used to travel and he used to get – bring back with him tape of her guitar playing, we sit and cry. It was a very difficult time.

How old was she?

During that time she was fourteen, when she came to Baghdad, the last time, and she went fourteen till seventeen years old, which she didn't see us. And this is a time she is growing up. Although, I mean, she has got a home there, her grandmother she is marvellous with her.
[01:14:00]

But you didn't know how long it would last?

Nobody know, I mean, nobody – things are – all when we are talking now, now we know it, but at the time, we know nothing, we don't know which way we are going.

How many Jews were still left in that time, in Iraq?

When you say that time, which time?

'64 to '67.

'64, '67, perhaps 3,000, 3 , 4,000. Oh '64, '67, yes, yes. About 3,000 to 4,000.

And when you got a passport, was it only you or other people also get the passport?

No, it was the first good omen that they gave passport. They gave for me and my wife and my daughter and they promised that they are going to open it in June, where the summer coming, for people to travel for in the summer. But the June war – came the June war and things completely went worse and worse and worse. All my life in Iraq, I haven't seen half of what has happening after the June war in Iraq.

But you were not there anymore?

I was not there, that's why I say perhaps I wouldn't have been able to survive.

Tell us what happened, you got the passport and then what did you do?

Within a week we decided to be relief, we don't care where we go, just be out of Baghdad, I can't open my mouth until the plane go out the border. We went to Beirut and we have got my brother, the younger brother. Maurice my brother was in Baghdad, my younger brother was educated in England and become a dentist, he came with his wife to Beirut. [01:16:07] Even the brother who live in Geneva, with his wife, came to Beirut with us. So we met there. And we

spent two weeks, a relief just from you can say, from a concentration camp in a way, to a freedom. We had a great time for two weeks, went to Geneva and then I went to apply for the visa to go to England. My work is all in England, still we have got work in Iraq. We ask for a visa, no answer, no answer.

Where did you ask for the visa?

From Geneva. Then I've got a manager in London, in our office, in London. And I told him what happened, he say don't worry, he went and contacted Ford, we used to be the agent of Ford of England.

Ford cars?

Ford cars in England and therefore the tractors, because the cars and the tractors they were already controlled by England. Then they moved to America, the control. So he controlled Ford, he say, 'Look here, David want to come, they won't give visa.' This fellow, the manager of Ford, he was shocked, he say, 'I can't believe it.' He had a hell of a time with the thing, the second day we got the visa. Then I went there, I have got a permit to stay any time I come, but as long as I have got a valid passport. The June war came in, they wrote – my brother wrote me a letter, they say they have denounced your nationality because you didn't come back after three months. **[01:18:03]** So it's only proper I will mention to the Home Office, but then, don't worry, passport is two years, but I think they have denounced me because of that. They say, 'Oh sorry, then you have to leave.' I couldn't believe it. They say I have to leave the country. By that time we have already have got immigration to America, in case I need it. We took all the papers. I told him but I've got immigration to America. He say, 'Yes that's fine, go to

immigration to America, get your green card and come back permanently.' I say I want to find the house; I want to have education for the kid. I was so frustrated, I was shocked, I couldn't believe it. Then I decided to go to America, this was in '67 in July, I think.

Then I want to go to America, then I've got a very friend, English manager, bank manager, who was in Baghdad. And we become so much like brothers. He say, 'David when you are going to find a house?' I tell him, 'No, I'm going to live to America.' He say, 'What?' He was shocked. I told him the story, he cannot believe it, I couldn't believe it. I mean, he already took appointment with the Home Office, he phoned me, he say, 'Please, David, put a tie,' because we used to go with a tie at that time [laughs], 'and come with me.' We went there, still the fellow in the Home Office, 'no we have got our rule, we don't have passport', that's it, all this. So I felt annoyed, we have done a hell of business with England and they treat me like that, I was so annoyed and I said, just I want to get up. [1:20:07] And my friend, he asked me, 'David, please can you leave, leave it for five minutes?' After five minutes I came, to tell you the truth, that fellow died after few years, poor fellow, cancer in the head. I don't know what he said, but after five minutes, this fellow, he say, 'Now you can go ahead, I'm going to recommend your stay here, find a house, find a schooling for your children and I will arrange for the recommendation to stay here.' He came with us, to the door at the end, I was – I couldn't believe it, what he told him I don't know.

You still don't know?

I don't know. And this is how I stayed here. Perhaps – if not for this fellow, perhaps I'm living in America now. Things happening.

Tell me, when you left Baghdad, what happened to all your properties?

We have already – we don't have – we have got the agricultural land in our name. Eve, she has got a hell of properties, her family, in Basra, they are all frozen, they are all frozen. But the companies which we are, it's still running, my brother was in Baghdad. And the problem is that the turnover, it become less than half because they become socialist. They start socialising all the import. The government start to do the import instead of ourselves. They left very good small portion for us to deal with that. So the business was going down and down already, from the event. [01:22:03]

But when you left you sort of left as a tourist? When you left Baghdad.

Just like normal, as everything. I left everything, the house, everything as it is.

So everyone took a suitcase? What could you take?

Who?

What could you take, when you went with your wife and your daughter, to Beirut?

To Beirut?

Yes.

To whom I say?

What could you take, yourself?

Oh no, only – we didn't want to take anything special, because in case they will caught us in the customs. And they say, oh you are smuggling this or that, we can't take anything.

What did you take?

Only our clothes. Only thing allowed for. I mean, I'm going to leave Baghdad, I got a passport, I can't risk it by having something or something like – even pictures we didn't bring.

No photos?

Nothing. We didn't want to give any excuse to – just want to – this three-years depressed me very much, I felt so low, only because I can't get the passport. Apart from that, really we didn't have a problem, I mean, as life, life is going normal, but we didn't have any problem.

Infringement on your movement?

Oh yeah, this affect me very – more than anything else, is my daughter is in Geneva, we didn't see her.

How does she feel today, this time?

Affect her very much, very, very much. This is the time she is growing up, she need her parents and this is affect her a lot. Thank God she's fine now. [01:24:00]

So when you had the family meeting in Beirut, you were exploring the options where to do?

You know, we have got a good friend there. The – my sister, the sister-in-law, you know, Eve – my wife's brother, is married to a lady born in Beirut, her father is part of the *Banque Zilkha*, manager there. And he was marvellous. So anything we need, any facility, just like that. And he made our stay so beautiful. Amazing, when I was there one of these things happening, is really, want to laugh about it, and always he said, 'David you know why I've got a lovely catalogue for houses in London, why we don't buy two houses?' I tell him, 'What kind of houses?' He gave me a beautiful catalogue, when I see the house it's five storey, five storey house, I tell him 'you are crazy, I want to have a garden, want to live with a garden, we are living in – outside all the time, I live in confined without a garden?' I laughed at him. We came to London, for eight months we tried to find a house. This too far, this problem, this problem, it's all my wife is dealing with that. Then my brother, the younger brother, Frank, he got me a beautiful apartment in Regents Park, it was – belonged to the Mayor of London. And he want to rent it only for a year, so I took it and I loved it, I see the park just like my garden. So after frustration, then my wife she remembered, Eve she remembered, that she say, you know the houses which you have seen in London – in Beirut, it is in Regent's Park, why you don't go and see it? [1:26:12] It's just our neighbour, the other side of where I am. Say, okay, that's fine. We went, I thought about five storey, how you can – we say, let's have a look, went to look, I have seen it's a lift, elevator in it. When I see the lift I say, this is mine. It can be big, the way I want it, everything, and you have got the garden in front of us. After the frustration of not finding the right place for us, it is more central, the schooling for the girls and if you have got help in the house, it's more convenient. I told her, I am happy if you accept, I told Eve. She say, 'I'm quite

happy, I will do exercise going up the stairs.’ And this is how we took it. And up to now we are there.

Is that where you settled, Regents Park?

Regents Park, yeah. We are, I think, one of the oldest now, resident, in this Chester Terrace. At that time they have – it was the nice houses, and they have renovate them and they put them in the market. And my friend, in Beirut, which was another one, after a year he asked me to buy him one. Still there are about eight or ten not yet sold, so wanted to get him one. They say as long as he doesn’t want to live now, to use it now, we are happy not to receive the money from him for a year and make it as a showhouse. He’s happy, he doesn’t want to live immediately, he took it for investment. So they didn’t pay the money and after a year and a half, he sold it, 50% profit on that, things went up, things it happen.

And how difficult was it to settle in London for you?

It was a second home to me. It was a second home to me. Far more than in Geneva, although in Geneva every year we used to go to Geneva, her family. But in London my – Frank, my brother, is here, living here. Eve’s three sisters living there. Her brother in Geneva, which I can relate to him very easy, it was a second home to me. Because I used to come every year, about three, four months a year.

And your English, you spoke English, obviously?

I speak English and we have got our connection with England, it's quite – at that time it was quite a lot.

In terms of work, how did you manage to find something?

How do I find what?

Work, professionally?

Ah! Work. Well, when I was in Baghdad, it is a funny story. When I was in Baghdad, we used to deal with a big British firm, Balfour Beatty it's called. The head of Balfour Beatty become very friend of ours. He know that I am going to reside in – shortly, in a few years, in England. And he say, 'What are you going to do?' I tell you one thing I will not do, cars. Perhaps housing, always people need housing. He say, 'Well in this respect, I have got my son-in-law, he's an civil engineer, he's working with a big firm in Africa and he want to start his own business.' For me, I love that. [01:30:00] This man I trust him with my life, this Balfour Beatty man. I told him, 'Do you think he is trustworthy for me?' He say, 'No question about it.' We signed agreement to do housing without him seeing me, without I saw him. And then I thought, in six months I will come to England, after I sign, but it lasted three years, he was frustrated, he committed his future with me. And he didn't see me, he didn't come there. But things moving and when I come everything start moving much better. This is how I started on the property business.

So you started building houses?

Yeah, yes, and besides we had investment through my brother, Frank, also they have got – they are more experienced. So we have used this kind of experience together. And this is how it work.

So did you have a special niche in the housing?

We don't build anymore, twenty years ago we stopped.

You stopped?

Yeah, only we do investment. We used to build some commercial, we tenant them and we keep them for investment, lock them investment. Now we buy them through my brother's son, Tony, he's – they buy the property, already tenanted and then we leave them for investment. I'm not so, again, young to do this kind of thing. They are doing the kind of work and we are quite happy.

But you like it?

I love it, I love it. I mean, I don't have any regret of what I have done.

And did you join a synagogue here and did you participate in the communal life?

[1:32:00] I wish I can, I don't have the patience for it really. I mean, I would have loved to do that but I don't have patience for it. I go to synagogue Yom Kippur, sometimes part of Rosh

Hashanah, you know, because they have got another section of the Lauderdale synagogue, the oriental one, and it is beautiful, it is done like the Iraqi one.

Do you prefer it?

I like it, I like it.

It's in a school in Naima, in the school

Yeah, yeah, yeah that's right. My daughter has done the school, Lizette, she's architect, she has rebuilt it and she put the synagogue upstairs.

Did she?

Yeah.

Aha. It's beautiful. So you go there for the special service?

Oh sure. It give us memory of Baghdad.

What reminds you, the melodies?

The melody, yeah.

And do you find it different from the main service?

Oh sure, oh sure, completely different.

How different?

The singing, it's more – has got lovely tune, and if the *Hazzan* has got a good voice, it can be like an opera person, he has got a beautiful voice, when he – and it's a nice way of singing. And we used to participate in the – especially Yom Kippur.

And which language did you speak to your children?

Sorry?

Which language did you speak to your children?

I think mostly perhaps half, half, English and Arabic, they speak Arabic. But with my grandchildren English.

All English?

Yeah, they don't speak Arabic.

And do you talk about the past, about your history, with your children, with your grandchildren? [01:34:01] Is it becoming more important at all?

Well I don't talk about the past, but when they ask me question, especially my two daughters, always they ask me questions. Sometime I get tired, because it bring my memory to the past and I – they ask a subject, I have to cover it properly so I enlarge on it and I will tell them how things used to be, how I used to feel. Well, the first – till 1941 I have got – this is my best memory of Iraq.

Growing up?

Yeah, it's a lot of Jewish people, I don't blame them, they don't have good memory, I mean, you don't believe it. There used to be perhaps, I don't know, 60%, which is a great – the highest proportion of middle class was the Jewish community. They are in the banks, in every section. The rich people they were families, I mean, there they were, I don't know whether 5% or something, but the poor people, we have got more than 30% really poor people. And whatever they do, the community does for the poor people, it's not enough. Poverty is – and the worst poverty are in the north, in the Kurdish area. I mean, you don't think there are poor people a lot, in the Jewish community but in Iraq, there used to be quite a lot.

How would you define yourself in terms of your identity today? [01:36:00]

I'm mixed. If I say I am British, they laugh at me. If I say Iraqi, Iraq is terrible shape. You know one day we were in a bus in Italy, touring, an American, as they are, they ask questions. They say, 'Oh by the way, your accent is different, where are you?' I tell him we are British, he say, oh my God, he's just like that [laughs]. No it's difficult, I mean, I love England, England supported me in every issue and I am extremely happy. But I am not an English, I am British, but if you want to see my memory, my memory all with Iraq. Iraq we had a good life.

What do you miss most, is there anything you miss most from Iraq?

[Sighs] I really don't know. I mean, the weather – the weather, I mean, you know, the weather, our life – the difference - here, our life in Iraq was at night. And when at night you come, you are so fresh because you have got a siesta, you rest and when you rest you are better than in the morning to have whatever activity you are having at night. Going for dinner, or a club or meeting things. In England, first of all you can't have a siesta and if you want to have a siesta you can't have it. And then you are tired already in the evening. And the weather, you can't be outside. I mean, the weather affect me very, very much. I'm used to hot weather, dry weather, and we used to have this in Iraq. [01:38:05]

Do you ever wish to go back to Baghdad?

It's finished now, it's finished. First of all when we were there, there were about four, five – four million, now there are about 30 million, number one, and they are different people, not the people I know. Perhaps they are the grandchildren of the people I know; they know nothing about our past. But still I have got Muslim friends. I mean, we are more than brothers, when we meet together.

In London?

In London, yeah. And the Muslim cannot go back to Baghdad now, they are frightened. So how can I go back to Baghdad? And besides I go – if I don't see the memory I have got, I can't see it there.

It's gone?

Completely gone. [Pause]

But if you could, would you go back?

There is no way I could, because if I could how – unless tomorrow somebody come like Qasim and make peace with Israel and everything perfect, they say we return everything for you, I would love to go for a visit to see what happened to the things. But this will not happen neither now nor in fifty years, nor in 100 years.

And what are the most important aspects for yourself of your Iraqi Jewish identity?

Well, I believe we are 2,500 years in Iraq. I mean, we were the first prisoners taken from Israel by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. And whether I am part of that, I believe we are because my great grandparent, they are not far from Babylon anyhow. [01:40:03] So the Jewish community flourished all the time with Arabs. They might have up and down, but on the whole they have the good life, otherwise they would never stay there.

Do you feel sad about the situation today?

Very much, but it is something you can't do anything about it.

It's not going to change in the near future?

Well I don't know with the future [laughs]; we are in the future now. I think the question of the Arab Israeli is not going to be solved because you don't have people ready to make peace with Israel. Only when you have – Golda Meir said it, she said to Sadat, when you're a child, when you were children, we love to live peacefully. That day we can have peace. But now all the media, all the radios, people, they are not giving them reality. They are only – they are giving them always the wrong media. And this fellow coming, not educated, and you hear this and that and that, this is a problem. You need a leader one day, when he say, 'I will take another Sadat,' whether they will bring another Sadat, I don't know.

And in your family, you said some people went to Israel and some people came here, do you think the experience of the Iraqi Jews who went to Israel, who came to England, is very different?

Very different. I mean, my mother – my sister is one of the original went there. [01:42:02] They were in the tent. Imagine they are living, they have got a house help, they have got a house of their own, they are living in such kind of high standard. All of a sudden, food is not available very – I mean, I am not criticising Israel, Gd help Israel, at that time there are 600,000 people and to absorb another 100,000 is not an easy thing. But the Iraqi which that went there, they went in the *ma'arabah*?

Ma'arabot.

Ma'arabot. And they have got – they suffered a lot. But the one who benefited, really benefited, is their children. Their children now, they prospered and they have got good position, all of them. And more than anything else, the 35% poor people of Iraq, the Jewish people, these people, they are their children. They have got education, they become in the

government, they do all kind of things. There's not like if they would have grown in Iraq, they would stay on the same limit. This is one benefit, there's no question about it.

And you said there's a synagogue in the name of your uncle in Beer Sheva?

Yes, you see my uncle, when he died, he wanted to have something in his name in Israel. It happened at that time they introduce me to Eliahu Navi who was the mayor of Beer Sheva virtually he was a king of Beer Sheva, this fellow. He loves the idea and he want to create something for the Iraq – for the Sephardi there. And this is how we started. And he has done a beautiful synagogue, it lasted about six, seven years to be finished. [01:44:01] And we had a very big opening, about 400 people they came, without arrangement, only when they heard things going to be done, people are coming from Tel Aviv, and we have got some friends they join us. And at that time the minister of religion, he was Moroccan, he opened the synagogue, it was a beautiful occasion. They send me a booklet, I mean, how it was done at the time. I will show it to you afterwards.

So your brother also he left in 1970?

My brother, I think 1970.

And he settled where?

Went for a year in Israel and all his – we are here, all – most of the friend are in London. They came to London and they settled here.

Is there anything else which I didn't ask you, you think you'd like to add, have we covered anything?

I don't think I've got anything to add really. We covered everything.

Do you have a message maybe for anyone who might watch this in the future, based on your experiences?

Well, I mean, what kind of message. I mean, the work which you are doing – this to document our life, I think it is very important because this kind of life is non existent. When I came to England, virtually some of the – I mean, there aren't many – probably there are about 1,000 people, Iraqi. But the most important is the Ashkenazi community here, which they are very big, very influential. [01:46:05] I don't think they know anything about us. They know nothing, until one of the good donor, people who do a lot of donation, David Saleh came here and he start running – coordinating his work with the JIA and he start to – start virtually educating the other side. And now we are extremely happy. My daughter is married to Ashkenazi, which she is extremely happy. I mean, we are with them as one, but it wasn't like that when we came to – in 1967, it wasn't like that. There was a big – because they lack the information of our life in Iraq, they couldn't believe that we have got Muslim partners, we work with them, they couldn't believe it. So now really things are much, much better.

Was there hostility, did you experience hostility, let's say in the Jewish community? Not hostility but ignorance?

In the English community?

In the English Jewish community?

Yes, what?

Did you experience ignorance or hostility?

Not now, not now.

Not now, no.

Before we – there was a big gap. There was a big gap really, but now really hardly there is any gap. I mean, we intermingle, we married, everything has become really beautiful.

And did you experience any antisemitism in England?

Sorry?

Have you experienced any antisemitism in England?

Well, I didn't anticipate myself, but it is there, it is there. I mean, this something antisemitism, I don't feel you can take it out. I mean, this is – it has been inbuilt, centuries and centuries, virtually part of – from the church. So the more you are – they are educated, the better. But still you can see some people, I mean, but on the whole England, I think it is a very fair country.

And since we're sitting here in very English countryside at Ascot, I have to ask you, so how did you get to Ascot?

Well, you know, I love the country, when I was in Baghdad, as I told you, I mean, our life is always – we love the country. The countryside, farm and everything, and I thought when I come here that the first thing I will look for a farm, I would like to have a farm, mechanised because we are dealing with the combine harvesters, the tractors, everything for the farm we have been dealing with that. So I can combine all this and I will enjoy it. When I came and I see the weather here, when I see the winter here, it give me a shock. I said if I am not participating in the management of the farm, there is no way you can have a farm. You have to be there. And I shall not be able to participate in a winter, I go outside in the mud and all this? So I settled for a country house, for a year – after two years I came to England, I start looking for a country house. We were so lucky, twice, we nearly – I signed on a country house and it didn't work. One of them was a beautiful Spanish house with fifty acres. [01:50:03] The fellow was a real English gentleman and this fellow he say, 'The house is yours, only one thing.' We agreed on the price. He say, 'It's yours only if the council decided not to take it, because the council want to buy it from me, and they haven't decided yet. If they take it, I can't.' My luck is they took it. I didn't buy it because the area was very – not so accessible. Then there was another house, also around here, we saw. A country house although with twenty-five acres. And the agent was so pushy. I loved the house, I like the ground, the agent was so pushy. I didn't like him. At the end Eve was with me and I have got the fellow of Balfour Beatty, I mentioned to in Baghdad, he was with us because he was working with me here in London after he retired. So Eve she told him, 'Please can you go and tell David not so sign, not to push himself.' He came and told me and they discovered there was – what do you call it? Gypsy site, at the neighbours, they didn't tell me about it. It would have been a terrible thing if I would have signed. When I heard that

question of the gypsy. And then I had the luck to get this place. 1970, we were – I thought the fellow was a gentleman from crisp families, I thought he's a real gentleman, we shook hand, I liked him, we start going on, I told him I can give you deposit if you want now. He say, 'Not necessarily, let them sign.' [01:52:00] I tell him, 'I'm going to go to Greece for two weeks, by that time our solicitor will do the searches and everything, the day I come, I will sign.' He say, 'No, don't worry.' I went there, I was so happy I start making my dream about the place and all these things. And there when we received the call, the beautiful call, that Maurice now is in Iran, he left Baghdad, he arrived safely in Iran. Then from there Frank, my brother, went to Israel to meet him. I went to London and then I went to Israel. I came to London because I want to sign on this thing. I phone the solicitor and say, 'I'm ready to sign tomorrow.' He say, 'Oh David, I'm sorry to tell you, the day you left, after you left, they withdrew the contract.' I was shocked, I thought this is my home. How you can withdraw the contract? I phoned the fellow, I told him, 'What happened? Why you withdrew the contract?' He say, 'Oh David, you know, before you there was somebody from South Africa, he want to buy the place, but he doesn't give me the right price. When he heard you are signing, he immediately sent power of attorney to his solicitor and he gave a bit more money than yours to sign, I can't refuse it, they do it with me if I buy a new home.' I thought he's a gentleman, he was an awful person. Anyhow, I said, 'Look here, I hate gazumping, I would like to come with your solicitor tomorrow to my office, if we agree we sign, if we don't agree, good luck for you.' He came with his solicitor, and the worst part of it, I said 'Okay I will give you the price he give you.' He say, 'No, I want a bit more.' Imagine when he told me more I was crazy. [01:54:00] I thought of myself to hell with my pride, he took me for a ride, that's fine, but I cannot find a house like that, I'm already in love with it. There are two of my people working with me, English people, they told me, 'David you are crazy, he took you for a ride.' I tell him I don't care. Money go and come. So I sign, I won't regret up to today. And by luck it happened, what he told me about South African

was true. My brother-in-law coming from Geneva, he came with a friend, he came and introduced him to me. I tell him, 'How you find the way, you managed to find it?' He say, 'I know it, I know everything, I want to buy it in 1970 and they told me somebody already signed.' So he was right to tell me that. But usually you say to them, 'Go to hell, you are gazumping,' you don't like it. Thank Gd I haven't done that. It worked all right. And this how I got the place.

And do you have animals here?

Yeah, I love animals. If I've got good weather I would have done a zoo here.

Is this where you feel at home?

Sorry?

Do you feel at home here?

100%. 100%. And thank Gd, I mean, my wife also she's happier now, to stay longer here.

So you divide your time between London and here?

Yeah, we used to spend about four nights in London, three nights here, now we do three nights in London, four nights here. But during the London time I come every morning here and go back to London. My office is here.

Okay, thank you very much, is there anything else before we finish?

I think we covered everything.

So just to get back because you didn't finish your message, you started it, message for somebody. [01:56:00]

I said, this is the great thing you are doing, documenting with many people like that because this one is the only experience of the Jewish people living in the Arab countries. How they have been their life before and how their life become now. And this is – I think it's the most important thing you are doing.

Thank you, Mr Khalastchi for your interview.

Thank you.

And we're going to look at some photographs now.

Sure, sure.

[Looking at photos 1:56:43]

Mr Khalastchi, can you please describe this photo?

Well this photo was taken I believe in 19 – two years after we got married, and this is Eve, my wife and my daughter, she's one year old, Linda.

And yourself?

And myself.

And where was this taken?

In Baghdad, in our home in Baghdad.

Roughly 195-?

1951, end of '51, '52, and of '51. She was one years old.

Thank you.

This picture was taken in 1954. This is my mother, Eve my wife, and my daughter, Linda, she was, I think, about four years old.

Where was it taken?

In Baghdad, on the same house in Betawin, in our house in Betawin.

Yes please.

This picture I think was taken in 1952, I used to deal with tyres and we used to visit some time our distributor – agent in various cities. [01:58:02] And this was in the city of Hillah, myself on the left, the third one is our dealer in Hillah, Hajj Ali, and the other one is a representative American from the tyre factory.

Thank you.

This picture was taken in 1956. The one on the right is Mr Bush, he was representative of Goodrich Tyre. The second one with the hat is Moshe Shohet, he's the manager of Soher company, which I was involved with. Then myself, then the son of Sheikh Hassan, Soheli. Then the one sitting is Sheikh Hassan Soheli, who was my partner. And the two on the left side are the people who serving the lunch there. This was taken in Abu Ghraib, which is about twenty miles from Baghdad, they used to have a beautiful house there.

Okay.

This picture is during the wedding of my second daughter, Lizette, and the one on the left is my son-in-law, Robert, he's married to Linda, which is standing near him and with their son, Aaron, I believe perhaps two years old. And myself, then my daughter, Lizette, then Michael, her husband. Then Eve's mother, my wife and Eve, my wife. This was taken at the wedding in Ascot in White Lily's Park.

This picture is of my grandson, Aaron, he was the first grandson, Aaron and myself.

When was it taken?

Er, well I think, I believe, what is it? **[02:00:01]** It could be 2006, it was taken again in Ascot.

Okay.

This is the synagogue which we built through the help of the mayor of Beer Sheva, Eliyahu Navi. And this was in 1979 was completed, in memory of my uncle, Eliyahu Khalastchi

Okay.

This picture was taken in Israel in Or Yehuda, in the centre – in the Babylonian Centre, I think in 1982. And this is where we put the corner stone for the area which we have donated in memory of my father, which is for the great synagogue in Iraq, which used to be about one thousand years old.

Mr Khalastchi, thank you very much for this interview.

Thank you.

[END 02:01:17]