

Sephardi Voices UK

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Interviewee Surname:	Elghanian
Forename:	Iraj
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	01/09/1945
Interviewee POB:	Tehran, Iran
Interviewee Occupation:	Entrepreneur
Father's Occupation:	Entrepreneur
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

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SILENCE [00:00:00]

Today is the 3rd of July 2019. My name is Daisy Abboudi. I'm here with Iraj Elghanian for Sephardi Voices UK.

Mr. Elghanian, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed by Sephardi Voices UK. Can you start by telling me your full name, please?

First of all, is my pleasure. My full name is Iraj Elghanian, which, in Farsi, is Elghanian.

Can you tell me your place of birth?

Tehran. I was born in Tehran.

And your date of birth?

1st September, 1945.

Thank you very much. Can we start by you telling me a little bit about your family background?

I was born in a prominent family already established. I can go back as far as 1875. The great grandfather of my mum was Elkana. And that's how the Elghanian family is coming. I assume he was born in Kashan. Like other Jews, they moved to Tehran towards the end of Qajar, when we were close to have Pahlaví. [00:02:00] And I can go quite far about what happened to them. And in actual fact, I'm witness of the history of our family because I know so many stories of all the cases that make it very colourful and sometimes interesting.

Elkana's son was Aghababa. He had Aghababa as a son and Khorshid as daughter. Khorshid was older by four or five years from Aghababa. And I assume Elkana moved to Tehran, 1875. He was born, let's say, 1855, moving to Tehran, 1875, I have some reason to figure out all those dates. Then their life in Tehran started.

From other side of the family, my grandpa is coming from Khorshid, which is the daughter of Elkana. Her children were born in Tehran. She was married to Haim Saghi. They have children [00:04:00] of kind. My father was from that side. It's interesting to see how it's all emerge as Elghanian family.

I start with the story about Aghababa, the son which was the younger one than - to compare with Khorshid, which was the daughter, the older one. Aghababa was born in Tehran in Sarechal. Sarechal was Jewish quarter. I have a map to address it that the first immigrants of the late 19th century moved to that area; not by force, but by choice. It was more convenient for them to get together, to protect themselves, to give help, assistance, and defending against any antisemitism.

I don't need it much longer.

You were talking about the Jewish area.

Yes. Sarechal became the center of all immigrant Jews coming from different towns of Iran. I have always the interest of finding where they come from because we had Isfahán, we have Shiraz, Kashan, Jask, Damavand as main towns of Iran, and established for Jews. [00:06:00] Out of curiosity, I was always searching.

At the end, I came to conclusion that Elkana, and his daughter, and the son were from Kashan. The reason is from their dialect. In Farsi, we call uncle *amoo* and auntie *ameh*. But my great-grandparents were calling *omee* and *amoo*. Instead of *amoo* uncle they said *omoo* and instead of *ameh* as auntie they were referring to *omeh*. That is the dialect of people from Kashan. That is how I came to the conclusion.

I can say that Elkana was the first immigrant, not the second immigrant to Tehran because otherwise, that dialect was disappearing. The fact that this dialect, that *omoo* and *omeh* stayed as an accent, is indication that Elkana was the first generation of family emigrating to Tehran. Let's say he was five. His father was 25. He was brought up and then he was the first pioneer, one of the first pioneers traveling to France, to Paris, because for Iranians West was France, Paris.

This is your great-grandfather?

[00:08:00] Yes, Aghababa. So I assume when he was in his 20s or 18, teenager or early 20s, he traveled to Paris. He brought back the team fashion to Tehran, mainly new fabrics, georgette,

this, that, which I was hearing when I was a child. This way, he started to become very rich because he was a pioneer and establishing the import in a simple way by sending parcels.

At the time, it wasn't really a meaningful other ways of import. It was by way of parceling, sending by post. And one was staying in Paris, one in Tehran, sending the parcels and selling those parcels to the other merchants.

And Aghababa become richer and richer and richer. Actually, I want to tell you, in the Elghanian family, we have four empires. The first one was built by Aghababa, which I'll describe in a minute, followed by three more. I have, in fact, a map of Sarechal showing the landmarks. One of the landmarks in the map is showing Aghababa's street and where he was [00:10:00] living.

From what I heard, he end up to have carriages, horses, and their appearance become very European. I saw his photo in my grandpa's house, hanged on the wall, very European appearance, but I'm afraid I couldn't get that photo available.

He brought import to Iran of fashion and way of life, European way of life. We can see on their dressing, their manner, behaviour, talking and bringing vocabulary of - European vocabularies to the Farsi language, and all the other signs. I know that he was traveling to Paris frequently. Those days traveling, to Paris was not easy. It was not with airplane. It was maybe taking a long way to go by car, by sea, whatever.

So Aghababa had two sons and two daughters. was the older son, and Aghakhan which his first name was Haham , was changed to Avraham , was second son, and a daughter called Sultan, another daughter who died early and I forgot her name. They were still living in Sarechal, [00:12:00] I assume at least till 1920. Pahlaví started 1925, but there were constitution revolution in Iran, which was bringing more freedom for Jews, and become richer. They wanted to come to the town, town, not to be Jewish center, especially the richer ones.

In the meantime, they become rich, and they're in Sarechal. They wanted to expand their house because they have horses and carriages. They had a neighbour. They wanted to buy their back garden, didn't want. They didn't want, they wanted.

Aghababa's wife approach one of the matchmakers to make them an offer they couldn't refuse. The matchmaker went to the other family and said, "Look, if you sell the back garden, back piece of your garden to Aghababa, he will get one of your daughters for his son. They couldn't refuse because Aghakhan was a young handsome boy of 14, riding horse. And they started talking.

Second problem started when grandpa Aghakhan [00:14:01] liked the second daughter. They had three daughters. No son, only three daughters. In Iran, it was very unorthodox for the second daughter or younger daughter to get married before the first one. It was a problem, but they accepted that as well. So Keshvar the second daughter, was engaged, arranged marriage with my grandpa Haham which very interesting is story.

I have all these from my grandma, this story. My grandma was only 10 years old when she was getting married. She said, when they took me with carriages to the wedding, I was sleeping, [laughs] but it was the way of life on those days. They were getting engaged, living with the family of the husband for few years, even before to be really, really practical marriages. This way, Keshvar my grandma, was married to Aghakhan. My mum was the first daughter, Mohtaran, and David was the son. Only two children.

Soon after that, [00:16:00] Aghababa decided to get out of a Sarechal, the ghetto. He found three beautiful houses opposite the Russian embassy called *khi'aban sfart rus* the Street of Russian Embassy. As you know, wherever are the embassies, are the prime position. He bought three houses, which I can show one of the pictures, of my picture, later on. They moved to opposite Russian embassy. Three houses, one for Aghababa, the corner one, the bigger one, two for the sons, Aghagan and Aghakhan [00:17:02]. I have a lot of memories from that resident.

Now, this is one side of this story. The other side is relating to Khorshid, the daughter.

We'll pick up. You were talking about your paternal grandparents, your father's side now?

Yes, yes, yes.

Do you want to continue?

Yes. Khorshid was the daughter of Aghababa, a bit older than Aghababa. I can figure it out because of the age of their children. [silence] Avraham was younger than Mirzagha, the son of Khorshid, by four or five years, six years, and all the way to the other children as well. I assume that Khorshid-- *Khorshid*, meaning son. *Khorshid Hanum* is a title for ladies, all the ladies of respect. Whenever I say, *Khorshid* it means Mister and the title. When I say *Hanum* it's lady, after the name.

Khorshid *Chanum* was older and had three children - three sons and three daughters - six children. Khanomjan was the first daughter followed by, Saghi and Mirzagha, my grandpa, Aziz, then Monavar and Iran. I have all of them in those various old pictures of 1928 to 1932. [silence]

Khorshid Hanum's son, one of them, Saghi, then Mirzagha - which was his actual name was Yehuda, was changed to Mirzagha- and Aziz. The first son, Saghi, and that is how I figure out where they're coming from. Is easier, not as difficult as the other one that I figured out from Keshvar.

In Shiraz, [00:20:00] the dialect for Yitzhak is Saghi . In Tehran, we say Ishag , but in Shiraz they were calling Saki . That is showing--

[phone ringing]

So the first son was Saghi which Ishag. There is a story that when he was a child, he fall from the flat roof and he lost the normality. He was an abnormal person. I have a lot of memories from him. He was very interesting person, but he has difficulties to talk. He had difficulty to express himself, but very kind person.

From sons was Yehuda, which is my grandpa, become Mirzagha and Aziz. They were following the pattern of Aghababa's business in a more modern way. As the empire of Aghababa was flatting, they were building the second empire of the Elghanian family, which was amazing. [00:22:00] They also traveled to Paris, mainly Aziz. My grandpa was in Tehran, but maybe he was travelling as well. They improved the import, whether from France, even from America. Watches, tyres for car, and fabric cars in a much bigger scale.

So in the beginning of the 20th century, Aghababa still was rising, but they were starting. My grandpa, Aghababa-- Sorry, actually Mirzagha, was very enthusiastic and a very active person, new ideas, new way of thinking, and expanding in a massive way. There went three ways - import, investment of properties, and lending. Because he was so trustworthy, he was using crowdfunding as well for people who couldn't use their money, trusting him, and is lending, import and investment all in one go.

They also were living in Sarechal. I don't know which part of Sarechal. Is not shown on [00:24:00] that map. However, in 1920s, my grandpa, Mirzagha, moved from Sarechal to Naderi Street, which was north of Tehran, very fashionable area, and establish his house and the family over there with Aziz and the rest of the family.

Khorshid Hanum had also an older daughter, Hananjan, which was mother of Habib Elghanian, Dawud Elghanian, and the others, Aghadjan Elghanian, others, and seven brothers. At the time they were very poor.

Number of years, my grandpa and the family were living in Naderi. Then my grandpa had a client from Qajar family, very prominent Zell-e Soltan family. He was his client. By the way, when Pahlavi came after Qajar, they didn't ruin the Qajar family. They got rid of Ahmad Shah, but not his family. They become active in the [00:26:00] political and administration of the country as civil servants. Yes?

What year was this?

1925 was the establishment of Qajar family. Sorry, establishment of Pahlavi dynasty, end of Qajar. From 1925, there were more freedom for Jewish people, more activity. That was the time that the Elghanian family or Elghanian dynasty started growing so fast.

In general, Jewish people in Iran, for many years, hundreds of years, were subject to two main movements, nationalist and religious forces. Nationalism was a positive force for Jewish population, and religion and fanaticism was a negative. It was always a challenge.

Pahlavi Reza Shah was a nationalist like Ataturk in Turkey. They both wanted to make the country more modern, more effective, more efficient, industrialized. Without any doubt, it

helped Jewish community to become prosperous and developing themselves, especially by way of education system came from France, by [00:28:00] *Alliance Schools*. I'm sure you had it in your country as well as in the whole of the Middle East. The education and the change of the political atmosphere, that all helped Iranian Jews to become prosperous and better than before.

I heard a lot of stories of antisemitism in other towns of Iran, when I was a child. Even now, I've read in the books it was unbelievably strong, even killing innocent people, blaming them for this, for that. It's funny enough, for example, even in Sarechal of Tehran Jews were not allowed to come out when it was raining because they are *nejis*, they are not pure from a religious point of view of Islam. That is Tehran, which was modern and governed by a strong government, etcetera.

Even, we were going to Isfahan, Kashan, Shiraz, Jas, Mashhad, Khorasan, they were all strong. Farther you were going, more antisemitism. In Tehran, we were feeling it as a child. I was felt, but very slightly; is negligible. [00:30:00] However, now the two families side by side, one from Khorshid, and one from Aghababa, sister and brother. Khorshid was married to a very nice guy, Haim Saghi, from Shiraz, as I said. His father was *baqal* which means grocer. Obviously, his father was a grocer. He himself was a grocer, in nature. His sons took over and did a lot of merchant and import investment, etcetera, but originally, himself was a shopkeeper, and coming to Pahlavi.

Until then, people didn't have ID, they didn't have family name. They were telling, "This son of that. This daughter of that." Aghababa Elkana, Haim Saghi, it means, Haim, his name, Saghi, his father. One of the things that happened in the term of Reza Shah was a declaration of ID. Every family had to go and put a family name, get birth certificates for future [00:32:00] or present. I don't know the administration, but certainly, they changed the system.

Jews, like other, the Muslims and everybody, they had to choose family name. At the time in 1925, Aghababa Elghana was the head of the family. They were trading with Armenians at the time. He choose to add *nian* to his father's name. Elghana became Elghanian. There are two variation, Elghanian, [unintelligible 00:32:50] but is not any for any specific purpose, just because the Armenians, they call themselves *nian*, *nyan*. We can't say this is wrong or right. He choose for himself the name of Elghanian, so he become Aghababa Elghanian.

Khorshid was very strong lady, the sister of Aghababa. A bit older than Aghababa, very authoritarian, and spoke to the family gathering and say, "Look, you all have to follow the same family name." Instead of Mirzagha to become Mirzagha Saghi, become Mirzagha and Aziz etcetera Elghanian, all their sons. [00:34:00]

Not only that, had three daughters, married by that time, 1925, '27. She said, "Also my daughters, never mind who is your husband, you become Elghanian."

Hananjan was the first daughter. I will show you the picture. Her husband was Bubai and said, "Agreed." The second daughter was Monavar, also agreed, the husband, they all agree. The third one was married to Lotfulla become Lotfulla Victory. He said, "Go away. What's wrong with me. I can choose my own family name. I'm Lotfulla Victory." I don't know, Victory was a very European name. We're talking about 1925, '27, '28.

Except one daughter, the whole family of Aghababa and Khorshid become Elghanian, all the variety of it, except Iran's and the husband, he choose Victory. Their son, Ebi Victory sent me that photo of 1928, which is so interesting and very sweet of him. That was how the surname was established in 1925, '27, around those days, and [00:36:00] the life continued.

The one event that I can even find in these two photos, and I heard the story, somewhere along the line, Aghababa's wife was a jealous lady. She saw, oh, the children of the sons of Khorshid are rising, bigger import, bigger investments, bigger trade, and she didn't like it. There was some sort of family feud, or being upset, and for years, they were disconnected.

And I can see in those two photos, the member of the family from Khorshid's side and Haim Saghi [00:37:16], the husband, but not from side of Aghababa and his sons. They're not in those photographs and event because those photographs were made in some event, or wedding or whatever. It's all formal. It's showing that the connection was interrupted. This was going for several years, maybe 10 years, I don't know, guestimate 10, 15 years, or 10. No, it can't be 15 years. About 10 years.

[00:38:00] After, let's say, 1932, '35, they arranged -- I heard this story from my member of the family -- They arranged a gathering of the two families to make peace. Aghababa was still alive. Khorshid was alive. They made a gathering. I don't know the venue, I don't know if it

was in the house of Aghababa or Khorshid Hanum and the sons, but there was a gathering. At the time, my dad was 13, 14. My mum was 10 years- 10, 11 years old. They were gathering for the elders to make peace, and saying, "Okay."

In that gathering, assume they shook hand. Now Hadji Mirzagha become building the second empire. He's richer than Aghababa, and establishing the second empire together with Aziz. Mirzagha was the bigger player than Aziz. He was a key man.

In that gathering, they shook hand and say, "We are family. We have to keep the family relationship," [00:40:00] celebrities, celebration, etcetera, which was all accepted.

Hadji Mirzagha, my grandpa, make a statement. He said, "To prove our sincerity, we are asking your daughter to be married to my son, Rahim." Mohtaran, my mum was playing because she was 10, 11, was in the garden with all the girls. My dad was playing football, or whatever [chuckles] with the boys. They said, "Call Mohtaran and Rahim." They'll say, "Come on, " because young people were in the garden outside, I assume it was a summer, and older people were in the gathering meeting.

They called my mum, my future mum. "Mohtaran and Rahim," they said, "from today, you're engaged." This was the way of life and was very acceptable. That was the reason the cousins were married together very frequently rather than outside, because there was no opportunity for them to grow and go out with girls and boys. They become engaged, and for several years they were engaged, for two, three years until they got married [00:42:00].

I'll tell you a little sweet story my grandpa, Orhan, was telling me. My mum was going in primary school to Kuresh, the same school that I was going and my father and all the member of the family were going. After primary school, she went to a school called Nobaveghan , which was a private school for well-off families and for girls, Nobaveghan.

My mum was there, so I assume, she was 13, 12, 13 whatever. One day, the headmaster contacted my grandpa by telephone at home. Those days, not many people have even telephone line. Called them and said, "Look, you have an issue. we want you to come today to school." He said, "Okay, I will come tomorrow," or whatever. My grandpa went to Nobaveghan school meeting the headmaster.

He said, "Mr. Elghanian, we have a problem here. Every afternoon, at four or three, four o'clock when the school is finished, your daughter is going out, a young boy always waiting for her, and they walk together." Those days, it was not allowed. My grandpa said, "Can you describe the boy?" They described the hair [00:44:00]. He say, "Oh, don't worry. This is my future [laughs] son-in-law." [laughs] They were in love together, and eventually got married.

Going back to--

Should we just stop it for a second?

We had four main players, Aghababa and Khorshid, the sister and brother, then we had- and Elkana. Elkana was the very fonded, and a daughter and son. Then in the other side, Khorshid was married to Haim Saghi.

Haim Saghi was a very nice guy from Shiraz. In general, people from various towns, have their own genetic specifications. For example, people from Kashan are famous to be very economical and financial minded. People from Shiraz are people who are taking very easy the life, and they mind about their happiness.

It's sort of genetic, also environmental because at the time of Qajar, music was not allowed [00:46:00] by Muslims. So musicians, so we had a lot of Jewish musicians, especially in Shiraz playing music, writing music, and performing music. That was due to the environment at the time.

And Haim Saghi had this, that gene of entertaining, be happy man, and simple. In 1920s, there's a story. He had grocery shop until I don't know when, then his sons were very successful, he stopped it. But then they went to Naderi in 1920s, getting out of Sarechal, and then to Sheikh Adi.

In the meantime, there was an incident, for example, he was subject to antisemitism, and attacked by a group of men with machete, which is big knife. I was told by my Aunty Parri that he was hurt under his arm and was very upset.

The same period, one day he knew that Reza Shah was going with his crowd and with the carriages towards Parliament. Usually, when [00:48:00] Reza Shah was moving with his

carriages, some people were on the seat and either organize or non-organize. Haim Saghi went to such a route. When he saw carriages coming, he start demonstrating and asking to be helped.

So Reza Shah said to stop. They stopped the carriages and Haim Saghi made a statement, saying he loved the Shah, but I'm subject to this and that and they made note, and said, "Listen carefully," and said, "It will be dealt with." Reza Shah was semi-dictator. He was authority at the time, and it was dealt with.

While the children were getting busy with business and import-export investment, he was enjoying life at home with Khorshid and children and grandchildren. He loved to play backgammon, *shesh besh*. There's another game with dice which is called *botr*. It's like 9 is the best number, and 10, 11, 12 was -- etcetera.

So he was gathering all the grandchildren, playing with them dice and making laugh and enjoying life, and sometimes he was playing backgammon. He wanted always to play for money, [00:50:00] a little money but money.

There's a story that sometimes he couldn't find somebody, an opponent to play with. He was going to the streets and finding a guy. He said, "Let's play." He said, "I have no money." He said, "Okay, I'll give you a five and let's go and play." [chuckles]

Let me tell you about moving from Naderi to Sheikh Adi, which was the biggest step in the family of my grandpa. As I said, he had a client from Qajar family. He was lending to him, family Zell-e Soltan. I don't know their first name. For years, he was paying interest etcetera. Then Zell-e Soltan had a house in Sheikh Adi Street, which was very prominent street. He had a mansion. He suggested to Hadji Mirzagha, "Come and buy this mansion from me and we settled in the same time."

They negotiated, and my grandpa bought that whole mansion. It was not a house, it was real mansion. I will describe it to you. I heard from my Aunty Parri about 120,000 toman at the time, but fully furnished with valuable antiques, carpets, and furniture, European furniture. He bought that mansion. It must [00:52:00] be around 1925, '26.

Imagine they came out of Sarechal in 1920. For several years, they were living in Naderi [00:52:14], and then they moved to this street and the mansion. The street was named Street Sheikh Adi, but has a given name as well. They were calling it [speaks Farsi]. It means people with 100 toman.

People with?

100 toman. Toman was the Iranian money, like £100. People with £100. It means only rich people were living there. It's the most prominent street. This this mansion was the main face, and was very wide front of Sheikh Adi, then two side streets all the way through to the end, alleyways. It is a big plot.

The mansion was in the - towards inside of middle-end of Sheikh Adi front. On the main door, there was a porter's house, and then the mansion itself, which was fantastically beautiful, French style and French's architecture, with big salon for events. [00:54:00] It was so sophisticated and beautiful with the balconies, with the railing outside, and with carving, and fully furnished with European-style furniture.

My grandpop, at the end of the plot, he built four apartments. One for himself, one for his brother Aziz and Khorshid, and two upper ones for the sons. One for my family, my dad, one for -- At the time they were married, etcetera.

I give such an importance of that step because it's changed the social life of our family. A lot of events were celebrated in the big salon. The salon could cater, easily, 100, 150 people. It was like one of the wedding halls in London with decorative and -I remember the doors. When you were entering to the salon, there was not one door to open. There was a double door. Let's say you open the first door, there's one-and-a-half-meter lobby, then to open the second door. As I said, it was French architecture. [00:56:00] It was very impressive. And Qajar family were prominent. Zell-e Soltan was a figure person. He sold the house to my grandpa.

Do you remember the address?

Yes.

Can you tell us the address?

Khabaan Sheikh Adi. Street of Sheikh Adi, and two-sided street. The south one was Zoll to the end of the street, alleyway. The other side was Behnham, again to the end of the alleyway. It was fantastic.

My brother, me, and my sister were all born there. I'm joking with my children, I said, "Look, I was born in the hospital and in our house." The way it was, the very corner of it -- I don't know, it was when they bought it -- No, no, it must be after because we had a family friend, my Elghanian family, called Dr. Bohr. They were socializing and everything. He took a small section of that mansion land to build a hospital called Hospital Bohr at the beginning, that very small strip of it initially.

He had assistant called Dr. Evazzadeh. Eventually, he took over Dr. Bohr, but -- [00:58:00] The name of the hospital was changed to Evazzadeh. Years to come, I will tell you, they took over a big part of that mansion. The whole 80, 90% of that land become the hospital in the years to come.

However, at the time, a small part of it was the hospital where we all were born as well. The mansion and the four apartments at the end of the other side, the continuation of the hospital, were two, three houses of investment, letting rooms to Armenian community. That is how the life was going.

Why did they decide to move out of Sarechal, originally?

No. At the beginning, when people came from other provinces, they were very poor. They were doing labour and small merchancies like shopkeeping. Even the richest one was shopkeeping. Nobody was trading or had money. To protect themselves, and to get together during Sarechal. As become more prosperity and more nationalism in the country and change of political situation, they become richer and richer. There was a point they didn't want to be - especially [01:00:00] prominent family. They didn't want to be in Sarechal, it's downgrading. They wanted to come out to the main city, North Tehran, and the time nobody that he was close to Russian Embassy, American Embassy, British Embassy, was prominent position.

By the way, opposite that mansion house, on the other side of the street was another house, ambassadorial. This was belong to Uskowi [sp?] family, which was Russian ambassador. The

ambassador was living opposite. In future to come, Habib Elghanian was married to my Auntie Nikkāh, they bought that house opposite the mansion. That was also not as big with land and all this, but the architecture and the house itself was unique and ambassadorial.

Were there other Jews living in the area?

Yes. Then those are the pioneers, then all the other Jews that gradually started coming, they were either going to Naderi-an area, or coming to Šayk Hādi. Šayk Hādi was becoming a center as much as - I'll tell later on that my school, Kuresh was three minutes walk from our [01:02:00] mansion house. That is proving how the population were there, otherwise they wouldn't do the school over there.

They were first immigrant went to Sarechal of had his own specific - created his specific way of life, culture, accent. You could say if we were talking to somebody said, "Look this is from Sarechal because of the accent". The same way that we could say, "Oh, this is from Isfahan". Or, "that is from Shiraz" as well. They have their own, developing their own accent, way of life, and culture.

The antisemitism was minimum in that area, they become open-minded, very traditionalist for today's – because in other provinces, where you have big pressure of antisemitism, there were more religious Jews as well, become more religious. It somehow is related, but in Tehran, they become open-minded, progressive in their way of life, in their way of business, in the way of developing themselves and producing wealth and other aspects of [01:04:00] society in a developed manner.

Now, we are in 1930s, close into 1940s. Hadji Mirzagha's empire is growing fast. Aghababa's empire is still established because he bought a lot of investment properties. To be frank and honest, his sons never were interested in doing business because they were, they had such an easy life. For years, they were collecting rent. They had a good life, but not developing. In the other hand, my other grandpa, Hadji Mirzagha was very interested. Just a second.

[silence]

In 1938-1939, during the war maybe, the head of Iranian Jewish communities, [01:06:00] they decided to open a -- Oh, there was famine. There was illnesses and a lot of challenges ahead. So they formed a-- [crosstalk]

When was this? Before the War?

Around 1938. They formed and created a Jewish charity called Nikkāh. Nikk is good, goodness, and wishing goodness, Nikkāh. My father, and my grandpa, and his brother Aziz, were active part of that foundation. I think till then, my grandpa's name was Yehudah. That period, he become famous as Mirzagha. Mirzagha means secretary, and it's like a title. Somebody who is into their bookkeeping, administration. It was like a title. They start calling him Mirzagha.

I think I can assume that because he becomes the secretary of that new established- new charity organization. His daughter, Nikkāh-- Oh sorry, the first daughter was Māh Solṭān, as she was born. Māh Solṭān [01:08:00] means moon and king. My grandpa, under influence of that new charity movement, he changed his daughter's name to Nikkāh, same name as the charity.

Nikkāh was married later to Habib Elghanian. That is how I want to picturize the situation. Then, the time my aunty was just born, my dad was not even born. He was born two years later. I want to make sure that I'm right with the dates. The life was continuing. One other event that happened in the meantime was 1942. In 1942, there was a Holocaust situation in Europe. You know the stories better than me. A group of young Polish boys and girls escaped, must be 100, or 150, or 200 estimated. If you make a research, you can find out anyway. They were somehow directed to Iran, [01:10:00] Tehran for protection and escape. Those young boys and girls in 1942 arrived to Iran, Tehran, and they were big enthusiasm into Jewish families to look after them, including our family. I heard from my aunty that even they make a big party in the mansion with music, food for those young boys and girls. As I said, that mansion could cater easily 150, 200 people.

Where did they live?

They were housed either in tents in big houses, or spread between the Jewish family. There was big enthusiasm to this certain extent that one of the girls stay forever in Iran because she

was a young girl and married to Soli Kohan. Soleiman Kohan, he was a young boy as well, and got married as a result. Later it was recognized as *Yaldei Teheran* [Hebrew], they were called Children of Tehran that group. Many years later, Israeli government before the Revolution, invited [01:12:00] my great-uncle, Aziz, because he was fundamental to that movement of helping those girls, accepting them, and looking after them.

They invited Aziz Elghanian to Israel for memorial ceremony of *Yaldei Teheran*. Actually, there is a street in Israel that is called Yaldei Teheran. That is how the case was developed.

Now, let's go back to our family life. My mum was 16 when she was married, and my dad was two, three, four years older, a young couple.

Before we go there, I've got a couple more questions for you about the period before that. You spoke a little bit about the antisemitism that was around at that time, and how it was a lot worse before 1925. Did your family tell you any other stories about things that have happened at that time or how it affected them? Was it better in the new place where they lived near the Embassies? Was it worse?

Oh, certainly better. At all times, when I was a young boy, I rarely had antisemitism pressure. When I was [01:14:00] 10, 11, or even 7, at the time of Ashura and Tashura, is the Shi'a people mourning the death of Hossein el Hassan by Sunnis. It's a great mourning for them. It's like a demonstration. They were coming to the street and singing and beating themselves and some of them which were very religious, they had a knife and they were cutting their heads. We were looking from the windows. We were frightened as children, because it was, for us, it was really -- I remember when I was 5, 6, 7, 10, you were feeling death fright, but in Tehran, especially on the Pahlevi, we didn't have antisemitism, very mild. Especially, I was in a Jewish school. [crosstalk]

Before that?

Before that, I said, for example, they couldn't come out in the rainy days.

How did your great grandfather manage to build a business with these laws?

I assume by paying. I give you an example. When I was 11 years old, I was either 10 years, 11, I was listening to the radio. We didn't [01:16:00] have a television at the time. There was a Muslim, not Ayatollah, but clerical called Rashed. He was every Friday coming for the ceremony, and then he was making speeches, touchy ones. It was growing and growing and growing. I well remember my grandparents and other prominent members of the Jewish community--

Don't forget, at the time when people came from the first point is coming from Sarchal to North Tehran. There may be 20, 30, 40 families, the rest are all there. It was Mosanen, Kohanim, Kohan, Elghanian, Fahemian and others, I think, but not more. The head of the communities were numbered. I remember this story, they collected funds and gave the suitcase or envelope to that guy, Rashed. You could feel the immediate effect.

In the next sermons, he was talking about Jews and Muslims are cousins and brothers. So it was - it was sort of [01:18:00] way of things done by Jewish people to survive as they did in other countries. Another example, after Constitutional Revolution, the Parliament was formed, even before Pahlevi, and end of Qajar.

In 1920s.

1920s. '25 was a changeover, 1920s, '18. The Jews were allowed to have one representative. They couldn't vote for everybody, they had to have - so it was semi-democratic. Here, if you vote for a Jewish member of the Parliament, not because he's your MP. It's because he's a general [laughs] candidate. Here, it was semi - so they said, "Jews can have one representative." But in general, Jews were not involved in politics, to avoid any sign or reaction of antisemitism.

In Iraq was different from what I heard. In Iraq, they were very involved in the politics and the ministerial of this, that. Something happened in the meantime when I was 12, 13 that is showing the effect of antisemitism in the area. I was very interested to follow the news and newspapers when I was very young.

[01:20:00] There was a coup against King of Iraq, Malik Faisal, and his Prime Minister Nuri Sa'id. So, ok, coup, whatever and one day, they put lock in all the Jewish businesses, shops,

offices and everything, and they become penniless and they had to emigrate. A big part of them they came into Tehran.

Not all the provinces they came to Iran, maybe a big population, not small, 10,000 or more. They formed their own school which was called Iraqi School and his name was Etafar and even all the Jewish Iranians were going to that school. We could figure out the depth of the antisemitism in the area. As I said before, in this area, there were always two forces, nationalists and religion. Whenever nationalists become stronger, the pressure of antisemitism was dropping and the other way around.

Then Egypt fall. Before it's fall, Malik Farouk sister, Fawzia, become the first wife of Mohammad Reza which was [01:22:00] the son of the Shah. How that relate to this story? Same day that Fawzia and Mohammad Reza were getting married, Haim Saghi was on the way to burial, same day. I had the dates here, it doesn't matter, but same day.

Another little story, he loved backgammon. His will was after he's going, to play backgammon on his site. On the 30th, *shloshim*, there's a picture - I don't have the picture - member of the family they took 10, 20, 30 set of backgammon, I don't know how many, and they were playing and having vodka and celebrating his life. Antisemitism was a feature always coming and going, especially even at the end of Qajar. It was very strong in provinces. I heard stories from people in Isfahan, Khorasan -- Oh, I will tell you later. My grandpa bought a villa in Damavand. Damavand is a mountain, famous mountain of Iran, and the peak of Damavand is famous. On the skirting of [01:24:00] Damavand, there was a town of Damavand boys everywhere, beautiful area. There was a quarter called Darvish quarter, which was famous for richer families of Tehran to come there and buy villas and houses. My grandpa bought one of those villas which I'll tell you in my stories later how impressive it was in my private life.

About antisemitism, when we were only 6, 7, 10 years old - that is proving how when we were going out of Tehran, how was the change. Everybody knew us in Damavand. All the shops, because we know they're children of Mirzagha. He was famous, he had account with them to supplying, and end of the month to pay and everything. We had pocket money as a child. We were going there to one of the shops to buy something little, let's say chewing gum. Who's putting that chewing gum. We were not allowed to give the money to him.

We had to put it on the counter, because for them it was not clean because it was touched by a Jew. I don't know what is the procedure of how they dealt with the money, and we learned, we knew, you [01:26:00] couldn't give the money directly for good. You had to put it, if he's putting, leave it there, and he was putting the change over there as well with the good, little good.

Did you know why?

Yes, of course, I was 10.

How did you think about it? What did you feel about it?

I took it as a silly thing. I didn't take it very seriously, but in other Provinces, there were communities that we were calling them Jadid-al-Islam, new Islamis. A lot of Jews converted to Islam, especially in Mashhad province. Some of them, they did it for permanent, and some of them were pretending. If you make a research -- I came to London, I saw a lot of Mashhadis, Ali, Ali Reza, Mohammad Reza, whatever, Muslim Muslim names. I was wondering. Then I learn, "Oh, they were pretending to become Muslim, but in hiding." They were keeping Jewish and they become very, very religious up till today. Even our synagogue, Kinloss synagogue it was arranged by them, but now is took over by Iranians, or whatever, and some aspect of it. Initially, Mashhadis even till today, very, very religious, [01:28:00] and Tehranis are very traditional.

We'll talk about Jewish life in a minute. Can you tell me about your parents' wedding?

Oh, my parents' wedding. That's a big story.

[phone rings]

We'll just wait-- Okay.

At the time, we didn't have halls for weddings, but we had our traditions and our way of life then in 1930s, 1940s now. My father Rahim was the grandson of Khorshid, daughter of Elkana. My mum was the granddaughter of Aghababa son of Elkana. Two grandchildren of a brother

and a sister are getting married. One, my mother from the first empire, of Elghanian, my father from second empire, the first son of my grandpa, and it was such an important occasion.

So to your surprise, it was not a marriage of one night, it was seven nights. I heard a lot of stories, and I'll try to give you a brief story. Number one, in the [01:30:00] mansion, they made room for all the other cousins, other grandchildren and children of Khorshid Hanum. She was alive still, 'till I was 10. 10 nights of wedding -- Sorry. Seven nights of wedding. Politicians were invited for one night. A member of the family-- I don't know what her arrangements were, but it was seven nights. There was one touching event which is showing the greatness of my grandpa Mirzagha.

Six nights was family, friends, politicians, music, dance and everything. For seventh night, he send messengers to all the synagogues, and say the son of Hadji Mirzagha was getting married. That day is allocated for you to attend. With all the poor people, in Sarechal, in other synagogues. No personal invitation. We had the big mansion. I don't know if it was outside, inside of the mansion. Maybe somewhere on the outside because it was a nice weather. Usually, they were organizing in summer when you can cater more people.

The seventh night [01:32:00] was allocated to unknown lower class of the society, of Jewish society. Not by name, but population. I had a lot of stories about that. Before that evening, there were -- They were not containers, but equal to one or two containers fabric coming to that mansion in the basement, cutting and preparing packages for every guest. This is very important for those poor people which they didn't have a lot of luxury life. They came, they celebrated, and they were given a gift, which was quite a lot for those days to give each family a package of fabric and other things. I don't know what was in the package. I was always very touched by such an event and decision made by my grandpa. It's showing how great he was. How thoughtful he was. How sensitive he was, how reasonable he was, how kind he was. Something happened in our childhood, which is -- maybe it's time to say. The wedding done. All the member of the family, were there are seven nights [01:34:00] and seven days, or seven days and seven nights.

One week celebration. The most important part of it for me is the last day. Not the beginning of it. They bought a crown -- You call it crown, for my mum. with a battery and lighting. [laughs] It's really funny now, but it was -- She could signal-- [laughs]

How old were they?

My mum was around 16-17. 16. My dad was 20 years old. I have some photographs of it as well. The life was progressing. As I said, at the time, they were going to get leveling of the two families, the children were going up to the prominent position, and creating new versions, new culture, new way of life, new norms which was making the life very colourful and lifestyle very colourful.

Do you remember Aghababa anf Khorshid? Do you remember?

Aghababa was younger one, [01:36:00] but I don't remember him. He died earlier than Khorshid. I remember Khorshid.

Can you tell me what she was like as a person?

Firstly, she was a very strong lady. I had a lot of communication with her. She was authoritarian and well thinking. The way we come and intimate, especially me, not my brother or sisters. When I was a little child, I found a lot of connections to this side of the family, my grandpa, for my father's side. Bijan my brother, the other way around. Towards Aghakhan I had the love for both sides, don't get me wrong, but my connection become stronger and stronger with this side.

And it was amazing. Starting when I was three years old. When I was three years old, I was the love of my grandpa, and he was my love. Mirzagha - is famous, they were -- In that apartment, for breakfast, it's not 2, or 3, or 5 people, 10 [01:38:00] people at least. 8, 10 people, if not more, with the cousins. Sometimes up to 15, 20. Imagine, I'm three years old or two years old. I was coming to breakfast. My grandpa was sitting on one side, my grandma with a samovar which is making tea. Serving tea. They were putting me on their chair as a child.

It was very famous. I was singing *kereh wah penar, cheaa wah shekar* it means butter and cheese, tea and sugar. And I was just started talking, and I was singing butter and cheese, tea

and sugar, restless until they were bringing me. So one day, my uncle Soli started screaming at me. "What is that? Stop it. What is that? They bring you! Who cares. Stop it." He was fed up.

My grandpa, talking to him, making him quiet, and in future, it didn't happen. There was a give and take situation with my grandpa. His mum, Khorshid was still with the- one of those apartment, but living with us. It's one of [01:40:00] apartment of the second son. We were living in the top floor apartment. On my way, I had always to pass from the staircase her room and residence of Aziz and Heshmat, his wife. My siblings were not doing it. While I was going, always I was going to Khorshid. We were calling her Nana. She was hearing my coming. She was expecting me from school, from whatever, from playground. I was age four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and she died when I was nearly 10. She loved sewing. She couldn't put the string to the sewing--

The needle.

Needle. I was helping on that. For some reason, she was paralyzed. I never knew why it was because she was paralyzed since I knew her. I was providing bottle and water. I was spending 5 minutes or 10 minutes with her. 3 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes. She was giving me good dishes and everything, and then I was continuing, but it was my routine. Then in one of the balconies [01:42:00] in summer, there was a bench and she used to sit on that bench.

I don't know. Naturally, I was a very curious boy from the beginning. I was going to Nana, sitting by her seat, and she was telling me stories, stories, stories, but unfortunately, I vaguely remember. I vaguely remember. She was telling about her traveling with Haim Saghi from Kermanshah to where? She was telling me, "Oh, when we were travelling, we had our *ghabura* with us." I didn't know what is *ghabura* meaning.

I cannot figure out that was if somebody is dying, he puts in her clothing is called *ghabura* for her, I don't know. It's coming from word *kever* [grave] in Hebrew. It means when they were traveling, they were equipped with -- Old people, when they were travelling, they were equipped with their dressing and other things, I don't know what, in the event of dying.

She was telling me other stories, and referring to Kermanshah especially, but I don't remember. Unfortunately, I don't remember. I've made a lot of research without being successful about

what she was talking to me. [01:44:00] But I was sitting, listening to her, because of the relationship was created between me and her. It was very, very interesting for me. I will show you later her picture in 1928 photo with the rest of the family later on with interesting way of life.

What dialect did you speak?

Now. As I said, Jews from Sarechal had special dialect, clearly. Now example, *khubeh* which means okay. *Khub* it means good. *Khubeh* okay. Iranians say *khubeh*. The dialect of - *khubah* is different and is only for Jewish people. I give you another example. My grandma from my mum side, or others even, they say *echanak*. If I were referring to somebody, a third person, they were saying *echanak* or *echanaki* that's referring to that lady or woman [01:46:00] or whatever and then say what happened. For years, I didn't know. Then I found out *echanak* it means this is the Jewish dialect of Sarechal, but the real dialectic in Farsi is *harchenik*. All the best. So if they were talking about a third person, they were saying all the best to the person, then continuing. In the dialect they say *echanak*. There were a lot of--

You didn't speak the Jewish dialect?

Semi, but we started learning because I was going to school or I was meeting non-Jewish families or whatever. We wondered, "Oh, our accent is a bit--," *Umadam* - we were saying *umadam*, I'm coming, but they were saying *omadam*.

Were your parents speaking with the Jewish dialect as well?

Yes, at the very beginning, but then because they were communicating with Muslim, high class people, etcetera. They were trying to change as well. There was that tendency of say, Oh, Sarechali - It means it's a low-class way of talking. Now we were feeling higher society, wrongly or rightly, and [01:48:00] I could see from my aunties' way of talking, my other uncles, and everything. They were trying to modify their accent to the general public of Tehrani's and Tehran was different than other provinces.

What about the clothing?

Oh, in those pictures, again, I'll show you, for Khorshid her husband Haim Saghi and the other members of the family, it was *ghajar nur* and code of dressing.

What does that mean?

Covering. The ladies were covering themselves. The men were putting traditional Qajar. You will see the picture Qajar cover and the hat. Covering themselves with the hat. As I said Aghababa and maybe his old friends or himself, the other top-class people of Jewish community went to France, coming back. They changed not only the financial face of the community, but the whole society, the behaviour, the dressing and you will see on the picture. Some of the vague pictures are 1932. How well dressed in European [01:50:00] manner.

Were the non-Jews also dressed in European manner?

Not that early stages. They were following the Qajar at the beginning of Pahlavi, they were behind. They were behind Jews and behind Armenians. They're a phase of two behind, but in those pictures, you can see how they're well dressed, tuxedos. It was out of imagination in Iran. It is only due to contribution of those pioneers going to France, mainly France, coming back, and next movement was the establishment of *Alliance Schools* in the region. Now, let's go to *Alliance School*.

Before that, I have one more question. Music. What was the music at home? Did you listen to more Western music or was it Iranian music?

No. When I was a little child, a) we didn't have television. Radio was not with battery. It was connected with a wire. Fridges didn't exist, except Elghanian family. They had fridge with oil, not with electric. We had in our house, in the basement of where my grandpa built those apartments, in the basement, [01:52:00] there were an area called *pashur*. It was very cold. I don't know how, and water dipping, it was so cold. You were going there in the middle of summer, you could feel like a fridge. I remember I was four years, five years, six years old, and they were putting all the fruits, meat, for days there, and was kept very cold and healthy. I never got ill because of that.

But music was?

Oh, music. In my very childhood, there was gramophone, and it was a big luxury. In our house of my grandpa, I remember there was a gramophone with discs we were putting there. Initially, it was all Iranian traditional music. There was famous singers like Moluk Vaziri, that she came to my parents' wedding as well to sing. She was the first, maybe, lady singer, because it was already Pahlavi. Ladies could sing.

Before that, when I was a child, we were calling then *motreb*, *motreb* it means musicians [01:54:00] and they were all Jewish. For any ceremonies or whatever, way before the wedding of my mum, maybe we go back early 1900, 20th century. Music was run mainly by Jewish people. They created their own song, their own tones, and is very happy ones and very meaningful ones and giving atmosphere.

Gradually after Pahlavi came, Iranian music, flourished by Iranian themselves, musicians and more freedom of music. Well, literally, it was all Iranian music. Then when I become a teenager, for the first time, we heard about rock and roll, the cha-cha, and Western music, but still not so much in the radio. In the radio, formal ones was always, since I remember, it was all Iranian music. Fundamentally, it started with Jews, because they were allowed, but Muslims were not allowed.

Should we stop for a break?

Can you tell me about school?

Oh, yes. [01:56:00] When I was six, seven, I remember the first day of school, I was taken by my dad to Kuresh School. Kuresh School was only 3 minutes away from our house, which we were in Sheikh Adi and Kuresh School was Hatef, whatever it was but 3 minutes walk. When they were ringing the bell, we could hear it from home. I walked to school with my dad. Everybody knew our family, the headmaster, Mr Nabatian etcetera.

I went to Kuresh School. Let me tell you about formation of Kuresh School and the history behind it, which is so interesting, and also about *Alliance Schools*, as well as Aziz and Heshmat School.

Let's start with Kuresh School. Kuresh School was not a part of *Alliance*, but supported or guided by another Jewish organization in France, because the head of school was Monsieur Ohayo at the time, and the foreign language there was French, not English.

[01:58:00] It was established same time in that my grand - a bit later, my grandfather moved to Sheikh Adi as a pioneer of Jewish people Sarechal and then it will followed by more and more families from secondary classes or whatever. Sheikh Adi was populated with the Jewish community, I would say well-off people. Our family with other prominent families were helping to establish the school with the forces of Jewish-French people, but as I said, independent to *Alliance School*.

Our school was a big land bought by the donations of well-off families and contribution maybe from Jewish-French people. It was guided by them, the curriculum, etcetera. My dad was going to same school. All the cousins were going to same school. My mum was going to same school when she was in the primary. It was familiar for all the upper middle class Jewish people.

[02:00:00] *What language were you taught in?*

In Farsi, but the second language was French. We had no idea about English. As I said, Monsieur Ohayo was the head of the school and it was divided to two parts; the girls and the boys. There was a parapet, small wall of 1.5-meter height or 1.3-meter height between the two schools, so the girls were kept - Interesting, at the time of my mum and my dad, when they were going to same school, especially my mum, it was mixed school, but later it was converted to two parts. That is why there was a wall between.

It was quite impressive school. We had a big hall used as synagogue and morning gatherings, morning prayers, and for festivals, and for Shabbat. It was a synagogue within the school and quite big *minyan* and we were going to that synagogue for Shabbat and all the festivals.

It was open to the population; it wasn't just for the children of the school?

No, no, no. It was used for local synagogue [02:02:00] as well as school.

What was the name of the synagogue?

It's Kuresh.

Kuresh Synagogue.

Everything was named Kuresh. *Kuresh* is Cyrus the Great, which gave freedom to Jewish people in the early years of-- 2500 years ago. So, what I understand is Elghanian family, Mohsenian family, Kohanian family etcetera, prominent families, at the time, were part of the donors and funding the school. It was governed by French authorities in general.

It was a very interesting school. When I went, it was already divided for boys and girls, sometimes we were naughty, we were [chuckles] jumping the wall. [laughs] It has a medical center in it as well. It's a very modern medical center in the part of Jewish, on the second part.

In our side, we had the synagogue and it was used for exams as well and in their parts, they had classes and medical center. Medical center we're using us as European manner, you had to go for every like two, three months to be weighed, to be this, and vaccination, and various health checkup. [02:04:00] I remember we had to undress to our underwears to be examined while the doctor was sitting there with the nurse, weigh and if there is any abnormality or whatever to be picked up, and vaccination. It was really giving the basic and good education to the community of the day.

Did you have a uniform?

No. There were two classes of pupils, fortunately, or unfortunately. We didn't have uniform, we were taking our food to school for lunch, but there was secondary class of pupils, which were from poor families. They were giving them dresses which is way of uniform, they were giving them lunch, so they didn't have to bring food from home and they knew-- I don't know how the system was working. It was the people from the richer families were doing contribution donations, the ones from poorer families were not supposed to pay, or the parents. They were getting uniform, dresses, [02:06:00] shoes, be warm and healthy, and food for lunch, not for breakfast or dinner, but food for lunch and they didn't have to make any contribution towards the annual fees.

Was there a lot of mixing between the rich and the poorer children?

Almost 20% were the richer family and 80% poorer families, but we were so mixed up together, we didn't feel the difference. We were playing together, we were brought up together, we didn't have that feeling of segregation as such. It was really enjoyable to be in that school. As I said, my father, his brothers, his cousin over at the same school, and my mum for primary school. It was familiar for all.

Something happened in the meantime, in parallel or earlier. My grandpa's brother Aziz, which I mentioned and he's on the photographs, was married to Heshmat. My grandpa was married also to Heshmat, her cousin, because Haim Saghi, his father was Saghi. There were two brothers; Abdullah and Haim Saghi [02:08:00] Abdullah and Haim. Heshmat, my grandma was from Abdullah, daughter of Abdullah, and Yehuda Mirzagha was the son of Haim Saghi, and they were married together.

My grandma was Heshmat and my grandpa Mirzagha. Aziz was married to Heshmat from Tahimian family. She was a beautiful lady, but she couldn't have children and those days were very important for families to have children. Her family came to Aziz and said, "Look, we understand you if you want to have another wife or divorce, we feel it, we understand it." He loved Heshmat, he said, "No, no, that's not the case." When he was in the same timing that Kuresh was established, *Alliance School* were establishing in the Middle East, including Iran and Tehran, and other provinces.

We had schools called *Etihad*, which is meaning of alliance in various parts of Tehran. Under Alliance, two schools were built in Sarechal. Unusually, because usually say Madrasa Etihad or the School of Alliance. These two schools are exceptional. They're called [02:10:00] Aziz and Heshmat.

Aziz was my great uncle, his wife was Hashmat. Two schools, girls and boys, and is shown in Sarechals map, these two schools, and they're still there, but not used by Jews. When I was a little child, we were going end of the year there and celebration. Aziz gave a lot of contribution to school, not only financially. He was meeting the authorities of France and asking them, look, the children shouldn't be hungry, they don't have means and they provided hot food and uniform and dressing up. He was putting, because he didn't have his own children.

He did a lot of attention to these two schools, which are shown in Sarechals map the same street end of the alleyway to the right was boys school or vice versa, girls and boys. I remember we were going to the celebration of end of the year when I was 10, 11, 12, and performances by pupils. I was familiar with the school but as I said, exceptionally it was not called Alliance school; it was called Aziz and Heshmat School. Those two and it was in Sarechal was purely for poor people didn't have to pay any fees, or dressing or [02:12:00] food during the lunch or whatever in school. That is how life was from in 1940s, '50s in Tehran.

Who were your friends at school. So staying at the period of time in your life where you were at school, would you meet your friends from school or was it mostly your cousins that you would play with?

No. Because we had such a big mansion when I was a little child, most of our families were coming to us for various celebration or festivals or whatever, afternoon or weekend and we've playing, playing like mad, a lot of games with the cousins. When I went to school, there was another opening. Because some people were going to good general schools mixed with Muslims and Jewish. The problem was at the end when they were getting married, they didn't have 100% friends around because they had to switch off and to speak to a community.

For us was very easy because we were brought up with the children of same school, all Jewish, 12 years I was there. We built such a friendship still we had reunions 10 years ago. We have 15 years ago, I went to [02:14:00] Mexico to meet them. We built a very strong friendship which still till now it does exist. We email each other, we phone each other.

In the school, we had a Chief Rabbi, Shofet [02:14:21] as a religious teacher, as well as running the services for the synagogue. His son, Murad, is still my best friend. Two weeks ago, he was on his way to Israel from Los Angeles. He phoned me and we talked. Now his other brother, Rabbi David now, he was in our school and he was best basketball and volleyball player.

We had the luxury of building a very good friendship during 12 years of my year from age 6, to 17 when I was 17. Yes, I was graduated when I was 17. I went to school when I was five, I assume or I was six. The answer to your question is yes, it was a very strong building of friendship with the school friends. We had some non-Jewish exceptional students as well. Life

was very normal. [02:16:00] Now, this method was continued until or for the first eight years of our school and governing by French authorities and Monsieur Ohayho and his wife.

Then for some reason, it was handed over to Americans, to charities, either because of the financial situation or other reasons, which I'm not aware about. They reformed the school completely. Monsieur Ohayho was gone. Dr. Beruhim came to take over. He was academic and professor in university, high degrees; they revolutionized the school in a drastic way.

First of all, the second language became English, not French anymore. Because he was academic, Dr. Beruhim, he brought the best teachers on land in Tehran to this school. The school was upgraded on the educational level and [02:18:00] all the Jewish new students, top pupils came to our school. Before that, we were in the top group, when they came, we moved down grade because they were such clever boys coming to our school.

It was unbelievable challenge. They renovated the school; they build new area, new classrooms in a more modern way and expanding the capacity of the school. So we came back to school and it was completely different. It was great. We had two divisions which people had the choice according their ability or the teacher were choosing them subject of mathematical and science.

Mathematical and science was one side, science and literature was the other side. I was always with a mathematical mind and arithmetic mind, so I was in that division. It was a good opportunity and some of my classmates they were going we were split into this or that type. That change was helping us a lot to be able to compete with better students and we had a challenge to [02:20:00] work harder and also better teachers by far.

Our school was graded, has become graded as well. There were two top graded schools. Alborz was the top but we were next to that with Hadafe School. We became top of the range in school wise and the result. Then while I was 16-17 we had to go through the final exams and then to register ourselves for University exams, which was called *Konkur*.

My dream always was to be an architect. I was very good with my friend Salim. He's a good architect. Now he's in New York. Living in New York. He was coming to us. We are doing a lot of –

I had friends like Salim, Moiz, Morat all of my friends, many. Me and Salim we were doing a lot of subjects together, all pointing to architecture direction. Then I will tell you about my earlier [02:22:00] life that established my business and I changed my mind. I said, "Look, I don't want to be an architect." I go to Israel for science, agriculture, and etcetera, which is leading me to start from my childhood. [laughs]

You spoke about the--

When I say my childhood, I'm talking about my date of birth to till age of 9, 10, then 10 to 17.

You spoke about a villa that you used to go to.

Oh yes. My grandpa bought this villa in Damavand in a certain section called Darvish Mahale. Mahale was the locality. Darvish. He was well known in the town. The supplier, shopkeepers, they know Hadji. Baba Hadji means we love Hadji. So, we had the account with them. Summer in Iran was very hot. In Tehran. Damavand is the mountain area. Very cool. The town itself is good for that purpose of summer holidays.

That neighbourhood, nearly all the villas right, left, center were bought by [02:24:00] Jewish families. It was straight upriver. You had to pass the river by walking. Access by car was limited to two kilometers, one and a half kilometer, 10 minutes, 15 minutes' walk. Then to walk. It's beautiful nature. In summer you could see the snow in the peak still. It was cool. It had rivers and running waters everywhere, sound of water, greeneries, fruit trees, non-fruit trees, rockeries. Unbelievable.

When he bought it, the life there was very primitive. The hygiene, the toilets, we didn't have the modern toilets. Even in Tehran, when I was a child, we didn't have bathrooms when I was little, when I was born. We were going to public bathrooms. It was near, in Sheikh Adi. Five minutes' walk from our house to the right. They had two sections. Private sections and public sections. Private sections is more expensive. You had one unit of yourself, big one like this. Maybe with the shower. [02:26:00]

We would go to public bathrooms, the private section. Somebody was coming to service. I was going with my dad and Bijan, my brother. How do you say...It was Iranian way of cleaning

us. We were laying down and the guy was cleaning us. Then soap and showers. It was taking good, an hour for three of us and walking home. Some other people which couldn't afford, they were going to the public. Same treatment but communal.

We were going always. I didn't go to the public one, but I was going with my brother and my dad to the service of the private sector. Then, when I was 10 or 8, 9-- Yes, 10, we started having bathroom at home.

Did you go every day?

No. It was once a week. My dad was taking us once a week to this. Imagine now we're going to Damavand even less facility. We had to wash ourselves in the river or in the little narrow running water and soaping ourselves, but beautiful nature and beautiful [02:28:00] way of life. As soon as we were going -- I used to go with my grandpa and my grandma and my aunts and uncles were really young and I was only four, five years old. The age of four, five, I remember.

First thing my grandpa was doing, say, "Leave your shoes away and he was buying us the countryside shoes which were very primitive called *giveh*. It was made of fabric and leather on the bottom, made for poor people but very comfortable and very practical. He was buying a set for me and everybody knew him in the small town. He was ordering -- What was happening, he was traveling beginning of the season and staying there three months of the summer holiday and coming back end of the season. He loved me and always I was going with him.

Did you have servants or help?

Oh my God. In the mansion to begin, we had the porter house. Porter with his wife and children, called Mash Muhammad and Zohra, the rest. We had personal nannies. [02:30:00] Nanny. We had a cook; we had other servants for cleaning and everything. Until we were 11, 12, my mum didn't know how to cook. Chicken head, she didn't know. We were brought up in such an environment, and even when we were going to Damavand there were local servants, or whatever, and it was beautiful life. I loved it and I become connected to nature, since then, and primitive life.

I still love primitive life and nature in a mad way. My mum didn't like it, didn't like the idea. She was always moaning that, "Damavand is not hygienic." trying to put me off, but she was not very successful.

I tell you one little story. In summer, in Iran, was very hot. We couldn't sleep during summer in the apartments. They had wooden beds and beddings in our massive patios of the, massive, of the mansion. Each family had a section for wooden beds and beddings for [02:32:00] my dad and my mum, and my siblings and myself. One section my grandpa and one section my uncle, and other section that was for us.

Other families didn't have that luxury; they were going to sleep in the flat roofs of their houses. We were lucky we had such a luxury of having the mansion, and the space, and the facilities.

My grandpa, at the time, has a Pontiac car, and before that he was the first one to have a Rolls Royce car. He went to Kuwait to bring, my auntie was telling me, having a driver called Nasser. He brought the driver with the family to Tehran to have the private driver. At the time, that period, we didn't have that driver around and my uncle Soli, which was third one, my dad, my other uncle Khalil, then Soli, and then Nemat, Soli was driving. I was five-six and I saw their packing. What was organized was they were packing everything, sending by transport to the villa, and then they were travelling themselves with the car.

[02:34:00] I saw packing going and coming and I was only five or six and said, "Oh, maybe they're going to Damavand." Apparently, my mum told the rest of the family strongly, "Don't mention to Iraj. I don't like her to come with." Said, "Okay." That was the plan, but I could figure out. Coming there evening, that is a very sweet story, I must tell you. In the evening of the next day they wanted to go by car. They had to travel very early morning because part of the road was not asphalt. If you were going late you're subject to a lot of dust and traffic of buses, especially buses, and other public transport or similar, and it was unbearable, with the dust. You had to go five o'clock in the morning to start, to avoid the buses and dust and all this. It was the evening of the day after they wanted to go and they were hiding of me, but I knew already. And we went to that section of sleeping for our family and the car was parked in the mansion [02:36:00] in one of the patios 20 meter away from our beds. I said, "Oh my God,

they're going to go early in the morning. If I fall asleep, they're leaving me behind." I said, "You know what? I will not sleep."

It was nine, ten o'clock we went to bed coming over two hours I was falling asleep and resisting. I said, "It doesn't work." In my child way of thinking, I said, "You know what? They cannot travel without the car. If I'm in the car, they take me. They have to take me." They're all sleeping, so I grabbed one of the light beddings with a small pillow, without shoes walking to the car. Obviously, it was a private house, private as in that it was not locked, and I opened the door to the car backseat. I was a child feeling sleepy, went to the backseat, and fall asleep.

I was in situation in the car, a child falling asleep quickly because it was always 11 or 12 and I was heavily sleeping. In the other hand come 4:30, five o'clock in the morning my parents were sleeping, my siblings were sleeping, but the rest of the family walking towards the car. Uncle Soli, [02:38:00] he was the driver. He was coming first toward the car, then my grandpa, then my grandma 5, 10 meters away to reach to the car, and my aunties Parri and Farzaineh. Soli opened the car and it was surprising, "Oh ah. Iraj sleeping there." All of a sudden, "Hush, hush" and I woke up to see what's happening.

I saw all of them around me, just looking at me. It was a scenario there, my mum is already there, my grandpa, my grandma and my aunties, and my uncle. My mum didn't say a word. My grandpa was excited and happy and sadness, I could see in his face. My grandma, all happen everything split seconds. I was grabbed by my auntie, then another auntie went three, four minutes to go upstairs to our apartment, with or without me, I don't remember. They packed small package of clothing, it all take few minutes, maximum four, five minutes, and I was in the car towards Damavand and the villa. [laughs]

You got your way. [laughs]

I got my way. [02:40:00] [laughter]

Can you tell me about Jewish life. Did you go to synagogue on Shabbat?

No. In general, our family were very traditionalist but valuing Jewish life. My grandpa used to go to the synagogue of our school every Shabbat. He was a permanent member. Every Shabbat. Not Aziz. I didn't see him much but my grandpa was, and he taking me with him.

Your mother's father?

No. My dad's. I was close to them, not the other way. Bijan, my brother was close to them all the time and I was close to my -- this side of the family, my aunties, my grandpa. He was my icon, he was my love and I was his love. Every Saturday I was -- Most Saturdays I was going with him. Almost Saturdays. We had the service and coming back. On the festivals - let's start with *Sukkot*.

We were three minutes' walk from the school. [02:42:00] Opposite that, apartments, my grandpa made a platform that usually when we have -- Big platform, the size of our garden. When we're coming from school, all our friends were coming to play football over there. But for *Sukkot*, that platform was made as a *Sukkah*. Could place easily all the synagogue. Member of the synagogue. It was that big. My grandma had ready-made curtains stored in one of the storage areas and very nice curtains. Velvet greenery. Green velvet, I remember. They were building the *Sukkah*. To put the curtains. Me and Bijan sometimes we were helping to put hanging fruits and all this stuff.

Members of the synagogue for years, at the end of the service they were coming- because in school we didn't have *Sukkah*. They were coming to our house for *Sukkah*. There was somebody was making the *Sukkah* and active in the festivals called Aflaton. Aflaton [02:43:52] was from Damavand because in Damavand we had [02:44:00] Jewish community. Old community. He lost his father when he was very young. He has a mother but not father.

After having the villa in some stage, I don't know what stage, but my grandpa took him as -- He become his godfather. He brought him to Tehran. He was living with my uncles. He had his room. He was become member of the family. He's very old now. He's in New York. He was connected so well to the family. He become technical man. He was very good for technician jobs and very strong. Built-up and doing the *Sukkah* with workers and everything hanging, and preparations. Some member of the family, they were even sleeping in the *Sukkah*.

They said it's the *mitzvah*. To that extent. But we were not religiously mad like people from Mashhad or others, provinces.

Kosher meat was kept at home but we were going out for restaurants since I remember. It was no restrictions. Our personal life is the same now. My son-in-laws are religious a bit or a bit more, a bit less. Not to the extreme, [02:46:00] and they accepted us as what we are. We don't have separate milky and meaty plates or to that extreme. We are traditional and we were traditional family in Iran.

Coming to Passover.

First of all, we had big table for Passover. All the uncles, my grandpa, my great uncle, and doing the--. End of Passover, the eight days, the eighth day was very important for Jewish people coming out of *hametz* -- out of *matzot* and having *hametz*. There was a tradition of visiting families. It was a big event traditionally. Not every family doing for themselves.

At that point, when I was a little child, my grandpa was the head of Elghanian - become head of the second empire. He was doing traditional party in the mansion. The musicians were from Shiraz. They were just coming and going. Every group for four minutes to play, so they were queuing up. There were members of the family, there were our friends. There were 80, 100 people coming to say respect to grandpa and go or stay for dinner and *Hametz*. [02:48:00]

The musicians were coming -- The poor group of mainly Shirazi players, because as I said before, the Muslims were not allowed to play traditionally. They were coming to sing, to have *Hametz* with vodka, and coming to my grandpa to give respect. He was sitting and he was having a bunch of notes. Giving 10 or a 20 to each of them and to say giving their greetings and going, another group, another group. It was going for hours.

It was such a big tradition and memorial for all of us. As I said, that mansion was made for ceremonial events. It was year after year, was repeated whether by way of *Sukkah* or end of Passover.

What about the Seder night? Was there anything specific that you did the first night of the Passover?

No. First of all, we were doing two nights of Passover. Yes, but only my grandpa, his brother, sons, my uncles, cousins. I remember I was 5, 6, 8, 10, and we were avoiding to fall asleep. [laughs] [02:50:00]

They were performing the reading and we were enjoying.

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, was there anything specific that you remember?

Yom Kippur we were always going to Kuresh Synagogue, our school. They were making a big tent in the playground because then, synagogue itself was not enough, didn't have enough capacity of more than 100 people. They were doing maybe two services, one in the synagogue and one mainly in the playground, surrounded by all our classes and in the middle was a playground for mainly basketball and volleyball players and it was around there, in the tent. Same for Rosh Hashanah. They were putting the tent for the festivals till end of the festivals.

In Iran, there are quite a few Jewish shrines, the Tomb of Mordechai and Esther. Did you go to any of those?

Yes. Esther and Mordechai is in Hamadan. Hamadan is old name was Ecbatana, the old capital of Iran, but the new name is Hamadan. When I was 15, my uncle from my mum 's side, my uncle David, [02:52:00] my mum 's brother, he was engaged and married to Purran, my great auntie. She's a lovely lady and she's from Hamadan. When they were engaged or married there was one occasion to go to Hamadan, and they took me with them.

We went to stay there and we did visit Esther and Mordechai, which has very small door. Have you seen the pictures? Yes, you have to go really low to get in, but is a real historic site and was really kept by caretakers. At the time there was a caretaker was Muslim, but very faithful.

About 15, 20 years ago, I heard some news that some extremists in Iran, they said this place should be ruined because, at the time, there the Muslims were executed. There were talks about that, but the government didn't agree and is still kept [02:54:00] in place.

Then there is another historic place which is near Damavand, is just before arriving to Damavand, is called Gilliard. It was small community there of Jewish people in Gilliard and ancient cemetery site, which housing all Elghanian family and beyond that, everybody was in

Tehran. There are cemeteries of 200, 300 years old and this was the destiny – Haim Saghi buried there, that was the place that they took the Backgammon sets to play. There are photographs; I'm afraid I don't have it now. About 20 or 15 minutes' drive, or even less, to Damavand.

There was tradition of *Tisha B'Av*. all the Jewish family which had relatives buried there, who were going to visit *Tisha B'Av*, paying respects and having breakfast or whatever, or after psalms to go back to Tehran. Us was different because you had the villa, [02:56:00] we were in villa, all from Tehran we were going to -- somehow, we were ending up with the villa.

I remember when I was a child I was going, for example, my grandpa from my mum's side they were coming for a visit but going back to Tehran, or not going to villa but doing something else, somewhere else breakfast and whatever, and then to go home. It was historic place and is called Giliard.

I was reading in history of Dr. Levi book about life of Jews. In that book, I was reading that the name of Giliard is invented by Jewish people. Is first immigrant coming from -- somehow from immigrant to Bovel and then to Iran they move to this town. There is a mountain in Israel called Gilad, and they saw the similarity of the mountains and everything and say, Gilad. It was then transformed to Giliard. In that book I was reading as the researcher, he was saying.

I still have my cousin, when I went to visit them two weeks ago in America. Her husband family is Giliardian. I said, "Look, you are [02:58:00] Giladis." [laughs] Those are the two main sites that I -- I heard about other sites in other places, but not that famous.

If you didn't visit then--

No, I didn't visit.

Can you tell me about your bar mitzvah?

Yes. I was so close to my grandpa and I was going with him to the synagogue. *Bar mitzvah* was not 100% popular, not everybody like Europe had it. My grandpa, he appointed a teacher, which one of the older friend of same school Kuresh, and called Oshirian. He appointed him

to teach me one of the relevant *Parsha* when I was 12. I was practicing with him for a while, for 6 months, 9 months, a year, then coming the ceremony.

In the morning we were close to the synagogue, we walked to the synagogue, and I did practice a lot. I was reading the *Parsha* and he was standing by me, and it was memorial date. Then [03:00:00] we came back home for lunch, and in the afternoon, families with children were invited, a lot of children. Family children about 30, 40, 50. There was a famous show of little puppets and music and somebody is talking on behalf of these puppets and is called *Kheimeh Shab Bazi* in Farsi. My grandpa arranged that as well and me myself and other youngsters were sitting enjoying the show with the story. Was really big fun.

What about food, did you have specific food that you grew up with; Jewish food, or was it more just general Iranian food?

Even until today, the Jewish food, especially I'm talking about Tehran, not the other provinces, is different than Muslim food. The way it's cooked, the way it's tasting, the way it looks, and so on, the more completely different. It doesn't exist for them. I give you examples. For Friday night, we have *cholo abgusht* and *gondi*. It's chicken soup, rice, [03:02:00] chicken itself, and *gondi*, which is very difficult to make. Not all the ladies they know how to do it. Is made of breast of chicken and beans. I don't know how it's made, but I know it's very delicious.

It's a ball, a dumpling?

A ball, yes. It's a ball and it was originally made, the ball itself was made for having vodka with, Friday night before the *Kiddush* or after. They were having cold vodka and the ball *gondi* it is very, very tasty. If I tell to a non-Jewish family, they don't know it. They don't. In general, the way of our cooking within the ladies are completely different. Completely. They use more oil, they use more this, they use more that, but Jewish way in Tehran of cooking was definitely different and distinguishable. When I was a little child, and I think this food is coming from Shiraz, it was a simple, simplest, but most memorable [03:04:00] and delicious for me.

Two weeks ago when I was in America, my auntie arranged it for me to have it as well. It's called *Gamard*. Do you know the history of pizza? Pizza was made in Italy for poor farmers. Now it's become so popular. I think this food was so simple and not for rich people, but it

traditionally came from Shiraz. It's cooked rice but very softly. It's like a soup, but harder and vinegar and some fried vegetables.

Sorry. [coughs]

They used to have it as afternoon, especially when it was hot in the summer or in winter. They were doing *Gamard* and it was so memorable. As everybody, nobody knows about it. In our family, it was known. I searched for it from other families, it's very little. I don't know, I have to speak to a lot of older Shirazi people to find it as well.

What's it called again?

Gamard. Now, there's a little story about *gondi* and Arak and vodka. At the time, music was mainly for Jewish people. [03:06:00] Making wine and vodka and all this was also the Muslims are not willing or allowed to do it, so they were doing it for themselves and some of them they were selling it to others. There is a story that Reza Shah was a soldier, then became an officer and was called Mirpanj. His formal name was Mirpanj. He was appointed as an officer of Tehran and he liked vodka, so they said, "Look, if you want good vodka, you go to Jewish quarter, Sarechal." He found some friends and they say, "Yes, come on." He was an officer far from being a Shah. "Yes, come on, you may have a drink," whatever, dah, dah, dah. Then he said, "Look, Reza, if you really want to enjoy, come on Friday, Friday evening." This story I heard, not confirmed. They were giving him *takbul* and vodka and he was really enjoying it because it is very nice. With vodka, it's really real and you put some salt and pepper and make it spicy and it's beautiful. He was for it and he was trying from time to time Friday nights or whatever to have a bit of vodka in Jewish quarter and he found some friends over there. A passage of time after, [03:08:00] there was a coup, and Reza was supposed to be a Republican, not Kingdom. He took and it was a parliament, this, that, then decided he want to be a Prime Minister- let me, new dynasty. The story is continuing. When he became Royal, he was sending a representative on Friday nights to his old friend and asking for *gondi* and vodka. [laughs]

We've spoken about Jewish like in Judaism. Was there any sort of Zionist influence or Israeli influence growing up?

No. First of all, at the time of Reza Shah, it didn't exist. No, or I don't know about it. It's beyond my time anyway. Then there was war and invasion of Iran because of political reasons. They wanted to help Russia, he didn't let them, and he said, "You be on neutral, [03:10:00] and then become occupation," and they called Tehran as Bridge of Success in the world. Without Iran and the occupation of it, they couldn't reach Russians with ammunition. After war, there was historic meeting of the Tehran conference of Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt where they planned a geographic map of the world. It was 1948 that Israel was formed. Certainly, during Reza Shah, the antisemitism was on decline, especially in Tehran, specifically.

At the time of Mohammad Reza Shah, because he was deprived from being a king and new king for political reasons, which is not for this conversation, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was appointed. During his time and beyond, as I said, there was one member of parliament allocated for Jews and one for Armenians. Jews were recognized after that revolution of constitutional as a minority and to be protected. [03:12:00] Coming at the time of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1948, the Jewish state was declared and come to reality, and gradually, the relationship was building up for common interest.

There was Mr. Ezri, he was part of Judaism, Zionist motion and he emigrated to Israel, and then he went to politic, then he was sent back as de facto Ambassador to Iran. He become very powerful and influential. I know him personally, and he was a self-made person from Isfahan. He created the warmest relationship between Israel and Iran at the time. The Embassy was near the old houses of the kingdom and royal. Then they moved to Niavaran, but before that, the [03:14:00] palace was in Tehran in the street of Kaj. Then the so-called Israeli Embassy was placed there as well. ElAl was traveling to Iran freely and frequently. Diplomats - high diplomats were coming to Iran for visit. As I mentioned, they were invited Aziz Elghanian to Israel to celebrate the memories of *Yaldei Tehran*, Children of Tehran, and it was all an ongoing situation.

So officially, between Iran and Israel, there were very good relations.

Yes.

On the ground, the general population, was that the same kind of feeling, or did you feel that you could talk about Israel or support Israel freely?

Yes, in Tehran, we had no restriction. I couldn't feel restricted with my Muslim friends. We had Muslim friends or whatever. It wasn't necessary to talk about it, but it was the normal way of life. In Tehran, we didn't have anti-Zionists or antisemitism in a sensitive way.

Now let's talk about university. [03:16:00] You finished school and you went to University in Israel.

But in the meantime, a lot happened. [laughs]

In the meantime, a lot happened in between school and university. Okay, tell me.

In the meantime, a lot happened. I went to Israel as youngest student when I was 17. I told you all about when I become 10 in the pampered way, plus my *bar mitzvah*, but things in a greater scale happened. In those five, seven years, we changed the whole configuration of Elghanian family, my personal life, and a lot of relevant people of kind, and bringing new factors and evolutions and revolutions, you name it, big changes. Now, let's go back to Hadji Mirzagha, my grandpa. He came out of Sarechal moving to Naderi. He bought an investment property called Hotel Naderi, and Habib Elghanian was working there as the first job he had, the first official job, and it was expanding and expanding.

He also built a big arcade in Saadi Street [03:18:00] and called Paysage de Saadi. *Paysage* in French means arcade. Which was front shops in the arcade and offices on the first floor, a massive one. It was a joint venture between him and a number of friends. Still doing the import, his business was import, investment, and lending by crowdfunding. In parallel, his sisters, mum, sons, Hanam Jan was the older sister of Hadji Mizan and Hadji Aziz, that they built the third empire. So far you heard about the first empire built by Aghababa. It was not destroyed but flatting. The second empire rising by Hadji Mirzagha, and then we're coming to the third empire of Elghanian. Then there is a fourth one as well.

While they were developing - similar to situation of Aghababa, he was still building while his nephews were building faster. Similar things happened here. Hanam Jan's husband was from Bubai family. He was a tailor, a very nice guy, but a tailor. [03:20:00] And he had - Hanam Jan had one daughter and seven sons. Four of the sons were senior, three junior. Then there was another sister Iran, which was married to Victory if you remember. One of the reasons was

a) those sons were the nephews of my grandpa and my great uncle. Secondly, Aziz didn't have children, so he was looking at them as their own children. The older son was Aghadjan, but later, he became Mushidjan because he went to France.

They sent him to France and said, "Look," they wanted to help the family, they said to Aghadjan, "Let go to France, you learn the business, to import, whatever you want and we assist you." They decided to send Aghadjan, which is in that old pictures, to France, and to build the side of the sister. Jan went to Paris. Before going to Paris, they were very poor. There's a story that my grandpa gave his shoes to him, and said, "Look, you're going to France, have my shoes." Briefly looking after him, [03:22:00] and others. So they went. He told me himself, I was going there sleeping on the table because I didn't have money for a hotel or anything. Just putting the bedding on the dining table and sleeping on the dining table. They were enthusiasts. Four senior brothers was Jan, was Aghadjan but became Jan, Davoud, Habib, and Nourollah. Then three junior ones, and we come to them later. While that empire of my grandpa was expanding by investment, by lending, by import, they started with more enthusiasm, more technology, more up to date. Aghababa was doing parcels by post. My grandpa started with proper import. They did industrial way, ships. Not containers at the time, but massively.

In the meantime, Aziz, my great uncle called on to those four brothers, and Lotfulla Victory, and said, "Look, let's make a partnership for you. Your only interest is to do business together," so they formed a company. Then there was dispute between them. There's a bigger story. They eventually splitted and [03:24:00] they dropped Lotfulla from the partnership and the four stayed. It was big stories about it, I don't want to go to details, it's too much time. They end up four brothers, and three juniors still they're very young and doing it in a very enthusiast way, a very massive way with a more fast way going up the ladder. Eventually, they built a real empire in Iran.

They were in field of import, industry, land, property development in massive scale to the way that they become so rich in the national way and international way, just before revolution. Habib was very good in public relationship, Davoud was good for planning and etc, and Jan was in America together with Nourollah. Nourollah was planning, I will show you the photos obviously, to bring the ideas of making factories, big high-rises. He was based in America, but

when he was coming to Tehran, everybody has to stand up [03:26:00] because six o'clock in the morning, he was going to the development site and to see what is going on.

Eventually, I must say that the fourth empire of Elghanian is built by him and his sons after revolution because after revolution, the third empire collapsed partially or wholly. Now Nourollah's son in New York leading, in American sense, leading individuals in the property market mainly and the way they are building the empire, and looking after it.

What happened in general, Aghababa went to France, come back with ideas, which worked, but it wasn't all money. We're talking empires, and empires, and empires. There are human factor as well, senses, or cultural families, or other relevant factors. Sometimes people don't value it.

I don't value the Elghanian dynasty or Elghanian family only because of the contribution and building empires. [03:28:00] I look at it myself from other point of views about humanity, about change of culture, bringing new way of life to our family, and related families by their generation. We shouldn't ignore the second part because money is only a device to present other values, or helping to develop other values. It's not all, and that is how I start thinking since I was 10 because what happen in Arcade Saadi, all the authorities were transferred to my dad, which was in his 20s. His father, Hadji Mirzagha, was not sitting in the driver seat any more as far as I know.

He had a lot of enthusiast of giving courage to his sons and children. My father Rahim, then Khalil was sent to America to study and bring new ideas. My third cousin, Nehmad, was sent also to America. He was very young. Then I had a third cousin, Suleiman Soli. That is one that was [03:30:00] driving me to Damavand. Such a nice guy, a lovely person. There were a combination, and there were Nikha, which was the older sister was married to Habib Elghanian. Two other sisters, auntie Paari is New York. Is the kindest lady in our family and such a close relationship with me, and auntie Fahzan is the last one. There was Hadji Mirzagha in the front office.

There's the shop and back offices and the input of cars and tires and watches, etcetera and my dad running the show and had the full authorities. He was very bright, very, very bright, and with full authorities, but something was lacking; the experience of life for difficult time and

crisis. Because he was not self-made, he didn't have the experience of facing crisis. Enthusiasm, young, and courageous. He made a lot of several joint ventures. [03:32:00] They created the first Iranian bus services with a crucial Iranian business, very famous, and other people and it was very successful.

What services? Bus?

Bus.

What is that?

Traveling buses.

Oh, bus services, okay.

Yes, we didn't have public services, proper public services. There were some buses going from this town to that town, but not popular ones. They did the first private bus company with joint venture with all this. Then they bought entire village not far from Niavaran. Niavaran was a palace where Mohammad Reza Pahlavi moved from Tehran to the Skirtin and it's 10 minutes. When they bought that village, Niavaran was existing as a palace, but summer palace, not permanent, and they turn it to become permanent before revolution. They bought an entire village called Josadarachtac.

I was eight, nine, when we went there with joint ventures, with Kalostian, an Armenian person, and Terani, and all his connection and friends. We were going there on Friday for picnic and they were putting maps, all the floor, and saying, "Those, that will be the road, that will be this," nah, nah, nah.

[03:34:00] So you were involved from a young age in the family business.

I was watching the history. As I said at the very beginning, I'm the business of history, not so active so far. We were there with the son of other partner, we were going for shooting. Kalostian son had a shooting gun and this was a big village, proper village, millions of square meters.

Did that influence your decision to study agriculture?

No, I'll tell you later. He took big steps to expand the existing empire of his dad. Then when I was 10, there was a new Prime Minister, Amini, Ali Amini, Dr. Ali Amini. He was strongest preacher on the radio, there was no television at the time, and speech. His strongest speeches and this we do, that we do, dah, dah, dah, and caused strongest crisis in the country. Everything was falling in the industry, the land prices, house prices. In the meantime, my dad bought all the lands near the airport, [03:36:00] near the town of Tehran, or near Karaj. He had a big vision, but I'm afraid little experience of crisis. At the time of Dr. Amini, the economic crisis has started. Not only that, they nationalized the private bus companies.

What year was this?

'55, '60s, '7. '55, '56, '57, '58, '59. [laughs] So the pressure built up and, my dad was a full authority and he didn't have the experience and it was too much to handle. Obviously, there was resistance, resist to sell this, to save this, to save that whatever, but didn't help. When you're going to the very high speed and you see the break wall in front of you, obviously, you try to stop it, but sometimes you go to the wall and it happened. A big crash, a big fall of the empire. I was a little boy so far. I was pampered, I was this, I was naive. [03:38:00] If it's continuous, I was the same pattern as my dad. I didn't even know how to resist, how to build, how to face a crisis, I didn't know. I was very naive and I can understand how he was. So crisis happened and this side of the empire start crashing.

Anyway, the empire started to crash and is a big fall down with a lot of dust coming out of it and unpleasant. My dad had the ultimate responsibility. He didn't have that ability or capability or experience to defend the situation, which in a way maybe it was defendable. Most probably it was defendable, but the lack of experience caused bankruptcy, it caused losses and domino effect, you know. In Iran saying, one mistake bringing a thousand mistake. [03:40:00] Out of desperation, other mistakes happened.

We are talking about 10 years period or beyond. In that situation, there were some unfair behaviour from part of the family, and taking advantage of the situation, which shouldn't. An example, my grandma, Hashmat, wife of Hadji Mirzagha, had a lot of assets on her name. My grandpa was very ill, he had to go to Israel for operation. They gave my grandma wrong information that "Your husband will die, *chaz v'chalila* [Heb: heaven forbid], the government

will take all your assets" in wrong way or whatever. Otherise, I was a little child, but that is what my understanding. Just before traveling to Israel, they deprived her from ownership to the benefit of this or trust or whatever, which wasn't true.

Who is they?

Sorry?

Who were they?

Member of the family.

Okay.

I don't want to go-

No, that's fine. Is only the family that we're talking about.

to details to upset anybody or [03:42:00] causing unnecessary arguments. My father himself, he got some lands, say, "Oh, if I go bankrupt, they will take it, so I will leave it with you and with you." Then I was expecting to be kept and it was not kept. in such a situation, there's a good factors of goodwill, take of personal advantage, uncontrollable situation, and all this will followed by claims and counterclaims, blames and counter-blames. The end result is disappointing family feud. It's natural for all this to happen. Now, I look back, I'm not surprised. As I said, I was a young little boy and I was witnessing all this between age 10 to 17. Age of 17 I went to Israel and I came back after four years, five years.

So you just moved.

That period of dark period for my grandpa especially because it wasn't his fault. Whatever happened, it wasn't his fault. He did a lot with the goodwill for his family, for his nephews, for the community, for everybody, with a goodwill, [03:44:00] good, kind intention. He didn't deserve that sad events. I was watching and witnessing all this. It was nearly going to ruin my personal life as a young boy. When you face all these unpleasant, unusual situation, you become emotional, you become disappointed. I still continue loving my grandparents from my side of

dad. I loved my dad to bits. I loved my mum, I loved all the relatives, my uncles from both sides, cousins.

I had nothing personally against them, or they didn't have anything against me, but always only the business affecting my personality and the character. Middle of all this, my grandpa loved me and he did the bar mitzvah permits for me. It was in the middle of all these downfalls that I explained to you. There was special relationship [03:46:00] between me and him. In the meantime, I'll tell you a story that is relevant to my grandpa and showing how great he was. 18 years ago, 20 years ago, I don't know, I was in Los Angeles with my sisters, visiting my sisters.

We took, they arranged, an Iranian tour to Las Vegas, Iranian bus, Iranian passengers, Iranian guests, and say, "Iraj, it's a good trip, let's go." I said, "Let's go." There were three of us. They sat together, next to me there was another Iranian gentleman. We just started chatting, eating, "Habibi, nah, nah, nah." He said, "Yes, I was." He said, "What about you?" I said, "No, we couldn't because of two reasons. A) we are Jewish and there is reservation, and also, we are coming from a famous family, so it's not wise to go there." I said, "What family?" I said, "Elghanian." He said, "Do you know Suleiman Elghanian?" I said, "Yes, my uncle." He said, "Are you the grandson of Hadji Mirzagha?" I said, "Yes."

Then he [03:48:00] said, "Okay, let me tell you. When I was a child, when I was seven, six, eight, my grandpa had a bookkeeper called Mahmoud. He was coming every few days or every week or I think every few days or every day even. He did report of rent collection, this collection, and my grandpa was using abacus." Yes? He was very figurative but in a primitive way, and I knew Mahmoud. He said, "Look, I want to tell you a story. Mahmoud was my cousin working as a bookkeeper for grandpa, and I was a spare one to be used extra when there was volume of jobs. Not day-to-day, but when there was the volume."

Then he continued, he said, "Iraj, I was going to Hadji, everyone, and helping Mahmoud, and helping the situation as a bookkeeper." He told me, "Friday is a holiday and nobody was working." One Friday he said it was winter, and cold winter, and nobody was in the Arcade of Saadi, but my grandpa was there for some reason. He said, "He phoned me at home." He said, "I have a request." He said, "Yes, Hadji, what shall I do?" He said, "I know it's Friday, you're

with your family, but please come to the arcade." [03:50:00] He said, "I couldn't say no. I knew that is important. I said, 'Hadji, I will be there shortly.' I went there."

Hadji said he was looking from the shopping door of the back office and the shop. He said, "There's a family there; a husband, wife, and few children, they have difficulties. Go ask them what is their difficulties." Or already maybe he sent somebody to see what is the difficulties. Anyway, he become aware, my grandpa, that this family coming from another town, Sabzevar, for medical treatment. It's cold, they run out of money, and they have no place to go. No money for traveling and they were stuck. After he knew all this, my grandpa, he said, "He told me, 'Go to the family, take them to bazaar.'"

My grandpa had account with several merchants. "Buy good shopping for them, buy travel ticket, and let them go to their town." Without knowing them, without asking any favour, without them being Jewish, just humanity. He said, "I was shocked [03:52:00] and impressed. I took the family, I explained to them, said, 'Let's go to bazaar.'" He said, "I took them to bazaar, bought them clothing, whatever they wished. Good. I suitcased two suitcases and everything, sorting the traveling and I sent them to Sabzevar and reported to Hadji Mirzagha, the boss." This scenario is showing the humanity face of that person. Like the same way that he invited poor people to the wedding of his son for the seventh night.

I was a witness of other behaviors and other issues which is so impressive and made him an icon for me. Now, I'm age 10, 11, seeing the downfall, seeing his sadness, feeling his sadness become so painful for me as a young boy. It was a strange feeling that even you cannot describe it by words. I'm in that environment and falling the empire and family feud. I was [03:54:00] a child, I always think of myself of a hero [laughs] to save the family. Funny ways. My mind was working 24/7. I was age 11, 12, I was madly thinking what to do. I'm joking with my cousin as I say what to do and how to do is a joke. What to do, how to do always in my mind, and stuck with the situation.

My dad has a family friend. He was a general in the Army. He was Muslim, but most of his friends were Jewish. Mahmoud Asharpur, he was a retired general. They retired him because one day he was in the college of becoming officers, and end of the year, Shah was coming to give their degrees. They had the telephone call, "Oh, please delay the ceremony because Shah

is engaged with other big events." He was authoritarian. I said, "Shah is not coming? We have the plan. We have to do it," so he gave the degrees himself and he declared. He was very faithful, but [03:56:00] their counterparts, they went to say, "Look, this is dangerous man. He's a dangerous man, and he should be put aside."

With respect, they gave him retirement. He came to the private sector, he had a club for Jewish people to come and play cards. He had built a massive farm in the skirting of Tehran. One day he invited us to his farm for a picnic. I went there, I looked at it with the family. He saw me, he saw me so curious. He was very clever guy. He said, "Iraj, you look very interested." I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Do you want to grow chickens and make money? I have money." I said, "You have? This was my dream." I said, "Fine." He said, now let's say it's Friday, he said, "Wednesday or whatever, you come." He said, "You have to prepare a place and I give you a hundred chicks, and you grow them."

It was the beginning of summer. That's why we were in the picnic. At the end of our house, there were two storage rooms, old, bad condition. I brought builders, I brought somebody to put a window, to put this, this, that, and make the place ready for chicks. [03:58:00] Then my dad phone and said, "Mahmoud, Iraj is ready." He said, "Bring him such a day, Wednesday to Mehrabad airport." Always coming with boxes of chicks, each box of 100 or 50 or 25, whatever. He gave me two boxes or one box of chicks, 100 together, two days old, one day old, and bag of food. He said, "Quick instructions. You do this X, Y, Z and you go to build them up." I took them.

It was the beginning of the summer holiday and I did need 40, 50 days to bring them to the market. I did it successfully anyway. He told me, "That's how you go to buy the food." There was Maydon [sp?] Amilo Sultan. There was a place there was wholesalers of chicken foods. They were doing the preparations and the bag, and he say, "You go there." I was a little boy, 12, 13. I went there. Everybody was big man and sitting there with the little farms, big farms, and I was little boy sitting there. The bosses said, "What do you want, young man?" I said, "This is my formula, so much these, so much bones." Altogether [04:00:00] two bags of 200 kilograms or whatever. I paid for it and they called a small transport, motors of three tires. I took it home. I finished the season with the chickens. End of season it was end of summer is *Rosh Hashanah* and *Kippur*.

My mum phoned all the member of the family and we bring the *shochet*. I said, "Don't go to the shops, you come to Iraj." A lot of family came, in one day I sold all the chickens, but fair price.

You were entrepreneurial from a young age?

Yes. I was picking up the two or three beautiful chickens and a cock. I didn't have the heart because I was becoming friendly with them. I didn't know they were all my friends, all chicks. They knew me personally, I knew them, so I said enough is enough. I kept those four beautiful or whatever, three, four, or five I don't know, whatever. I had a very little casualty, I was doing the vaccination and properly looking at them. End of the season, money in the pocket and I said, "Wonderful".

I took those four or five and start [04:02:00] eggging, laying egg. My mum let's say in the shop was each egg 10p, let's say, she said, "I'll pay you 50p, Iraj, for each egg. Just bring it," and she was making omelet for us; me, Bijan, and my sisters. Her purpose was to encourage me, and it work. Okay, you can go on.

Now let's talk about university.

I did in three sessions, three or four sessions until become 17. Now, we had the chicken farms and Bijan was not good for academic. He was sent to ORT to do the technical. There was another organization, then he was sent to Israel. I said, "You know how to make money out of this. You go there." He went here, not to Kibbutz, to-

Moshav?

Moshav. Then he came back, he said, "Da da da da da." Now, I'm 17. I said, "Forget about architecture." If I was staying another six months I couldn't go because I had to go to army, until 18 I was exempt. I said I'll have to travel before I become 18, so I organized the passport. In the meantime, Bijan came and we want to establish the business, and I was going to Israel. They found a big land, 50,000 square meter, big land near Tehran [04:04:00] through agent. I said, "This is cheap." We buy it, we establish the future farm with my uncle, uncle David because we didn't have capital.

There was a family meeting between me, Bijan, uncle David, and my grandpa from my mum's side, is enough, the side of my mum . I said we needed budgeting this, this, this to build this, coming to so much. My uncle is very strict. He said, "Where is your part?" and we had no money. I said, "Look, I am sorry. You want 50%?" "I will be 50%, you will be 50%. Where is your money?" Mohtaran to his sister. We were in the corner.

My mum had the wedding ring, very expensive diamond, very expensive, was given to her for the wedding. Took it off her finger and dropped on the table. She said, "That is our capital, for my children." My mum was ready to any sacrifice, no matter. She passed away a year ago. My dad was passing away years before 1988 but my mum a year before. [04:06:00] She was a source of encouragement and source of positiveness towards the children. She was ready to sacrifice anything, it's not only event, any event, for her husband and the children. She was ready to put everything down for husband and children, no matter. My uncle had no shy to accept it. She said, "Okay, Mohtaran, I sell it and use it. If you're shortfall, you sell, you pay later." The deal was done. They bought the land, big land starting with the building up. I just saw the start of it and I went off to Israel. I'm 17, 1962. 1962 I'm in Israel.

What was that like with the language? Let's start with language first.

With language, we have Hebrew classes, very little, next to nothing. I couldn't talk. I had no Hebrew language, so I went there. As coincidence, Khanomjan the mum of Habib and sister of my grandpa was ill and was on hospital. All the sons, Hadji Aziz, were there looking after her to save, and they had an apartment. They knew I'm coming and said, " Mohtaran, send Iraj to us." [04:08:00] I went there straight from airport. I had no money, little money, and all this. I said, "I'll manage it."

I went to them then I found Ulpan [Hebrew language school]. Do you know Ulpan Brechov-- Borochoy? Do you know the area?

Yes.

I went to the Ulpan, that serious, da, da, da. I don't know anybody in that age, that determined and that serious. It was out of my age, it was not coordinated with my age. It was not supposed

to be that way. I was supposed to enjoy my teenage life and early life. No. I went there, start learning Hebrew for three months, because Hadji Aziz was there.

He used his influence and asking them to give me a room in there because most of the people were coming and going; morning, afternoon, but some resident, mainly girls and some boys. 10 boys, 30, 20 girls could stay there at the resident. I was one of the residents. I stayed there. I was shy in nature, very shy, brought up in that type of family with manners, with respect, with etiquette, with shyness, with all these damages, and I started there.

I was [04:10:00] a period of three months. It was a period of three months or whatever, yes, I found the first graduation in Hebrew, I learned grammar, I learned basic rules da, da, da. Then from university, I wanted to register. They said, "Because you want to study agriculture, you have to have experience in kibbutz as well." I said, "Wonderful." Go to *Ulpan kibbutz* as well, working half day and half working. I started with Geva Kibbutz, but something happened, which I didn't like. I don't want to go to the story of it. I didn't like. I was discriminated by lies and unfair situation, and I left.

Where in Israel was it?

Geva was in the north near Kinneret, then I moved to Kibbutz Alonim. I found my way there. Kibbutz-

Where was that? Also in the north?

Nearby, north. I knew that September or whatever, I'm going to university. So I bought that first-year books. I said while I'm learning a practice my first book so I become familiar or I understand the speeches and lessons and everything. I didn't have time for fun. I was dead serious. I was [04:12:00] working. I love that nature and socialism and I could easily become *Chaver* [Heb: Friend/Comrade] Kibbutz to stay there because I loved this lifestyle. I said how come you contribute as much as you can and you take as much as you need. It is no difference. Okay, now is different in Israel, but at the time, was that and a strong socialism between the family. I still believe it.

I'm in Kibbutz Alonim and in love with nature from Damavand and his all nature and agriculture, although I studied mathematic, but I loved it. They said, "Oh, wake up at four o'clock, five o'clock, going to da da da come back at six o'clock to have breakfast, and then to go for lunchtime and ending and swimming pools, cinema da, da, da." I said, "Okay, fine." I was waking up at five o'clock on the dot, calling people on the dot and taking a bit of coffee or whatever, going with the tractor. The manager was very clever. He was giving us a contract job.

He said, "Whoever is finishing 20 boxes of onions, he can be off." I was young. I was enthusiastic. I was doing it by breakfast. He said, "You did it?" I said fine. I was very fast [04:14:00] and quick and hardworking. He said, "Itzik," Manager, they call me Itzik. "Itzik, you finish? Okay, you have a good time." I said, "No, no, no, I come back." [laughs] He said, "Okay, I'll put you under extra hours." I never used extra hours. For me, I just wanted to be helpful and I want to be giving and taking.

How long were you in Israel for?

Four, five years, altogether about five years. Then after a while, *kibbutznik* people were working under me. It was very unusual to have somebody, because usually, we were working under *kibbutzniks* but I was so effective. I was organizing better rota, this, this, that and I was unbelievable and I was enjoying it. Not only that, I was reading my books and getting ready in Hebrew, and it was fantastic. Even until today, I believe in market economy, I believe in the economy, but when it's coming to family, I believe social values.

You can't have you as a big man and your sister or your relative in bad condition. I was built like this due to those conditions. Anyway.

Were you living in the kibbutz while you were at university?

No. Pre-university. [04:16:00] Three months in ulpan, nine months in the kibbutz altogether, going back to Jerusalem. Going to Jerusalem, I register myself first day I went there and I found my old friend from school, he wanted to be a dentist, Hamid. I met him, I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Look, I register for agriculture." First, we were in Jerusalem, then we moved

to Rehovot to continue. However, we had a shared flat together, we found somebody and we were sharing the flat.

Lovely time and biggest stories and sometimes funny sometimes comedian, sometimes we had good fun, but dead serious. I was just so serious about education. I said, "Look, I have to learn, I have to have the degree." I never had the ambition of being employed, but to have a degree and go back to family business. Then I moved. We had Prof. Khen, who was fascinated about evolution, how evolution happened and gave me big picture of the world. Then we had Professor Fan had the book and the first exam coming. I didn't have the confidence.

I go very quickly but didn't have the confidence because I said, "If I fail in this first exam, I quit." I didn't have the confidence. I say I thought I'm the worst [04:18:00] student and the exam was verbal. We registered. They called me and I told my friend, "Look, I don't have confidence. If I fail, I go back." We went there. There was Prof. Khen, he had his book as well, physiology of plants. He was going to ask question, his assistant was asking question passing me going on to one another, they were verbal. They started to ask me simple.

What they were doing simple questions and going up, up up to more difficult questions, asking, asking, asking, asking, and so they stop when you don't know. That was their system. The top degree was 100 to 0. Asking questions, question questions, and I was answering. I didn't have the confidence but I was-- It reached a point they went out of the book because I couldn't fail. I didn't fail in any of those levels. They went out of the books. There was one question that that was my level. I knew the answer but not in full. I said, okay.

After a day or two, they put the result I was the second on the top. That gave me confidence. I was very good and then we went to Rehovot. I was good as a student. There were 10 more Iranians in there, but were all [04:20:00] taking easy, not serious. I was dead serious. I finished the degree coming to Tehran.

Was it hard to be away from home for five years having lived with your whole family?

One year, my mum, my sister, my grandpa and grandma, her parents, came to visit me. If I come out to Iran there is army and this. They came to visit me. One day, they told me, my mum said, "Iraj, I'll teach you how to cook." I said okay. One of the easy things, rice, tomato rice, I

loved it with chicken. I said okay. You take this one. I want this. This is the process. I was memorizing. It was intelligent and enough to memorize and writing notes. I said, "That is how you do it." I said, "Fine. Why you didn't tell me earlier? I will do all the cooking." They went back.

One day, I didn't have any other friends. I was on my own. I got all the elementary of the menu and da, da, da. So much this, so much this, da, da, da. I start cooking and all went so far very well. So much rice, so much da, da, da. You do the rice like this. The chicken like this, da, da, da. Everything just went 100% except one thing. It was ready. I put it in my plate. I put my fork and knife. I had cutleries. [04:22:00] In a nice way, I brought and I was careful not to burn it, I brought the food and I put the food for myself.

So far no problem, but I didn't taste it yet. My food is ready and plate, everything's served. I'm on my own. I have the first spoon. You can't guess what happened. I start crying, like I never cried like this. I didn't even think about anything - become homesick. I'd never experienced homesick. I was already becoming strong. I was doing everything on my own with friends, in kibbutz, in --. Crying like mad. I was eating and crying, eating and crying. I finished my food or half food. It was so delicious but crying. That was the first and last time I cooked. [laughs] I said, "Never again."

Anyway, graduation, no graduation, whatever. The exams, I was very good. Coming back to Tehran, now, I'm away for four or five years. They built a farm, expanding it in a reasonable way, and I came. I said I joined there. Obviously, I didn't want to go [04:24:00] to other people. First year, I was observing, listening to them, and saying, "Yes, sir." Whatever they were telling me, I was doing without exception like a soldier. They were married already. No, my uncle was married. Bijan was not married. Soon he was married again. But I was younger. I had the understanding. We had to wake up at five o'clock, six o'clock to send the goods to the market, da, da, da. I was doing it. I came with this decision of new ideas, implementing fast expansion. We are behind. Always we are behind. [laughs] They didn't have good time with me because I was preventing laziness or spending unnecessary privately or whatever. Only investment, only this, only that. I took over after a while. We had the expansion, and then I went to the army, which is another story because I couldn't get out of Iran.

There were rule, if you had higher education, you will become officer straight away, but going three months for training, then officer.

I'm going to stop us for a second.

We'll stop now. Just as you come back from Israel, you've started in your family business on the farm. We'll stop now and we'll come back on another day to talk about your time in the army and your life [04:26:00] from that point on.

Until the point that we left Iran and the life in UK and what is happening, what to do and how to do. [laughs]

Exactly. So thank you very much for interviewing with us today.

My pleasure. You've been great to attend and talking to me.

[PART TWO]

Today is the 18th of September 2019. I'm here with the continuation of Iraj Elghanian's interview for Sephardi Voices UK, and we are in London. Last time we were speaking, you had finished telling us about coming back from university and you had worked on a farm with your brother and your uncle. You had finished telling us about how you built up that business. Can you tell us what happened next?

As I said, first few years, I was focused in my mind to expand as much as possible to build for more units and expand the production. Then there was a change of economy situation in Iran in general, which was becoming fast industrialist. There were a lot of new industries or industrialists that they wanted to start or they were small business and they need the space. In the other hand, there was restrictions on building around Tehran was becoming harder and harder. [04:28:00] It was very difficult to build any new units.

In my mind, I said, "Maybe there is opportunity of changing course." I discussed with my uncle, David, and Bijan and they were laughing about my idea and they were very disagreeing. I said, "Look, there's no harm. Let me start with the marketing." I put advertisement for industrial unit

for rental and I put the price of £2,000 a month, for example, or £1,200 a month. The respond was so enormous and the applicants. I quickly increased the price. I was increasing the price, and still the demand was there. We did the first unit. I explained to my uncle, "Isolate that unit with its own entrance. It will become self-contained. All we have to give them is a toilet, the unit, and the services like water and electricity. The rest is for them." We had the first tenant who was doing new tires for bicycles and motorbikes. It was so successful. I made a calculation. I said, "Look, it's much more productive and less work to do." My uncle was happy, Bijan was happy, and [04:30:00] we started marketing and releasing units. Within a year, we converted all the units to industrial estates.

In the meantime, we had a friend in the local authorities. He helped us to get planning permission to a very big unit at the end of that section. We built that as well. We end up within 18 months or 2 years, with big, big income and less manpower for the farm [04:30:58]. We only had one caretaker to look after the garden and to maintain the services to the units and we have very healthy monthly and annual income.

This led us to go to further activity on building industrial estate. We found some plots with planning or getting planning with the purpose of building and either sell it or rent it with a good profit. This took us until the late 1970s.

Did you meet your wife at this point? [04:32:00]

Sorry?

Can you tell me about meeting your wife at this point?

Yes. I have to go back. While we were doing all of this, I was in my 20s, since I came back from Israel. Firstly, I was very open-minded and sensitive guy, very successful in university. I met Jewish young people founding relationship as well, which was excellent. But the problem is because of the background history in our family, I became much more mature to compare with my age. That was one issue. The other issue was I did end up being double character. In one hand, I had my original nature of being very kind and caring for other people and responsible person.

In the other hand, I become very, very defensive in my mind whenever I was feeling [04:34:00] a little bit of risk or danger or threat or confrontation. I was going from one mood to another, mood of defense. I was very successful and very hard on that. None of those were suited for a young man of 20 years old. But it was manageable and enjoyable, I couldn't complain. I had a good life of 1970s while I was young and working. Even I was working very hard, but I had my private life as well. In the meantime, something elementary happened as well, which was because the reconstruction of our family and the style of it, and when the Empire went down starting from the very bottom, there was a vacuum of power in our family.

I was bombarded by responsibilities and solving problems which usually a young boy in the family is not doing it. It's the parents and grandparents are putting the guidelines. Without me wanting taking power or authority, I've become gradually [04:36:00] the authority. That was another principle change in my personal life that affected all the rest of my life until today full of responsibility and decision-making. Not because I wanted, but I was appointed or given without my personal will, but I enjoy it and I didn't mind. Coming to towards end of 1970s, I said, "Better to go for family life."

I cleared myself from all the relationship only going out with some of my friends and clearing my mind for formation of the family unit and getting married. We have a neighbour which was a family friend old family friend of my parents and our neighbours in the same street and the daughter Valantine was the youngest and the last child in the family. Occasionally, we were seeing each other in the street and say "Hi." Anyway, [04:38:00] it was proposed. In Iran those days, it wasn't arranged marriages like the generation before, but it was semi-arranged.

You couldn't go out with a Jewish girl without asking the parents before and knowing that it's for the purpose of getting married, so informal proposition. That happened. I said, "Let them meet." On the first night, I went to my future in-laws to meet Valantine. His father was sitting in a formal way or sitting next to him and my mother-in-law. Valantine was sitting on the other side, and her father was keep talking to me. Out of politeness, I was talking to him. There was no conversation or communication with Valantine.

At the end of the night, I said goodnight and I got her telephone number. I said, "May I have your telephone number." She said, "Fine." She told me later on when I left. She told her mum,

"Oh, this boy is not for me. He didn't bother even to talk to me. He's not good." Anyway, he was working as a secretary in a Japanese company. [04:40:00] The next day, I phoned her and start conversation and "How has it been. How are you?" and few more conversations. I said, "Let's get out together." Reluctantly, she said, "Okay, let's do it."

We made an appointment, it was winter, and that evening Tehran was snowing like mad. There was like half a meter of snow and it was very difficult to drive. Anyway, she was on the same street. I went with my car, picking her up, and very carefully drove into a restaurant which had music and dance as well, which was famous. We went to that restaurant, Chardash. We had excellent evening together and close communication, and she was so happy. I was happy too. I said, "Good night, and be in touch together."

The next day, she told her mum, "Oh, he's such a sweet boy. I like him." [laughs] Then after a few months, we were engaged, getting married in 1977, a year before revolution.

Were there any specific Iranian traditions [04:42:00] in your wedding that would be different from a Jewish wedding here, for example?

Yes. Our wedding was in one of the top hotels, and it was a first wedding because they just refurbished it. Royal Gardens was belonging to family Beroukhi. The wedding in Iran was completely different. It was not sitting, we were dancing and serving dinner, you could serve yourself, but lavish one, and the *chuppah* in our specific case was by Rabbi Yedidia Shofet. Also, the *chuppah* itself was different, was not constructed, it was different.

How?

Because they used this *talliot* to cover with young boys holding it, making like a *chuppah* but not constructed like a European way. There were no speeches, just the ceremony followed by dancing and dinner, dancing again. It was wonderful but completely different than European. Soon, Valantine [04:44:00] become pregnant, and in the meantime, there was change of situation in Iran. There were sound of revolution and people coming to the street chanting against the regime. Initially, was very polite and monitored way, but then it become harsher and harsher saying, "Death to Shah," which was unthinkable. It was small groups and growing

to the bigger groups, and sound of ayatollahs and Khomeini moved from Iraq to Paris and the atmosphere was becoming completely different.

How did you feel about the revolutionaries and their ideas? Did you agree, did you disagree?

Now. In general, the population were very pro-revolution. Before the revolution, every evening people were going to the flat roofs because in Iran they were all flat roofs, and imagine a million people going to the roofs every evening and shouting, "Death to Shah," or [04:46:00] "Viva Ayatollah." Even the intellectuals, even the industrialists. I didn't feel good about it. I didn't feel good about it because I knew it was going to be extremist.

In the meantime, I had the experience of the army. While we were expanding and we turned to industrialist rental and I had more free time. I said, "Look, let me go to the army", because it was obligation, "and finish with it, otherwise, I cannot have a passport or traveling." I voluntarily went to the unit to register myself and because there was a rule that anybody who is finished university and has a degree after three months training become officer rather than a soldier, I went through that and there were exams at the end. I was the first one. I could choose a province.

There was no place in Tehran because it was granted to the people with strong connections, and I saw Gorgan. I didn't know Iran so well at that time. Later, yes, but now they said, "Gorgan is the best, my friends, because it's a wonderful weather, [04:48:00] is full of greenery and everything." I said, "Okay," because I was the first one to choose. I said, "Gorgan." They said, "Okay, you go to Gorgan." At the time of Shah, he made his own semi revolution by creating army for education, army to help the farmers, army to do this rather than army for fighting. That section that I was dedicated was *Sepayit Agrigit*, it means helping the farmers.

I said, "Okay." It was going to that province to the agricultural center which was part of the Ministry of Agriculture, and namely, helping the farmers.

They were saying other groups there were going to teach writing and reading in Farsi, then - that was 18 months experience. I found out how that regime was empty, because was whatever I was seeing was just empty statistic and no action, and just waste of time of young people on

the revolution of Shah, which I was neutral [04:50:00] in my approach towards politics anyway, in Iran.

I said, "It's not right," to myself because they were giving us every month a cheque for a salary of doing nearly nothing. There was nothing to do anyway even if you wanted to do something. I was half in Gorgan, half in Tehran, dealing with my business, and going for fun over there. That gave me good experience of knowing how the political system in Iran is working, which was just ending up with the statistics which has nothing to do with reality.

Then it helped me to understand why people are not happy because, at the time of Shah, there was big progress towards industrializing the country and modernizing the industry and helping to the industry and becoming a big producer of goods and export rather than import. In that sense, it was very good, but there was no freedom of speech and there was no equality of how to deal with people. I could sense it because there was so much corruption and bribery.

My daughter was born in 1977. I went to get the birth certificate. [04:52:00] There was a law that Iranians cannot have foreign names, only Iranian names. So the revolution is coming, I had some nice Iranian names, but then my sense said, "Oh, I'm better to go international name, so in case that we have to emigrate, I will end up with international name." One of my friends has a young, beautiful secretary called Rita. I said, "Look, it is a nice name." I went to that officer, said, "What is the name of your daughter, newborn?" I said Rita Elghanian." He said, "Mr. Elghanian, you know you cannot have a non-Iranian name." I had equal to £100 or something in my pocket. I did put it in his drawer. They were always leaving their drawers open. I said, "But we are Jewish." "Oh, yes, you can." That was showing that the tip of the corruption reaches to the very end. I had another story, for example.

Can I ask you, does this mean that Jews were allowed different names? It was accepted that Jews were not quite Iranian, or [04:54:00] was that how it was seen?

No, the officer has his own discretion and was using that as an excuse to have the bribe. He didn't care. If I was not paying him, he was insisting, "No, no, no."

Did you feel a growth in the way that you were treated as a Jew in those few months before the revolution and during the revolution?

No, there was no difference. Especially in Tehran, it was no different and there was no anti-semitic slogans. One of the clever things that happened because we had a Jewish-Iranian center headed by Habib Elghanian, which was executed later and its members. Our Chief Rabbi was *Hakham* Yedidia Shofet, he did our ceremony and the wedding. He was dedicated to Jewish community and every New Year ceremonies, he was going to meet with other significant people, to Shah, shake hands and kissing his hand, et cetera.

Iranian community by that way, they were not involved in politics but [04:56:00] they were known as pro-Shah. There were a group of young people including Hamid Sabi which is at the moment is my friend in London. There were a group of intellectual young people and they came with some idea of going against Shah, demonstration. It was a tactical decision. They went to the old committee and said, "Look, if this committee stay pro-Shah to the end, revolution will succeed. You think they will let the Jews to survive?"

They organized a tactical demonstration, pro-revolution. There was daily demonstrations of millions coming to give slogans and shouting, million every day, or every few days. They joined to that, they made declaration, "We are pro-revolution," so they split their leadership, and that helped a lot after revolution and during revolution. Even until today, the regime never attacked directly the Jewish [04:58:00] community as a whole.

Can you now describe the actual revolution for me, what you remember of the--

As the demonstration were continuing, there was a sense that the chance of revolution is growing daily. Ayatollah Khomeini was in Paris, he was sending his statements, and the European-Western media was promoting it and they're resending cassettes and messages. There was a balance of power between the regime, revolutionaries, and the army. As long as the army was standing by Shah, the balance was there. Obviously, if the army was giving in, that was the end of it, and that's what happened.

The pressure was growing and Shah made his famous speech which was very wrong. He came and apologized to the nation. He said, "Wrongdoings have been done and we're going to correct it," and he was talking [05:00:00] in the point of weakness. That even strengthened the hand of revolutionary people. And something to know is prior to revolution, it wasn't the power Ayatollah's and their followers, there were all groups; the group of communists, the group of

Muslim extremists, the group of Muslim moderates, which was Ayatollah. There were a group of Muslim in the middle, and there were a group of young intellectuals, and they were all united to a full revolution. It wasn't only one group.

Shah had various tactical movements like changing the Prime Minister and bringing army officer as a prime minister, and strengthening the army and promoting the army [05:02:00] with the hope that it will help. In principle, none of them were matching the will of the people and those groups that were all pro-revolution.

Nearly a month before revolution, Shah decided to leave. He was advised by his prime minister. He said, "Look, if you stay, there will be always more and more demonstrations against you. Get out of the country. We bring rule of law and you come back, but you come back to be the king, not the ruler. You have to change course," so he accepted.

With a cry, he and his close family, his wife Shah Farah, and close family, and their children and close family left Iran. They left Iran and demonstration was going to stop. Eventually, Ayatollah decided to return to Tehran after years of exile, and that was a decisive move.

How did you feel when you heard that Ayatollah was going to come back?

The temperature [05:04:00] was going up, political temperature. He came back and part of the army went to respect him and give him a red carpet to come. He went to make his first speech, which was really meaningless and full of rubbish, but he could sell. He could sell and he gave hope to the nation. Everybody was under the impression that, okay, Ayatollah is coming, he's going to stay in Rome, like Vatican, and there will be democracy in the country. That was the acceptable thinking of the whole nation nearly.

Yourself included? The Jewish community included?

Jewish community, we were very skeptical. They were selling as much-- It was becoming more and more difficult to sell house or business and everything, but they were selling. They were opening account abroad and sending either \$100,000, \$1 million, \$2 million, \$3 million, \$5 million, whatever, in their ability as a security. They knew that whatever happened, always

Jews will be suffering, so there was a lot of capital escape for Jewish community, and even Muslims. We had a lot of Muslims friends, [05:06:00] they were capitalizing in case.

It didn't take long for Ayatollah to break the cycle, and that was the day that army gave up. People ran to the army bases, taking arms, breaking the prison doors, freeing the other criminals, political, everybody [laughs] from prison. Then next day, there was chaos in Iran. People were showing gun and machine guns in their hand, firing in the air and celebrating the revolution.

Where were you when this was happening?

I was in Iran and I was just watching.

Physically, you were at home and you could see this happening outside your window? Can you --

Yes, we were going out driving, there was no more traffic light, or working, or officers. Revolutionary, saying you go, we gone, "Don't go. Stop," da, da, da, controlling the town. Then immediately, they started making revolutionary committees.

You were still happy to go out at that time? Clearly, you couldn't go out then, it wasn't safe.

No, no, no, we could go out, [05:08:00] but it was a very tense situation, very, very tense.

What I want to understand a little bit more is just about you on that day. You went to work like usual the day after the prisoners were released?

Even a month before, all the businesses were closed. Even three months before because the import and export was stopped. They were not releasing goods. They were not allowing export. The country was paralyzed.

What did you do? Obviously, you realized things had changed dramatically overnight.

We were just watching what's happening and it was very disappointing. A lot of people, even like myself said, "Look, this is a temporary situation," must end up with the stability either by

return of Shah or a democratic government-appointed, because that was all the slogans, before revolution and during revolution, democracy.

And in actual fact, a democratic government was formed, but there were two powers. [05:10:00] The government of Bazargan, which was the intellectuals and they were pro-democracy, pro-parliament, and they wanted to bring peace and quietness. In the other hand, group of extremists of mullahs in Rome, like Vatican. There was a challenge of power between the two. The Prime Minister at the time, he came to the radio, television, the day after revolution and said, "Look, the revolution was successful. Let's go to normality. Let's celebrate and go to normality, rule of law, import, export, industry, everything to be free." People like me were saying, "Oh, that's it." In the other hand, the Ayatollah were sending different message of rubbishing them. The government, it was a puppet at the end, not able to do anything, and people were puzzled, "What's going on?"

Then while I was there, something interesting happened. The Ayatollahs were pro-revolutionaries [05:12:00] before revolution, including the communist, the Mujahideen. The Mujahideen e khalq which was very extreme of Islam, an intellectuals, pro-democracy. They were united against Shah and pro-Khomeini, and Khomeini was hand to hand with them. As soon as revolution happened, a group of those factions were coming for demonstration and saying, "No, now is for communists," or "Now is for intellectuals." Or now--

What happened was the group of Khomeini, they're very truthful, they started picking up a group of them to destroy. They didn't go against all. First, they said, for example, "There is no place for communism." They took all the leaders of communists, people that were supporting him aside and destroying their group. Then they went to Mujahideen e khalq. They were extreme Islamists and had gone in force to the very extreme, rule of Islam, sharia. Then he went to them. [05:14:00] It happened within the first year.

The first year of revolution, I was in Iran. I was watching all this going for them, then other groups, other groups, the intellectuals, eventually they went to the government and ministers. Which ministers? The ones that were right hand of Ayatollah in Paris, and there was no mercy. So gradually, they destroyed all his allies, cleanness and brining changing the-- I was not in

Iran, but soon after they changed even the government of intellectuals and bringing a pro-Ayatollah government.

Can you tell me about leaving Iran?

We were still collecting rent from our industrial estate. My mum was in Iran. Just before revolution, a year or two years before, we bought an apartment in Israel in Tel Aviv, and my brother emigrated. He said because he has no power, [05:16:00] talent of diplomacy, and there was a strong possibility of confrontation with the officers for that or other reason, so he went with his family to Israel. I was there with my uncle, we could do nothing, just collecting rent and managing our tenant and portfolio. And I told myself, "Look, there is no point." In the meantime, Rita was born. She was only six months, eight months old, and in the meantime, about six months after revolution, something dramatic happened as well, which was affecting the Jewish community.

My auntie, Nikkḥah was married to Habib Elghanian, her first cousin. Habib Elghanian was the head of the Elghanian family at the time with his brothers, and he was the head of Jewish community. He was a prominent person. His wife, Nikkḥah, died just before revolution. At the time of the revolution, he was out of Iran, but he had the guts, he came back to Iran. He said, "I've done nothing wrong. I'm industrialist." He went back to Iran.

He was working in his office, one day he was arrested, and there were a lot of talks of mediation and a deal [05:18:00] to release him internationally, et cetera. The day of year of my uncle's death, he was in prison. We said, "Okay, let's go to the cemetery," like the annual respect as usual for Jewish traditions.

Sorry, your uncle, Habib, when he was in prison, and you went to the cemetery for another uncle?

No. His wife died.

Oh, the anniversary of his wife?

Anniversary of his wife. We all gathered in one address of the family, and it was about 20 people. I was in Iran. Still my dad was in Iran. My mum was in Iran. We said, "Okay, we go

for the anniversary," and Habib, he was in prison. It was seven o'clock in the morning, we went to visit, seven or eight o'clock in the morning and one of his sons, Fereydun was still in Iran. He was coming with us as well to the anniversary of his mum.

We were all standing waiting for a few more people coming, and Fereydun went to his car to listen to the news and coming back. He said, "I'll come back in a minute." He came back crying like mad, "They killed my dad." That's the [05:20:00] evening of the anniversary of his wife. That was how it was working, they were waking up the prisoner, let's go for trial, two o'clock in the morning.

The trial was 5, 10 minutes. "What is your name?" Habib Elghanian or whatsoever. "You're accused of being a Zionist against the will of people, against Islam, against that, and spying. What is your defense?" No lawyers or whatever. He was making personal defense, which obviously was refused.

The judge, "You'll be executed shortly. If you have any will, you have half an hour or whatever to write and he went to write to his children." That letter was out by officers and given to his family and that was it. In the morning, all the papers have Habib Elghanian showing in the papers tak, tak, tak, tak. I don't remember even what happened. Did we go for a funeral or for ceremony anniversary or not? I'm lost, because it was such-- I think it was all canceled and everybody was disappointed and we were --

What date was this of the year?

It was '78 spring-summer, you can search for execution date. [05:22:00]

Did anyone expect that this kind of thing would happen in the Jewish Community or was it completely out of the blue?

People couldn't imagine to that extreme. After the revolution, one something that you should understand, they started eliminating the top level. Ministers, ex-ministers, ex-prime ministers, ex-servants to the royal family, whoever were close or close to intelligence services. Every day was news, pictures, death sentence, death sentence and all the same. There was Ayatollah Khomeini he became famous. He was ruthless, he was running the show. Was working, he was

not listening to anybody, just finishing. Ex-prime ministers, ministers, lady minister of education, he was accused at his time he made camps for girls and boys.

A mixture of boys and girls for the camp, a educational camp and it wasn't liked by Ayatollahs mixing girls and boys. Executed. For any reason, they finish with the top elite [05:24:00] but nobody expected Habib Elghanian, a Jewish merchant, to be one of them. He was not a politician. Well, it happened, so it sends a very strong message to the community of danger and what can happen to anybody.

They finish with the elite then as soon as they finish with the elite, it took him several months, few months then as I said, they went to the allies. Ally after ally clearing, the Mujahideen were the biggest allies of them, they are powerless in exile. All the intellectuals, they rubbish them, they finish with them.

They didn't leave any chance for any opposition to grow or to show itself whether, it was ally or ex-elite, they cleared. That day passed and I was thoughtful, I said, "Look, I'm Elghanian, Habib Elghanian was killed." Everywhere I will have to say, I have to prove that I'm not related directly to man or we can't leave, it was awkward situation. I told myself, "You know what? Let me take off. The business doesn't matter if I'm here or not." Before revolution, [05:26:00] three years before we had a new partner, one of our great friends from university for import of beer and lagers and distribution and we choose, unfortunate to face the revolution. Worst type of export-import.

I said, "You know what, I'm going to London to my ex-partner, settle in or analyzing." Then my sisters, one of them in America, one of them in Israel, I said, "Look, then I go to California and coming back to Tehran to see what's happening." I bought a ticket of Tehran-London-Los Angeles-Tehran. I told my wife, "Look, you live here with Rita. I go for a few months couple of months and I come back." I came to London, just randomly. I was staying with my brother-in-law for few weeks as a guest.

He bought a house and refurbishing and the builder, Mr. Richfied, Jimmy Richfield, and I become friendly with him. I was going with my brother-in-law to his house that he was refurbishing and talking to him. My English was very basic from school. I was good in Hebrew and Farsi, but not in English. I told him this story in brief, I said "Look. I'm [05:28:00] in the

property business in Iran, industrial estate, but I understand property. Is there anything that can buy in the meantime and refurbish and sell it?" He said, "No, there's no profit in it." I said, "What?" My brother-in-law was living in Golders Green. He said, "No, you have to do conversion." I said, "What is conversion?" I didn't know.

He said, "Come with my van." He took me to Highgate, to one of his sites. He said, "Look, I have a client who bought this property, it was one house, made it three apartments. It's called conversion." I said, "Okay, can I find one of those houses in Golders Green to buy?" He said, "No, in Golders Green, there are small houses." I said, "Where to go then?" He said, "You go to Hampstead." I said, "Okay." I knew Hampstead station next to Golders Green and I said, "Okay," so I buy a house, and we have no money anyway. I said, "Oh, if I find the project, I find the money."

You left Iran, even after the execution of Habib Elghanian? You left expecting to go back? You thought everything would be calm enough to live in Iran?

Yes, I was in on the belief that I would go back. Genuinely, genuinely, genuinely. To my logic, it wasn't sustainable situation. Not Shah returning but because at the time, they were from the government of Bazargan, [05:30:00] which none of them were Mullahs, they were all civil people, ministry of that, ministry of that. They had real intention of bringing rule of law and the slogans that they were publishing before, and their manifesto. Everything was positive on paper. In practice, it was something else.

What were your first impressions of the UK, or England, London?

Luckily, because I was in my time of being a student in Israel, I was familiar with the Western culture to some extent, but to some extent, UK is completely different than Israel. While I was a student, I went to Europe, I knew about Europe, but not in detail. So it was a very new experience. My calculation was before, I said, "Look, I'm going to Western countries, in any western country, a man will find a way of working and managing your family. Why shouldn't I?" Okay, other people, my friends, they sent a \$ 1million, \$2 million, 10 million dollar, the least was \$1 million, otherwise, they wouldn't even dare to emigrate. [05:32:00] I said, "I don't mind. Let me try with a positive attitude."

Had you already managed to take the money out of Iran?

Very, very little, less than \$100,00, \$50,000, maybe 50,000 dollar and it's was good enough for a year or two years to survive, if you don't work, with very little but I had something that other people didn't have, the experience of life, of building from nothing.

What made you decide not to go back to Iran and to bring your wife and your child over?

Something happened. I went to Hampstead, I went to a lot of state agents, at the time 1978, there was a recession and I didn't know the prices of property have gone down by 20%, 25%, the interest was high and was difficult to sell things. I went to one of the agents after insisting they said, "Look, there is a big house with planning permission to make six flats in Arkwright Road, Number 45. You can buy it, and the price was £168,000 or £170,000 before you can buy it for £140,000, £130,000."

I did negotiate to the very bottom of £107,000 and the vendor was Tony Joseph. He was one of the developers and he wanted to [05:34:00] get rid of the project, and we didn't have the money. But we had, I'm coming from a prominent family and background and other people had the money. I said, "Okay, somehow I'll make the money." I did but borrowing friends, family, whatever, and we exchanged.

I said, "Look, it'll take a year, year and a half, and in the meantime, there will be the revolution will settle, and then I decide to go back. Fine. I'm not losing anything, there's nothing to do in Iran." My mum was helping us, she was-- my dad collecting the rent, sending us little pieces of money for daily expenses and from our more industrial estate, and I said, "I will be fine."

Your mum was still in Iran?

My parents were still in Iran. My brother was in Israel, my sister, one of them in America, one of them in Israel, the one in Israel also, while I was here, she went to America to join my sister. I rent a flat, a one-bedroom, very small, I can't say rubbish flat to compare with the our standard of life in Iran. Then it become, I came June or July, so the execution of Habib Elghanian must happened about February [05:36:00] or March. Yes, because it was beginning of a spring, and I did contact my wife, I said, "Look, pack and come with Rita and I'll have a one-bedroom flat

and we'll see what we can do." I went to see if they have the Jewish organization. I told them my wife is coming, they were organizing the visa. Because immigration has become and travelling to UK-- Before revolution, Iranian passport was the king, you can come to any European without visa, but are hardening in this situation and visa situation has become a problem. Anyway, my wife had the passport, she went to get the ticket and eventually, just September-

1979.

-1978, '79, sorry. 1979.

So a year later?

No, it was '78 my daughter was born. Yes, it was 1979, I came earlier and she came on September or October. It's 1979, we are in London, with a rented apartment and a house to convert with planning permission and [05:38:00] my knowledge was next to zero but I had the talent of, as I said before in high school, I was very good to become architect and architect. I had talent of three dimension understanding and experience of property, whether it is industrial or non-industrial basic is basic, and being ready mentally for being successful. Nothing could stop me, one way or another way.

Eventually, Rita came and unfortunately, on her birthday of first year, I was not in Iran to celebrate and always miss it. Rita was one year and as soon as-- she was only one-year-old child. In Iran, my grandparents are still alive, my parents are there, surrounded by love and knowing people. Coming to London, it was Valantine, my wife, and me, so she was feeling strange and sticking to me and was hugging her and really crying because I was missing her. Anyway, we started the life in London.

When did your parents move? Did they move or did they stay in Iran?

They stayed [05:40:00] until my dad passed away, which I will tell you. My parents were in Iran, they were collecting and managing the industrial estate with my uncle David and Bijan was in Israel. I told him, "Look, we are still partner and let me establish this new company and see how it goes."

We had no money to develop the property. I went to the bank, NatWest, I have no loan in it. I said, "I want development loan." Anyway, they gave me £70,000, which was-- Yes, I did need £100,000, they agreed with £60,00 or £70,000. I said, "Okay, I'll finished part and I sell and finance the rest. I managed it."

Our profit was a garden flat, I said, "Okay, I'll live there. On the contrary, if you live in the flat, you don't pay tax after you sell it and I turn all our profit to that flat. Living there for two, nearly two years, and we started the business. In the meantime, I was watching news of Iran, and nothing positive was happening. Even I said, "If people were coming and it was becoming more and more difficult to get out of Iran, it was by smugglers already and very difficult." I said, "Look, it's not the normal situation that I can't go and come back [05:42:00] and I'm better to stay and focus for a year, three years until the situation is--"

I still was believing that this is a temporary situation, and we have already a lot of assets in Iran, our industrial estate, houses, lands that we bought with the investment from profit of the rental income, et cetera. This was a relatively big portfolio. I bought a rubbish car in London, a FIAT, Italian car and I was free every day.

What I did was, I was going towards the town, and whenever I was seeing is scaffolding, I was just a stopping because when the builders are working, they leave the doors open. I just was walking, I was cheeky, I was walking to the sites and I saw maybe 100 cases. I saw all the stages of demolition, building, finishing and it was new experience because in Iran, we didn't have wood and partitions, we had concrete and metal. Here, it was wood and open-plan kitchen and small units, which we didn't have any experience in Iran. I had scan all the stages while I had the time, and thinking of creating [05:44:00] a new version, what it was doing cleverly, any ideas combined then I was going just quickly and get an agent and they were approving it, the design and marketing, it was very successful.

We sold the first units, I had cash, we had the profit, I was ready to develop. I said, "Okay, in Iran, there's nothing to do." I was begging, begging every day until I found another property and then another property. First three, four years, we were doing one property at a time, then two property at the time, then three, four, and I created the new style of three dimensions, which was unique in London, by creating galleries and triple dimension using steps. Not one level in

the apartment, using galleries, using other means of design, which was unique and we could sell our conversions instantly without any difficulties because of the new style.

That's how you built up your business in the UK?

Yes.

What point did you think, "I can't go back to Iran, this is permanent."?

Year three or four. Year three or four. I gave up [05:46:00] my hopes, that's because I saw how that regime establishing itself and get rid of all opposition, intellectuals and everything and become united in only one sense of religion and authoritarian, I taught that is the end. I was following the news, I started reading *The Times* every day, my English was improving. I didn't go to English classes, I just was doing hard work reading papers, newspapers, letters from solicitors and discussions. Still my English is [laughs] very basic.

However, 1985, '84, '85, we became major developer dealer in the area. We were buying the properties, getting the planning, shifting any sitting tenant. At the time, there was regulated tenant houses, with regulated tenants, negotiating with them. I've learned the skill of negotiation with regulated talent, clearing, having the planning permission, preparing your package, ready for development, selling to other dealers and developers.

The agent could trust my judgement and my word, the banks were giving us a lot of credit, and accepting more evaluation as the valuation because [05:48:00] I was performing so accurately.

You were going to tell me about what was happening with your parents in Iran?

Yes, they're still in Iran, in communication. In the meantime, Sally was born and we moved to a new house, we bought a new house for the first time, it was 1984. I asked my parents, "Why not come to London to visit us and America to visit my sisters?" And that's what they did. They came to London, they stayed with us and then going to LA, enjoying life with my sisters. I said, "Do you want to move to London or America?"

My dad said, "No. We have our environment. We have our friends, we play cards every day." He loves to play cards and enjoying his retirement, and truly for elders, it's become more difficult to emigrate because you lose your flexibility.

They felt safe saying in Iran?

100% because my mum was in control and she is a very strong lady. Whether at the time of Shah [05:50:00] or after revolution and in Iran, where there was, as I said in my interview before, they always had respect for ladies. She was managing with any situation and justifying that we are Elghanian, but not directly related. My children did a lot for the country. Still, they want to come back or whatever reason, explanation, but she was okay. Then, coming late 1980's, my son Daniel was born. In the meantime, we moved to big house in Hampstead, Number 43 Akenside Road, next to the 45, the first property.

It has a problem to be solved, with a short lease and Reform Act, which I was becoming expert on those. We were living in a massive house of equal to 15 rooms. Big, big house, double fronted, with three floors. Daniel was born. My parents are still in Teheran, my grandparents in Teheran. I asked, I was talking to my mum and dad regularly. They were refusing to come. I said, "We are comfortable here." [05:52:00] It was the case. Then, after a few months in 1988, when Daniel was six months old or whatever, in our regional farmland we had industrial estates and a swimming pool and gardens, and entertainment area.

My parents were inviting people every weekend to join them. One of the Fridays or Saturdays, near the weekend, because Friday and Saturday was the weekend in Tehran. Friends were there, with my parents and they had lunch. My dad said, "Goodbye to everybody, I'm going to have a rest. I'll join you in a minute." He went to, we had a bed in the shadowy situation. He asked my mum to give him a bit of water. My mum went to bring the water. It took a minute. My dad finished, by heart attack, massive heart attack and died.

We don't have ambulance, we don't have any treatment. We had the news, I was really deep. I was devastated. He was only 68. [05:54:00] Now, the situation has changed, but mum was left alone with her parents. We were neighbors in our street. My parents had two apartments with my uncle. We had two apartments beside them. She was left alone. She became very depressed and with anxiety.

I was thinking and thinking, and I said, "Look, I have to make a choice. While my mum is there, we are safe in our assets. Nobody's touching it. She will get a rent and having a financially easy life. The other choice is, to come to UK and enjoy life with the grandchildren and children." I talked to her myself and I said, "Look," the first choice is very selfish from her side because we are appointing her as a caretaker for assets, nothing more, nothing less. I said, "Look, the life is more valuable than assets."

I made this decision. As I said, that was my tasks from early ages of when I was 20, to make decisions and to be responsible for the welfare of the family. I had a discussion with my mum and I said, "Look, there is no point. Grandpa, grandma, you, in Teheran. [05:56:00] What is it?" I made a plan. I said, "You travel with grandpa and grandma. I'll meet you. You'll come to London, they go to America to join their grandchildren and their son."

That is what was the plan of action and performance. At the time, it's become more and more difficult to have, for Iranians, to travel and to find a home abroad. It would become very, very difficult. The procedure was either by smugglers or by proper passport to go to Vienna, the Jewish community. There was a camp of refugees. To stay there, it was a long queue. Minimum six, nine months, some people 18 months, until they get refugee status in America or somewhere in Europe.

The first destination was Vienna. I hope you are familiar with it. The organization here was CBF, the contact for Vienna and refugees. So far, my status was not a refugee. I came as investor because of my idea that I'm going back, there's no point of being refugee and being involved with the refugees. I was so a believer of [05:58:00] going back.

Then, my brother joined me, after the business was growing, after three, four years. He came as a refugee. I did consultation with our lawyers and CBF and I said, "The best thing for my mum is to come to join me as a non-refugee, just joining the family and supported by Iraj Elghanian." And for my parents, yes, to go to Vienna, to get visa to America with the reason of joining the family.

When did you get your British citizenship status?

Now, we came here, as I said, with a normal Iranian passport, asking for permitted visa, for working visa. It was after five years, I had right to apply for British citizenship.

You never had to become refugee status before?

No, no. My brother, yes, rest of the family, yes, but not me and my mum. I'm very systematic. Let's put it that way. When I came to this country [06:00:00] with little knowledge of the law, planning law, litigation law, and everything, I did something right to create a team of professionals around me. I started with Monty Frenkel, our lawyer. He was a top lawyer and very creative and very helpful to our business in general, to staff it, then Paul Benveniste a surveyor, then David Pearlman as a content, and changing to Lee Parris.

In general, I was relying on professional people and not to do things without proper advice. As soon as we decided for the project of bringing my mum, I did very systematic. The consultation with our lawyer, he said, "Look, Iraj, you have to prove that a) you are supporting your mum and dad while they were in Iran by your income." My source of income was our industrial estate. It wasn't them. We were supporting them.

"Then you have to prove that you can afford to accommodate her and look after her without asking for any benefits." In the question of benefits, when I came to this country, when I think now, I was entitled for benefits, [06:02:00] but our culture was [laughs] never that, especially in our case, and the family thinking of benefits, was silly. Except one thing: child benefits. And I never wanted my wife to be depending on the state. That was our culture.

What about Jewish life in the UK? Did you join a synagogue?

Yes, of course. I'll come to that after sorting out my mum. For my mum, I started with preparation of documentation about our house, how big it is, our business, or employing builders and contractors, accounts, three years' account, this, that, it was a handful of documentation. It took me a couple of months to prepare everything and I told my mum, "We are ready. Please buy the ticket to Europe."

[silence]

And I planned this way, I said, "You buy a ticket from Tehran to Switzerland. Then from Switzerland, I sort out your status, whatever it takes, and then we go with Grandpa and Grandma to Vienna, Austria, and sort out their [06:04:00] position as well." They had a ticket coming to Switzerland, I had my tickets to meet them. I went two days before. They were coming on Thursday, I went on Tuesday, Wednesday. I found that there was a rented accommodation like apartments, holiday apartments. Through connections, I found that. I went there to book an apartment for them because I knew my grandma likes cooking for Friday night, and I bought everything for Friday night, kosher chicken, all the elements of rice, and the ingredients for dinner. I made the flat ready, and they landed.

I went to the airport to pick them up and going to the apartment to stay. As soon as they arrived, I said, "Okay, I'll make an appointment for British Embassy in Switzerland." That was the best destination to get a visa for my mum. I found, in the meantime, it's a Monday eleven o'clock, let's say, fine, we enjoyed the weekend together. When my mum arrived, she had a package of medications for depression and everything and sleeping tablets. I put everything in the dustbin. I said, "Mummy, you don't need all this." [06:06:00] She said, "How can I sleep?" I said, "You will sleep." By seeing me and thinking of the family thing and everything, she was very calm, encouraged, and happy. I took her over the weekend to the mountains. It was snowing, had a good time, then get ready for Monday. Monday, coming and my--

Oh, Friday, my grandma made Iranian-Jewish chicken soup and rice and everything, we enjoyed, lovely. Going to British Embassy, make appointment and I went with all the documentations, and they said, "Okay," I met the reception. "Okay, Mr. Elghanian, fill the application," which I did with supporting documentation. "Okay, the authority," the ambassador or whoever it was, "will meet you in two months' time."

I said, "What, two months' time? I have business to run in London. I have men working for us. I'm responsible for an industry, a company that's creating jobs, and a business in London. My mum doesn't speak English. You mean that I will stay here, two months, with my mum and leave my business?" He said, "Okay. [06:08:00] Wait." He went to the authority and he said, "Okay. You come tomorrow for interview." I said, "Okay, it's better."

We packed and go, and the next day, I went to meet the consulate of British Embassy in Switzerland. I told him about it, I said, "Look, I started from scratch, we are young, we are big business, growing business, those are the annual accounts of three, four, five years of our account, and here is the photos of our house, big house. I can afford to look after my mum."

He asked me, "Mr. Elghanian, I have a question. Why you or your mum don't ask for refugee status, which automatically can be granted?" I said, "Because we are too proud." [laughs] "We leave our country, we think it's a temporary situation, and we go back. There's no need for refugee status." By that declaration, seeing all the documentation, put a stamp for permanent residency for my mum, free to go to London.

Now we came home, now I said, "Okay." I've organized tickets to Vienna from Switzerland and [06:10:00] next day traveling to Vienna. We went to Vienna with the recommendation that there were two organizations of looking after refugees. One of them, I had a good connection through family relationship, and they said, "Look, Mr. Elghanian is coming to you, a prominent family of Iran and the grandparents want to go to America to join their son and the family." We told them, "Look, look after them, and at the end of the day, we make a contribution to your organization as well, just donation." I said, "Don't worry, we just do our job." We arrived. We went to a hotel. My grandma was not used to hotel business, and I searched, I found a holiday apartment in suburbs of Vienna. I said, "They may take a couple of months or whatever, they need accommodation, let's see what will happen," et cetera.

I moved them within two days or two nights in the hotel, then rented that apartment holiday let, which has a little kitchen because I knew my mum-- my grandma wants to cook, and she's not used to go to a restaurant or European [06:12:00] foods. That was sorted, and in the meantime, the next day we went to their organization, I forgot the name, and application.

I asked the lady, "What is the timetable?" I said, "My grandpa is not well," he had a stroke, "and he's late 70s 80s." He said, "If you're lucky, three to six months." I said, "Three to six months, who will look after?" He said, "Look, we have to camp here, we have organization, unless you prove that he's on a medical basis, and they give priority."

I said, "What does it mean?" He said, "Look, you have to go for medical examination to do this, this, that, that," a big list "until they have their approval for give priority." And I'm there.

As I said, I was so good on their systematic procedures, I said, "Okay, give me the list of what to do exactly and we start running the ball." He said, "Okay, first you have to go to doctor appointment," da, da, da, and then blood tests, this, that, with their results and their decision, et cetera.

I said, "Okay." I went and phoned to make [06:14:00] an appointment with that doctor, and next day I was with my grandma, my mum, and my grandpa with the taxi going to the doctor and--

You succeeded in getting him the status.

He said, "Okay you have to do X, Y, Z," da, da, da, "I sent letters to that laboratory, your dad, your grandpa." I said "No. You give the papers to me and from there, I'll make that arrangement." The taxi, go to the laboratory, go to this, this, that, anything that is by correspondence I did cut. In five days' time, in five working days, I got the stamp. They all said, "Unbelievable. There are thousands of people coming, they stay 18 months, 12 months, minimum, 6 months. How did you do it?"

I said, "Look, I did it." Anyway, within a week, it's exactly one week, Australia, I'm an Austrian in the meantime, we're doing sightseeing and various things with my mum, and mainly my mum, because my grandparents were not young enough to do that and heading -- In the meantime, Alfredo, their grandson, came to Vienna to pick them up, and my sister came from Israel, from America, I don't remember [06:16:00] exactly. Within a week, I was in the way back with my mum to London, and Daniel, my son, was only six to eight months old. My grandparents had refugee visas to go to America to join their children.

I think at that point, let's stop for a break.

Yes, yes.

Can you tell me about Jewish life in the UK, did you join a synagogue?

As I said before, we are coming from very traditionalist background. In Iran, we were going to synagogue mainly for festivals, and in UK, we joined an Iranian Jewish synagogue, which was

based in Kinloss. Gradually, we met almost all the Iranian Jews who were living in London, either since before revolution, or after revolution, during revolution, et cetera.

In Iran, we are from Tehran. Tehran was a capital populated with open-minded people, and the level of antisemitism was [06:18:00] not noticeable. There was, but it was very, very small, and I was not personally familiar with Iranian Jews' conditions in the whole of the country while I was in Tehran. In London, by meeting the new member of community and new immigrants, we found new friends and talking with people from Isfahan, Kashan, Hamadan, Mashhad, et cetera and become more familiar with their Jewish life of Jews in Iran.

For example, people from Isfahan was telling me while they were going to school, they were, on a daily base, attacked and beaten by Muslim boys and community, and a lot of other story becomes told, then become criminal activity, and they were killing people, et cetera, or in Mashhad, which was even worse. It's going back during Gujjar time, there was a declaration by one of the Mullah's that if Jews don't convert to Islam, they'll be executed. [06:20:00] They were frightened. Almost all of them converted to Islam, 70% or 80% permanently and some of them apparently, they become new Muslims. They were called new Muslims. In public, they were behaving like Muslims, but in private they were Jews and keeping their Judaism in secret. That is in Mashhad, where the antisemitism was so hard and harsh to be beyond tolerance. However, we learned a lot, and now I know that antisemitism did exist in Iran, specifically in other province and towns rather than Tehran, which should be expressed and shown as part of their history.

Was it important for you to continue to practice Judaism to the extent that you did in an Iranian way rather than adopting different customs and traditions from the UK?

Yes to the extent because, in Iran, I'll give you example, we didn't have *challah*, [06:22:00] even the religious people were using the normal bread to do their *hamotzi*, but in Europe and UK, you don't even think otherwise, you see you use the *challah*. This is only a small example and other traditions.

Can you give me some more examples?

In Tehran, I don't remember people practicing daily prayers of the afternoon or morning. Yes. In school, when we were in school in Kuresh Jewish School, we had a *shacharit* as part of the assembly, but that was it. I don't remember people gathering in Tehran for *minhah*, *aravit*, *shacharit*, or whatever, specifically, other than in UK, it's a normal practice.

Even in the small *shul*'s like Kinloss, they keep all the prayers of the day as a standard normal case, which I was not familiar in Iran at all. As I said, we're coming from a traditional family, we kept the Judaism and *Shabbat* was *Shabbat*, festivals was festivals, and with a lot of respect and attention to the family [06:24:00] structure.

What about culturally, was it important to pass on to your children any sort of Iranian culture or anything?

Yes, of course. My children since they were born and growing up, they knew Friday night is for the family, they never thought of making arrangements with friends, going out or dinner, or even to go to Friday night to other families. They knew that Friday night is a family event and to be together, that's one example, or same about festivals like *Rosh Hashanah* and Passover, et cetera. Some of my children, even after being married, they become more religious, my daughters, but never to the extreme.

What about language?

Oh, when we came to UK, Rita was talking to us with Farsi because, a) our English was not that good to speak English with our children and, b) her main language was Farsi until she went to nursery school and school. With the second child, it was different. When Sally was born, they were talking to each other in English; with us, Farsi. [06:26:00] Sally's Farsi become milder, and Daniel was not talking in Farsi at all because he was talking with her sisters in English until my mum came to London.

When she came to London, it was a bit different because she couldn't speak English, she was very popular and enjoying the life with grandchildren and children and talking to them Farsi, so they had no option, and therefore, their Farsi become stronger and stronger day by day. My children, they're almost fluent on Farsi, not reading, read and write, but spoken language.

When it comes to my grandchildren, there's a little sign of Farsi language, maybe they hear and they know several words, but it's obvious, it's natural that generation by generation, their original language will be eliminated.

How do you feel about that?

[laughs] I don't like it. I like the continuity of the culture and the language. I try them joking and laughing, talking Farsi, but that is how much you can go and how far you can go.

Are there any other ways you try to pass on your Iranian heritage to your children or your grandchildren?

Yes. [06:28:00] We have, in general, a mixture of Iranian and Jewish traditions in our family. The Iranian nation, in general, is a very hospitalizing nation. They love to look after people and hospitalize them when they're guests or visitors as well, and this is in our blood, and that is transferable.

To be hospitable.

Yes, with children and grandchildren. I can see they have the same manner and kindness towards their third parties when they meet, and it's a good sign. Part of the traditions is liquid and easy to transfer, but some of them like language and slangs and all these and history, it's more difficult. You have to accept it.

You said when you came to the UK, you never took official refugee status. Did you ever feel like a refugee?

Yes and no because, a) I don't think about it. We are here nationalized and status and living in UK [06:30:00] 40 years, more than half of my life. Sometimes I think in English even. Sometimes if I have a business meeting, it's difficult for me to speak in Farsi. It must be in English. I was telling my friends when we arrived, "You feel you're being British when you dream in English." It really happened to me. First time, I said, "Oh, I was dreaming in English." This was the sign of adaptation. In a way, a human being is an adaptable creature. You adapt yourself with any terms and condition you are living in.

What's your identity now? If I said to you, "How do you identify yourself?" what would you say?

I feel Jewish-Iranian. That is my true feeling I have. [06:32:00] In London, we found a lot of Iranian friends, which are Muslims and are wonderful people. Even in Iran, in Tehran where we were living, we had, in our neighborhood, a lot of Iranian Muslims, and we were very close to them. I couldn't find a reason or hate or things like that. I think it's that people, by nature, they don't hate each other. I think it's more transferable by political and religion movements and authorities. If you leave people together, in natural way, they can live together.

What would your message to the future be for people watching this, to your children, your grandchildren? What message would you pass on having looked back over your life?

In my opinion, extremism is the most dangerous shape of human behavior that can have big negative effect, can ruin relationship and putting human being against each other. Whether extremism is political or religion or whatever form or shape is a danger. In contrary, loving people and behaving [06:34:00] in a fair way with others bringing enjoyment and bringing happiness. I always encourage my children to behave that way in a fair way, far from extremism and respect to others as himself or themselves.

Thank you very much for your interview. Is there anything that you would like to add as a final words at the end?

Just thank you.

Iraj Elghanian, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed by Sephardi Voices.

[laughs] Like wise. Thank you.

[pause]

This is a diagram of Elghanian family starting approximately 1850 with two sides of the family. On the top-left is Elkana which was born approximately 1850 in Kashan and moved around 1880 to Tehran and lived in a Jewish quarter namely Sarechal. On the right, you have Saghi Baghal. [06:36:00] He was also born approximately 1850 in Shiraz. Around same time of 1880

moving to Tehran to Jewish quarter namely Sarechal. That's the first generation of Elghanians as far as we can go back. The second generation is very important.

On the left is Aghababa Elkana and his sister Khorshid which are my great grandparents. On the right is Haim Saghi and Abdolah sons of Saghi Baghal from Shiraz. Obviously, Haim Saghi married to Khorshid in the same second level of the diagram. Aghababa was the first generation of Elghanian who brought fashion and reforms from Europe to Tehran and become the head of the Elghanian family. On the third line, we see the new generation which is mainly result of marriage between Khorshid and Haim Saghi. The families connecting to each other.

Aghababa also was married to his wife and creating the third generation. [06:38:00] On the fourth generation are my dad, my uncles, my aunties. Fifth generation is me and my siblings, and obviously there's two more generation which are my children and the grandchildren, which are not shown in this diagram.

This photograph is in Tehran approximately 1926. In the middle, the guy with a beard is Haim Saghi which was married to Khorshid. On his left, and Khorshid was obviously the sister of Aghababa, Aghababa Elkana which was head of Elghanian family at the time. On the top on the middle-left and right are the two sons of Haim Saghi, my grandpa Hajji Mirzagha and my great uncle Hajji Aziz. In between them is Habib Elghanian, their nephew which later become the son-in-law of Mirzagha my grandpa. Next to Khorshid on the left are two of her daughters, and next to Haim Saghi on his right is his daughter-in-laws, [06:40:00] [talks to wife in Persian].

Yes please.

Yes, you already did.

As I said the two ladies on the right of Haim Saghi are the daughter-in-laws of Haim Saghi. The first one is my grandma from my father's side married to Mirzagha and the second one is again Heshmat married to Aziz my great uncle. In the front sitting in the very middle is Nikkah the first daughter of my grandpa and my grandma which was later married to Habib Elghanian

which is standing up between Hajji Aziz and Mirzagha. To her right, the front second on the left I assume is my father and he was about six years old.

Shall I?

Who's in this photo?

This photo is also in Tehran approximately 1932. It must be an event like a wedding in the family or whatever everybody is dressed in European style, very stylish and the young boy on the middle is my dad age 10, 12. The standing ones from the left, the little girl [06:42:00] must be my auntie Parri and the guy who's holding her is my grandpa, Mirzagha and next to him is Davud Elghanian which was the nephew and the brother of Habib Elghanian, nephew of Hajji Mirzagha. Next to it is Lotfollah Victory which was the son-in-law of the family married to Iran.

Next is Hajji Aziz, my great uncle, the brother of Mirzagha and both are the sons of Haim Saghi and Khorshid. The next one is Jan, the older brother between this third generation of Elghanian family building the Third Empire together with Davoud and Nourollah and Habib. The last one I assume is Hasham Khan which was a family-related and also original bookkeeper of my grandpa at the time.

Those are the two photographs related to my grandparents.

On the left is my grandma and grandpa Heshmat and Hajji Mirzagha 1940s in Tehran. On the right is Agakhan my grandpa with his daughter Mohtaran my mum, which is [06:44:00] exactly 1947. My mum was in her 20s and my grandpa in his 40s.

Thank you.

Those are the photos of my mum and dad very youngest age, in their 20s and elegant and kind.

Thank you. Who is in these photographs?

Those are the photographs of my uncles and aunts from my father's side. The one on the left with a coat on is Nemat, my third uncle. The one on the top, is Khalil and his wife Farah my first uncle. The middle one is my dad together with Soli, Suleiman. My dad is sitting and Soli is standing, and he's in the places in the mansion that I did say in my interview earlier in Sheikh Adi. On the far right is my auntie Nikka, with her husband Habib which was married to Habib and Habib was head of Elghanian community at the time of revolution. On the bottom is the photograph of my two aunties, Rarri and Farzaneh in their [06:46:00] teenage era.

Who is this?

Those are the two photographs of 1947 when I was one, two years old. The first one on the top is my mum and uncle David her brother with Bijan in the middle and me on the right-hand side. It is in the house of my grandpa Agakhan, which was opposite the Russian Embassy. The photograph on there is showing better a picture of my mum together with me and Bijan in the balcony of the same house opposite the Russian Embassy. The style of the railing for example is showing how great was the house and with this location opposite the Russian Embassy and the style of it and the way my mum was dressed up, which is amazing.

On the right is again, same ages, me and Biajn together with Aflatoon. As I mentioned before, Aflatoon was from Damavand and was adopted to the family by my grandpa. This is important photograph because it is in my grandpa's mansion, and showing the [06:48:00] apartments that my grandpa built for day-to-day life of the family, apart from the mansion itself. It's showing the balconies and the structure of the building and which is lovely memories.

This is the photo of approximately 1953 when I was eight-years-old in a Jewish school Kuresh, is end of the year ceremony in front of some family, guests of the parents. We are all participating in the tournament - on the far left side with the hat and white shirt next to me is

Murad Purmoradi my friend in school. The fourth one is Dr. Hosalel Al-Azari he's a dentist in Los Angeles. In the very middle is Mr. Janampour our sports teacher and trainer. On the far right is Salim Aminfar architects, he's one of my best friends again, he is living in New York. It is a very interesting photographs behind Salim, on the far right, is the window to the synagogue in our school, which was assembly room [06:50:00] an exam room as well is multi-functional. It was a synagogue as assembly and exam room-

Thank you.

-and it's lovely.

Those are the photographs of myself on my 20s. On the top left, as army officer with a uniform and the others are just as a young boy.

Thank you.

[06:51:28 END]