

Sephardi Voices UK

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Sephardi Voices UK.

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

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

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

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	Sephardi Voices UK
Ref. no:	SV094
British Library C. Number:	

Interviewee Title:	Mr
Interviewee Surname:	Zubli
Forename:	Farouk
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	1941
Interviewee POB:	Iraq
Interviewee Occupation:	Import/Export
Father's Occupation:	Cinema Owner
Mother's Occupation:	Housewife

Date of Interview:	18/03/2019
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Daisy Abboudi
Recording Format:	Video
Total Duration (HH:MM):	
Copyright/Clearance:	Yes

Additional Material:	
Interviewer Comments:	

[00:00:00]

Today is the 18th of March 2019. I'm here with Farouk Zubli in London for Sephardi Voices UK. My name is Daisy Abboudi. Farouk Zubli, thank you very much for agreeing to being interviewed by Sephardi Voices UK. Can we start by you telling me a little bit about your family background?

Yeah, I was born in Iraq. My father and mother also were born in Iraq. We lived there until 1951, when we went to Israel. Now, my father had the first movie, talking movie cinema in Baghdad. It was in 1929, '30 and he had a lot of connection. The prince used to visit him. And because of that, he got a lot of connection and let's say, power to do a lot of things, which served him later on when there was a problem with the Jews, yeah. In 1951, we went to Israel, my father stayed six months. Then he went to Iran through the border and came to Israel. But in Israel, he couldn't work or do anything, so he went to Iran. And he took us, the whole family later on, we went to Iran to Tehran. [00:02:06] I myself, I stayed six months because of the education. And my mother sent me to Paris where my auntie was there. And I stayed in Paris about seven years. And came back to Iran, where I started my own business, the business of photographic films, medical films, medical X-ray, and medical equipment, until the revolutions in '79. Then I came here, we came here with the whole family.

Do you want to continue?

Yeah, here since 1979, until we settled down. So, I used to do exports to Africa and to the Middle East, and to Iran at the time, which was possible, of some medical, some photographic which we used to buy from other countries. I used to represent Ilford company of photography and used to send their products to the Middle East, to Africa. And that's it.

Your parents were born in Iraq?

Yes.

Can you tell me a bit about your grandparents, your parents' backgrounds?

I don't know a lot about my grandparents, I know they were in Iraq. My – the family of my father, I know there were five brothers, one of them was – at the time, he was the head of the railway station in Mosul, north of Iraq. [00:04:04] The head of the stations usually used to be like a mayor, they used to do all, like a governor. So, this is one of them. I don't know, the other brother went to Israel during World War Two. He crossed – because his son was – had a problem with his eyes and they heard that there was a professor of eyes in Israel. So, he went through Beirut to, at the time it was, of course, Palestine. The other brother, he, which is very interesting, he went to France, to – first to Belgium, Brussels with his family, with his wife and son. And he had the daughter born in Brussels, but they did not stay there. He went to Paris and he established a kind of factory for women's wear at the time there, in the mid-thirties. Yeah. If – because he was there and everybody knew he was there, so the other brother went with his children, four children, to see him. And he left them in a boarding school and he came back before the World War Two. But the children stayed there. Happily, or I mean, the Germans who went to the school, it was a boarding, so to take the children they asked if there were any Jewish. [00:06:05] But the headmistress was a very kind woman, she told them, 'They are Muslims.' So, they didn't take them for the concentration camp. This is very, very, you know, it was something very important for the family, because their father and mother didn't know about them from 1940 to '44, they didn't know. So, in 1944, they received a letter that, 'Come and take your children.' This was very, very difficult for them during four years. In the meantime, my father in – during the war and after the war, he used to work with the British Army in Habbaniyah to – there – to – there were stocks of all kinds of things. They used to – a lot of people used to buy from them and send it, you know, for metal fixing or whatever, yes. And then he, because of his connection he could – some of the Jews which were imprisoned during that thing, he could take them out, because the head of the police was a very good friend of him because of his connection with the King, when he had the cinema. Yeah, he used to, as I told you before, when he had the movie, the prince Ghazi before he became king, used to come to the cinema, and he liked to drink whiskey. So because of that, my father got a lot of connections with police chief, with the mayor. [00:08:05] And that's where he used these connections and his – some kind of a power to exercise it, to take out some people from the prison during the 1948, '50 when Israel was established, because there was a

movement against the Jews there in Baghdad. Yeah. And then my father went, came to Israel. He couldn't – started a kind of business but it wasn't successful.

Before we talk about Israel, let's say in Iraq for now.

Ah, okay.

If you – do you know anything about your mother's family? That's all about your father's –

Yes. My mother's family, they are four sisters and four brothers, four brothers. They used to be in the merchants, you know, in textiles. One of them went to India in – during World War Two through Beirut. And I don't know what happened to him. But he – I know he died about ten years ago. The others, Ephraim was – he stayed in Baghdad and he was a textile merchant. Two of them and the other one also, three of them, they said in Baghdad and I have no more. The sisters, one – that was my auntie, one went to – they went, the family went to New York. [00:10:02] The other one was the wife of my uncle. They went to Brussels, this is the... And the eldest one went to – they went with the whole family, went to Israel, yes.

So, you have an aunt and an uncle that also – so, you had two sisters married two brothers?

Two brothers, yes.

Is there a story behind that?

So, you see the families, it's an interesting thing. The other uncle, the third one married the cousin of my mother. So the Abad family, A-b – the Abad family married a lot of Zubli family. So, that was a connection. It's not only them, there was another cousin who married – a Zubli married an Abad also. So this is a connection, what I say, yeah. The other thing is my father had also a cousin, first cousin who came here, who come to England in the 1930s, mid-thirties. He studied medicine and stayed and became a GP. And he lived in Shoreham-by-Sea, near Brighton. Yeah. And this was – he had a daughter and a son. He died in about fifteen years ago, yeah.

You told us a little bit about your father's business with the cinema.

Yeah.

Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

He started the cinema, before he started a cinema he was – he had a connection. You know, they used to – at the time, the financier, the bankers at the time they were called, it's the local ones, there was no banks in order to transfer money, let's say. [00:12:06] So, they had very known people who were – they always used to call them bankers. So he used to work with this one, because he had to transfer – for example, they have to transfer money, they have – physically they have to transfer the money, let's say, from Baghdad to Iran. So, he – they used to put it in a – the whole thing, to take it, put it in a train. And somebody, my father used to oversee this. So to go to, let's say, to Khorramshahr, which is the border, Iranian city, and then to go back. But then in 1928 or '29, with another man called Moshi Gigi they bought the cinema called Royal Cinema. Because they had – the owner at the time who built it, they had difficulty and so they bought it from him, and they started importing films. Now, the films used to come through Beirut, not directly from the US, because Beirut was the centre at the time of the Middle East. Centre of the Middle East of business, of trading, everything, transport, travelling, it was Beirut. So, everybody wants to, let's say, to go to France had to go to Beirut, from there to France. Or to go to India, to go to Beirut and then to... So, they bought the movie and they used to import the films. Now, when they bought the films from Beirut, it was without the rights. [00:14:02] You see, they just sent a copy of the films. So mainly, it was from the Warner Brothers, these films. So, one day in mid-thirties, I don't know exactly the – Jack Warner came to Baghdad, Jack Warner. And he came to Royal Cinema and he told my father, 'Why do you – how do you get my films?' He said, 'I buy it from Beirut.' He said, 'You know you don't pay the rights for them?' He said, 'Well, I am buying it, I don't know from where.' Anyway, so he said, 'So, you are Ruben, you are Jewish like me?' So, Jack Warner told him, he said, 'Yeah', he said, 'I gave you the right to import it.' So, he import all the Warner Brothers, all Warner Brothers films. Yeah, this is the interesting thing about it. And they have the picture of the movie. Now, in late thirties, I think, when the prince Ghazi

became a king, so he wouldn't come to the movies. Not late thirties, mid-thirties. So, he will come to the movies. But if my father wanted something, he used to go to the palace and stand in the door, the palace door, when the king was to come out and see him from his car. So, he used to tell his intercom, 'Please, go and see what...' He used to go, 'Say it, Ruben, he wants.' That means do what he wants. So, that's why he did a lot of things for all the Jewish community there. I don't know the details, but this is what he was telling me. Yes, yeah.

What were your parents like as people? What was your father...? Let's start with your father.

[00:16:00] My mother was very educated. She finished school, *Alliance Israélite* in Baghdad, and also she had a French education. My father was like a merchant, very energetic and very helpful. He would do anything for people, money was not important for him at all, at all. And because of that, he had an incident with the mayor. And the mayor wanted something and my father didn't do it. So, I think in the late years of the thirties, he passed the law to make – to pass a street, a road through the cinema and he destroyed the movie. It was no law, anyway, you know, it's yeah, yeah. This is –

So, what did he do after the cinema was...?

This was during World War Two, he did this with the surplus of the British army. Then he started also a business in textiles, in textiles until 1951.

Can you tell me about the area you lived in in Baghdad? Which area was it? What was it like?

Area? I don't know the name. It was – I remember there was a hospital, a Jewish hospital called Meir Elias and we used to be opposite it, we used to live... But then later on, we moved to north of Baghdad where the river, Tigris River, opposite. There used to be a lot of – it was a resident thing and we moved there, yes. [00:18:03] It was called, I don't remember really, but it's known. Abu Nawas I think. I'm not sure.

Do you remember the house? Do you remember anything?

Yeah, the house, I remember it. Yeah.

Can you describe it for us?

It was two-story and there was a balcony, we used to go and watch the river. It was, I think – but before moving there, I remember the other house where the whole family... It was a very big house where two stories. The ground floor had a kind of a garden in the middle. And the kitchen, which was a huge one. And the under kind of hole, which it is underground a little bit, which we used to go and sleep in it, because it was very hot. That's only – but the second floor was, one side was my auntie, who was the sister of my mother who lived there. The other side was a huge three or four-bed bedrooms. Two uncles of my – brothers of my mother used to live. We used to live in the middle. And the other side was my other uncle, the brother of my mother, with his family. So this whole thing. It was very, very big, very huge. A huge house, like the – I think the – at the time in this country, in these cities they used to have these kind of... Yeah.

[00:20:01] *What was it like living there with all the family?*

Oh, it was very happy, you know, all the kids together. Yeah, yeah, until the age of ten, eleven, something like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was, among the children, I think I was the oldest because my uncle had my – one of my uncles was married, and he had also children. Was – so everything they wanted, they used to tell them, their parents, 'Go to Farouk and see what he says, what he wants...' They used to come and tell me. And when they used to fight, when they used to fight, they would come to me and say, 'Well, this one he said like...' You know, they used to fight, I had to judge them. [Laughs] So, that's the – this is the – yeah.

What about school? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

I was at the Alliance in Baghdad until the age of, yeah, let's say eleven, yeah. It was very – it was a Jewish school. It's a big, very, very big one. French was the main language, then we used to learn a little bit Arabic and English. So, three languages, yeah. And I had some friends,

which later on I met them in Israel. We used to go to the same school in Israel, just by chance. Yeah. And what else? This school, that's...

Was there a particular reason you went to that school over...?

[00:22:02] Alliance, it's only for the Jews, was there. There are two or three Jewish schools, but the Alliance is very known. You know, the Alliance school was established in 1880. How was it established, if it's of your interest? It's the French senator at the time in 1884, travelled to the Middle East. And he saw Jewish communities in Syria, in Baghdad, in Egypt, Cairo, in Libya. And that was all under the Ottoman Empire. It was Mesopotamia, there was no Iraq before. So, he had the idea to make a school and he went to see the Sultan in, I think, it was in Istanbul. And he asked him his permit, whether he can do a school for the Jews in the Middle East. And the Sultan gave him the permission. There was one condition, which I'm not sure how it was. He said, 'This is only for the Jews.' He told him, 'With one condition, so only for the Jews. No other community has to be there.' This is what he told him. So, he did Alliance in Baghdad, in Damascus, in Cairo, in Libya. That was Alliance, what else? I think yeah, that's Damascus and Halab, Aleppo. In Aleppo, also.

Did you learn or hear anything about Israel during your time at school, at school or at home?

[00:24:05] Yeah, in the – when I was at school, there were some people who used to come from – at the time Israel didn't exist, to come from there. And used to call them the Haganah, or whatever. And it used to be called Palestine. And then, Israel, there was a movement, a movement who they wanted to take them to Palestine. At the time, Israel didn't exist. So, some people went there, yeah, went there just for all kinds of things. My uncle, the eldest brother of my father, my father's brother, the eldest son went to Israel with all his family in 1941 during World War Two, through Beirut, because his son had a problem with his eyes. I told you there was a famous doctor called – I forgot the name. He was a very famous eye doctor in Israel. So, everybody used to go there. I mean, yeah. Yeah, I heard about it, yeah, at the end.

Could you talk about it openly that your uncle was living there?

At the time?

Yeah.

I was very young.

When you were a child, when you were old enough to talk about it?

Yeah, I talked. Yeah, yeah. Really there was not enough time, because when I grew up, I was ten. When I was ten, I went to Israel. So, just – we just heard, my mother used to say, ‘Oh, he’s in Israel, he’s in Tel Aviv’ or whatever, yeah, yeah.

[00:26:10] *What about Judaism at home? Was...? Can you tell me anything about that?*

Yeah, we used to practice it only in the Kippur, Hanukkah, all the feasts, all the feasts. Yes, we used to practice it, yeah.

What do you mean practice? Can you give me some examples, something, tradition?

Go to the synagogue with my father, I used to go. That’s in Kippur. Also, during the Sukkot, used to do sukkah and use people used to come, family friends, and make prayers during Sukkot. I think it was – they used to do it every day, seven days. Yes, yes, I remember it very well, because I was a kid. Yes, yes, and a big house. But when we went to the other house, we didn’t do it. Yeah.

And what about Pesach? Do you have any...?

Pesach also. Oh, yeah, Pesach, yeah. We used to do *chametz*. We used to collect everything before Pesach, the day before Pesach, we used to collect all kinds and to search everything. And then put it together and go and give it outside, I don’t know to where, all the bread and

everything, yeah. And all I remember, the kitchenware they used to put it in – they'd boil it in hot water so it become *kasher* for the Pesach. This is what – this, I remember it, yeah.

What about food at home? Was there any specific food related to these festivals, or...?

[00:28:00] The meat used to come from kosher, kosher meat only. Only kosher it used to be at home, yeah, because it was known. I mean the – and the chicken was – there had to be a rabbi who has to do the – I don't know what. They'd slaughter the chicken, I remember it, yeah.

Are there any examples of specific foods that you used to eat on special occasions?

Used to eat to the *tbeet*. I don't know, you heard about it? Yeah, *tbeet*, they do it on Friday night. And for Saturday because nobody wanted – had to cook, so used to eat the *tbeet* with chicken, with rice. This is a special food. And also, the meat *kubba*, meatballs in all kinds. One was with, what's it called in English? With the...

Do you want to say it in...?

Oh, it's... [laughs]

Semolina?

Huh?

Semolina?

No, it's with... Oh, it just went out of my – I can see it. I have some in the fridge [laughs] just to show you. It's... Anyway, anyway, it will come, it will come. Yeah.

And your parents' social lives, who were their friends, do you know?

It was the family. My mother's sisters. [00:30:00] My father, he had also his family. Well, also his family, his nephew, his brother, his brother who was a little bit younger than him. The one who went to France to put his children there, and he came back, he was very close with him. And that's what I remember in Baghdad, yes.

Do you remember them going out? Did they go out in the evenings or...?

In the evening they used only to go to other places, to family places, to houses. No, no, no out. I don't remember going anywhere. No, I don't remember. The – yes, the – my father, there used to be a kind of coffee place. They call it Café Baghdad; it was on the river. So, they used to meet there, I think on Saturdays. Yeah, on Saturdays, yes, yes. I used to go with him sometimes and used to meet my cousins, who was on my mother's side. They used to live also in that area, so I used to see them. Yes, yes. Now I remember, yeah. They are in the States now, Edmond and Howard, yes, yes, yes. Oh, yeah. He's – Howard is – used to be – in the States he became head of the IMF for Latin America. A very big position he had then. [00:32:00] We went once to visit him in Barbados. He used to live in Barbados, his headquarters [laughs]. Now I remember. And his brother studied in MIT, and he was the one who worked on the latest airplanes, you know, the sound – whatever they call it. Yeah, all the armaments or whatever, yes.

You spoke about your father helping Jews who were in trouble.

Yes. Because of his connection with the head of the police, even during – you know, there was some time where there was – they had curfews. But he would go out and see the head of the police. He was very courageous. And he really had something, his nature was like that. And he took out from prison people because of his connection. He used to go to the head, told him, 'Look, this one is – what he did? He did nothing.' So, he took them out. He took them out and they smuggled them to Iran, I think three or four people. Yeah, yeah, that's... He didn't have any problems with – because the head of the police was his friend, really his good friend. And I remember my mother used to tell me, because I wasn't – used to tell me that she used to do food, Jewish food for the family of the head of the police and the mayor and send it to them because they liked food.

[00:34:11] *What's the difference between Jewish food? What's something different that she would have cooked that their wives didn't cook?*

This was the *tbeet*, they liked it.

Oh, the tbeet?

Yeah, and the *kubba*. *Kubba*, yeah.

And did your parents ever mention the Farhud?

Yes, yes. My mother told me that during the Farhud they used to come. And a group of people, they came to the door of our place, the big house. But somehow, she told me that from the window they would throw them. But somehow the group told – one of the group told them, 'No, don't touch it this door, go somewhere else.' She said, 'For what reason?' She didn't know, she didn't know. So, this is.... But during the Far – after the Farhud, as I told you, some people come from, they used to call them the Haganah. They came from Israel, Palestine at the time. And they stayed in our house for, I don't know, maybe a week, yes. And they went – you know, in Baghdad, they discovered some arms in the synagogue. I don't know if this, you heard about it. So, the chief of police asked my father to come as a witness. He said, 'Come and see what your people have done.' So as a witness, he took him as a witness and they took pictures [laughs].

Did your father speak about that afterwards?

[00:36:01] Yeah, he told me about it.

What did he say?

He said he didn't know that I was helping them [laughs]. But he, the chief of police knew something, knew something. But when the situation became harder in the fifties, in 1951, he

told my father, you know, Sayed Ruben, 'You have to go, this is no more your place.' So he gave him a kind of laissez passer, which was not official. And he went across the border to Iran. He could – yeah.

Did you experience any antisemitism?

No.

No?

We didn't, no. We didn't at all.

When you think about Iraq, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?

When I think about it, I say this is the country of my birth. I would like to visit it, that's all. I have nothing against it.

No particular memories or...?

Memories, I used to – we used to swim a lot in the river, because it was very difficult. This is the memories. Memories also of the school, we were very happy in school, yeah, yeah.

What kind of memory can you...?

You know, the teachers, one of the teachers who used to teach us French, was very, okay. He was – at the time, you know, he used to – the people who – they used to slap them. You know, it was known everywhere then. But this teacher had a kind of piece of wood in his pocket. Anybody who was rebellious, who didn't know anything, he said, 'Open your hand' and used to hit him with it [laughs]. This is I remember it. That was natural in the school, yeah.

So, you left before your father?

Yes, and he came, he went to Israel before. [00:38:04] And he came, I think six months after us, six months, or was it one year, nine months?

Can you describe when you left? Can you describe the day?

We went to the airport, because that was all the community were going, because they stripped them out of their nationality. And so, we went the whole family, we were four of us children with my mother went in the plane, and they went back straight with Israel. In Israel –

Did you understand as a child what was happening?

A little bit, yes, I understood that we are going to Israel. That's all, yes.

Did you understand that you wouldn't come back?

Yeah.

And how did you feel about that?

I was happy to go, I don't know. That's because all the children would say, 'Oh, Israel, Israel.' It's propaganda also, you know, people used to talk about Israel all the time.

What kind of things did you hear?

Oh, that they were fighting, that all the Jews are there. Doing everything, you know, more free, free.

And what about your mother? Did she have any – did she talk to you about how she was? Did you pick up on anything?

No, we went to Israel. No, she was happy to go to Israel. I tell you also, we as a family, we had a privilege because of my father with his connection. All the – all what we had in Baghdad,

even the furniture, whatever we had, he put them in, maybe at the time it was boxes, huge boxes. [00:40:00] And he sent them to Holland in a port, to store them there, because of his connection. I don't know how. This, I don't know really the particulars. When he came to Israel, he brought it to Israel and we had everything. And we – when he came we had the house, where he rented a house in Ben Yehuda Street, which was like the Champs Elysees, you know. Ben Yehuda was very Ashkenazi, it was all German, German Jews. And the old community of Jews who came during the beginning of the century, well, they were there. And, you know, it was very strange, the – a Sephardi family among them. You know, they used to tell me, because I made friends with all the kids there, and they used to tell me, you know, 'You are a Sephardi. How did you come to this street?' You know, it was a little bit, yeah, you could – yeah, yeah.

Did you move straight there with your mother?

No. When we arrived before my father, we rented a room in the – a market used to be... The Carmel, Shuk Hacarmel. Yes, a room. It was a market, at the end of the market where a lot of Iraqi Jews used to go, because they didn't have any place. They used to sell vegetables, food, in the street, you see. [00:42:03] It was a market. Yeah, it was a market, it was a temporary thing. Because when they went there, there was no food, you see. And everybody was unhappy. You know, they changed places, you see, the community itself. We didn't feel it. But the community really, they were unhappy because there were to be called the Ma'abarot, which is – it was all with the tents. And all for a certain period they lived there. Huge, the community, a lot of ... I mean, 150,000 were there. So, they had to put them in places, yes, yes. And the uncles, I think, yeah.

So, all your rest of your family were still staying there when you moved to...?

Yeah, yeah. The Ma'abarot, they stayed there about a year. And then, they went to houses and this, yes.

What was your first impression when you arrived?

We did, you know, we thought it's like an adventure. As a kid, as kids it was like an adventure. Yeah, you see, yeah. For you, okay, became eleven, twelve years old... Now, in Israel they had the – like for the young people, they had, what do you call it? Shomer Hatzair it's like a...

[FS2] A club.

Like a club, not a club. So, it is – Shomer Hatzair was socialist. So, the socialist side. There was another one which is the right. What was...? It was called Beitar. Used to go also to like a club, but I didn't fit into this. [00:44:04] So in Tel Aviv itself, because it was all kind of Western kind of – there used to be *chevrot*, Western *chevrot*. That means group of people, used to be a group of people, like six, seven people, eight people, boys and girls. We used to go – we formed it and we used to go out together to the movies, this. And the name of the *chevrah*, every group had a name. We had a French name, called Allah Mi Hahu [ph]. There was a there was a song called Allah Mi Hahu [ph]. at the time, so we called our group Allah Mi Hahu [ph]. [laughs].

Were you all Iraqi children together?

No, no, no, no. I was – two Iraqis, two Romanians, one Bulgarian and one – Yekke who was a German. He was born in Israel, but he has German parents. Romanian, two girls, two Romanian girls. One was Colette, who become later a representative in the House of Parliament, and she was – she became a friend of the late president. I mean, this was very late. What was his name? Peres, Shimon Peres. Yeah, Colette.

So, that's in Ben Yehuda that you had this group of friends?

Yes, yes. We used to go anywhere, yes, yes.

You mentioned it was a French song, did you – I didn't ask you about in Iraq and then also in Israel, what kind of music you listened to. Was it in Iraq...?

French and Hebrew. Hebrew, we used to dance the Hebrew Horah. And the French songs, yeah at home, I used to do it, yeah.

[00:46:00] *And in Iraq?*

In Iraq also.

Also Israeli music or...?

French songs.

French?

French songs.

No Arabic songs?

Well, I used to hear it. Somebody used to – yeah, of course, they used to sing. We used to go to families, they used to dance the Arabic dance and sung it. So, yeah, yeah, yeah.

What about the language when you came to Israel? What languages were you speaking and...?

Well, I learned Hebrew. Yeah, I was in a French school, a Catholic school, but Hebrew. We learned Hebrew.

At school?

Yeah, it was obligatory to us.

No, in Iraq?

No.

No?

Yeah, in Iraq we had it, yeah. We had this, we learned Hebrew, yes, yes.

So, it wasn't completely unfamiliar coming to...?

No, it was not unfamiliar. Yeah.

Did you speak any Arabic?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, good Arabic.

At home?

Yeah, at home. But literary Arabic I learned in Baghdad, until the age of – yeah, because yeah, yeah. Until now, I mean, I can translate.

So, you were living in Ben Yehuda? How long were you living there for?

Four years, until we went to Iran.

And we briefly mentioned the fact that you were the only Sephardi family in this Ashkenazi road. Did – you mentioned someone mentioned it, was there any sort of...?

No, between us when we were – as kids we were – no, nobody said, 'You are this.' But I heard in the other places in the, for example, in the market. But you know, this is not racism. They

used – because out of their – they were fed up with the situation. And for example, the Iraqis used to call the Yemenis like *albadhinjan* like *chatzilim* like –

[00:48:05] *Aubergine.*

Aubergine. Used to – you know, it was – I used to go to the market and they'd say, 'Oh, you know, here is a *chatzilim*, we are selling Yemenis.' You know, it was just to – and then the Yemenis used to come and what – you know, tell them, 'You are stupid, you're this.' But they used to argue, not because – because of the situation, you know. It is the situation, it's not... They thought of course, in the beginning, the impression was that the Iraqi Jews were illiterate. This is what the impression was at the beginning, until it took four or five years to know that really they are doctors, they are professors, they are... Yeah, but in the beginning, they thought they were illiterate, yeah, yeah.

When you say they thought, who were they?

The Ashkenazi, the Ashkenazi. They had the impression that, you know...

Is that a bit why your father struggled?

Yeah, not – he didn't struggle. He had an Ashkenazi guy, because my father was – he believed in Israel and he thought everything was fine. And when he came to Israel, he wanted to do a business. A guy who was – I think he was, yeah, he was Ashkenazi. He was – I think he was of German descent, wanted to do – he told him he had plastic – machinery to do plastic and he'd do a factory. And my father, 'Okay.' So, he gave him money and his brother, the second brother, also gave some money. [00:50:00] And they gave out – this machinery was in the customs, but it was under – something was wrong. Somebody, he took money from other people and he told them, 'This is also yours.' But my father couldn't get his money back, so he left. He left his – he left to Iran, where he started –

But he doing that for four years?

No, six months and he left. Six months, he left.

So, he was living in Iran and you were staying...?

And we stayed in Israel for three and a half years without him.

What was that like?

It was – we always used to – we received letters from him, but it was difficult. I know my mother was very... yeah.

Could your mother speak Hebrew? How did she...?

Yeah, she learned Hebrew, yes. Yeah, she spoke Hebrew, yeah.

And was there a big difference between school in Iraq and in Israel?

Well, in Israel, because I went to the Catholic school, there was a difference, yes. Yes, there was a difference, but it was an excellent school. It was really the – education wise, for me it was very good, excellent. I did – and also the friends I had there, like me, there was Iraqis also, a lot of Iraqis. And the Jewish rabbi came to our house and told my mother, ‘Look, you sent him to a Catholic...’ She told him, ‘I want education, you don’t – don’t tell me about education.’ And they never came back. He used to come say, ‘How do you do that?’ [00:52:02] So, me and my sister, my sister also was in the girls’ school, also the Catholic one. My brother and other sister went to the local schools.

Why?

Because – I don’t know why. It was near our house and it was more practical. And they were also very young, you see, and so my mother said it’s better they start, you know, younger, it’s better. But me and my sister, because already we had a French background, she sent me there.

And was it all Jewish children there? You said there were some Iraqi Jews, were there other...?

Where, in the Catholic?

Yeah.

No, there was non-Jews. There was a community in Jaffa, it was in Jaffa, a community of Armenians. Not Armenians, there was also Christian, it's a kind of Christian, which he was –

Coptic?

Yes, yes, yes, yes. This was in the Catholic one. But when I finished the Catholic one, I went to Tabetha, this was the Church of Scotland. They were also Christians there, yeah, yeah. In the school, in the Tabetha school, that was mixed, it's boys and girls. The – I think 80% were Jews. Now, they were a mixture. They were different backgrounds. They were Iraqis, they were Bulgarians, a lot of Bulgarian Jews. Romanian, Romanian Jews. [00:54:00] Romanians also were in the Catholic school. Yeah, a lot of Romanians.

Did you keep any traditions from Iraq when you were in Israel?

Traditions? Yeah. What traditions I did?

Did you still cook tbeet on Saturday?

Yes, yes, yes [laughs].

Yeah?

Yeah, four years, yes.

Did you continue to speak Arabic at home?

Yeah, with my mother, yeah. Yes, Arabic, yes. With my brother, with my sister. Yeah, we spoke Arabic, the Jewish Arabic. Yeah, the Iraqi Jewish Arabic. Yeah.

Okay, so after Israel, is there anything else that I forgotten to ask you about Israel? Anything important about that period of time in your life?

No, I was very happy there. I didn't want to go – when I went there I didn't like it. I wanted to stay there. This is the main thing, but...

How old were you when you left?

Fifteen. Fifteen, in '55. Fifteen, yeah. About fifteen, yeah.

And why did you leave?

Because my father wanted us to go, to go to – you know, the whole family.

To join him?

To join him, yes, yeah.

Can you describe again leaving? You had all your things with you?

Yeah. I mean, when we went to Iran, there was no direct flight at the time. So, we went through Turkey to Istanbul. We went to Istanbul; we stayed there one week. Or yeah, one week and then we went to Tehran, yeah.

And you managed to move all your things from Iraq?

Yeah, yeah,

Because the things from Iraq had already been brought to Israel?

[00:56:00] Israel. Okay, furniture and this, we left it.

You left there?

We left it. All the belongings, all – we took it, yes, yes. We took it.

And what were your first impressions of Iran?

I didn't like it.

Why?

Because first of all, the language. And the way people – okay, you know, it's a strange thing, you see. The way people spoke, it was different, different, completely different. And that's why I – my mother also said, 'It's better that you...', she sent me to Paris. She didn't –

Where in Iran was it?

Tehran. Yeah, Tehran.

So, you stayed for six months?

Yes.

Were you at school?

There was a school called the Iraqi School. There were two classes, everybody who came from Iraq. There was a lot, a big community who came from Iraq, from Iraq direct and from Israel, who came here. So, they put them together. The ages were from the age of fifteen to the age of twenty. So, it was mixed. It's all because they had only two classes. And it was quite a

happy thing. I mean, I remember it because it was nice. We were joking all the time and this and that. We learned something but not... [laughs].

What language were you learning in?

English.

English?

English, yes. It was – English is the main thing, yes. And a little bit of Hebrew, but that's –

And how was your English?

Because in Bag – in Alliance I used to know English, so knew enough, yes.

Okay, so you knew enough to be able to learn?

Yes, yes.

[00:58:00] *Okay. And who were the teachers?*

They were teachers, yes, they were good teachers really. We had a maths teacher who was very good. There were one Jewish teacher, one Armenian teacher, two Armenian teachers. Yeah, and there was a big community of Armenians in Tehran. And the Armenians were – they mixed with the Jews all the time, because it was a minority also. But it was also – they worked in business, yeah, in business. And a lot of technical, you know, in the car industry. They used to – the repairs and this, they were all Armenians. Yeah.

So, you went to Paris alone?

Yeah.

What was that like?

Well, my aunt was there. What was that like? It was very good, because I knew the language first of all and I was too young. I went to the cinema school, but I was too young. So, they put me in the photographic section and the other section. Not the director, because director is – in the director section was only four people. It was very known this school. The only school, cinema school there. So, it was – because I was very young, so I stayed there a year and then I went to university after. The Sorbonne, yes, yeah. And I took maths, mathematics. [01:00:00] Then, after three years, I went back to the IDHEC for half a year. The director of the IDHEC was not a nice guy for the Jews. He showed it because it was, you know – from the time – probably he was there from the during the war. And the people who really didn't like him were the Vietnamese. There were two Vietnamese, two in there from Indochina. At the time, there was no Vietnam, it was Indochina. Yeah, and he was – they were very good friends with me. And he was – they used to – against him all the time. They were very courageous, these guys. I mean, for me, the guy was a director, but he was very courageous.

In what way? What did...?

Well, they used to argue with him. 'Why did you do – why do you say it like that?' you know. You know, so he – but the teacher there, the people who – they were very good. There was one used to be very good, yeah.

Did you experience any other antisemitism in France?

In France? No, no.

Anything because you were Iraqi or...?

No, no, no, not at all. Not at all, as long as you speak the language. In France it's like that. You speak the language, nobody asks you anything, no one. And they – this is a French way. They never ask personal questions, never. That's no one. It's very – because my cousin's there also. My auntie, his son was – at the time he was – when I went he was grown up. He was

twenty-two years, twenty-four years. And he worked with somebody who was Jewish, he had – in the textile business. [01:02:01] Yeah, yeah, and then he worked – after that, after three years, he worked in the – with the Americans in the American base. There was an American base in France and he was working as an accountant. American base in France, he had a very good position. And when he came –when I came back to Tehran after the Paris, he came there. They wanted to give him the big company, accountant company. It's called – I don't know. Anyway, he came there to see and he told me. This is Iran. You know, there was a – there is a saying, say *uchsul wawee*. You know Arabic? No?

Explain.

Uchsul wawee is like wedding of the rabbit. That means nothing counts. He said, 'I'm not going to take this.' At the time, this company wanted to give him \$100,000 per year. At the time, it was a big thing. He said, 'I don't want to stay there, to be an accountant' because nothing was balanced. It's only the people, you know, the upper class. You had to have power. And he told us, 'Look, this is not stable. You have to go, don't stay.' But my father used to work there, you see.

So how come you went back, you didn't stay in work in Paris?

Ah, my father got ill and my mother said, 'Come.' [01:04:00] So, I used to go there every two years in summer. So, I went there and saw him, so I stayed to help him. He was very good after, you know. He was very – so I stayed. I mean, it...

Were you planning on saying?

No, no, I wanted to stay in Paris [laughs]. No, but it's circumstances, family circumstances.

So, how old were you when you went back?

Twenty-three.

So, you were ready to start a career?

Yeah, yeah.

What...?

I mean, twenty-three, I did – because he was in the film business and the photographic business, I did a company which you imported photographic material from Hungary, from Ilford here, and used to distribute them. Made a company with, it's like a cooperative. I had the idea because there was a lot of local photographers. Photography was very – local photography, very famous, very interesting. People wanted to go and make photos of themselves. So it was all over Iran, not only in Tehran. So, they used to use it. So what I did, I did a company with five photographers, like a cooperative. And then, one of the photographers who was very known, he brought another twenty of them. Everybody had one share. But they used to use the material of their company. So, Kodak and Agfa were the big ones there. But my company became the big one. [01:06:00] So, Forte was the name of the film which we used to bring from Hungary, and Ilford.

What was the name of your company?

Aks Iran, Photo of Iran.

And was your father in that business too?

No, it was only me.

So, what was your father doing?

Father was film producer. He was used to – how different producing there it was. They started producing – first of all use you started dubbing films in Persian, because they used to do subtitles. But subtitles, it was no good because people, a lot of people who didn't know to learn. And I'll tell you something, the lower class of Iran, people used to go to the movie, they

didn't understand anything because there were subtitles. What they used to do, a group, let's say, of people, they didn't have enough money, they used to send one of them to the movie. They used to wait for him until he comes out, and he used to tell him the story of the film. You see, that was in the beginning. But then after that, it evolved [laughs].

So, did your father learn Persian?

Yes.

And your mother as well?

Yes, yes.

So, he started dubbing?

Yes, this business, the photo business. And then, how it became? What was it? How he got to the medical thing? Yeah.

Before that, let's talk a little bit more about your – the film producing for your father.

Yes, film producing.

Did you do that with him?

[01:08:01] Not really, no. I used to go and see what is the studios. There were a lot of studios. I used to go and see how they do the film and also the dubbing. I used to tell you about the dubbing. So, they started dubbing the films in Persian and that was a big, big industry. And we used to have to bring the films, the negative films, it's called the negative, master negative. And then, when they used to dub it, they had – there used to be – there was a film called the sound films. And they had to do it together and they produced positive films out of it. Yeah, and then this is when my father started with it also, dubbing. And then, the studios started producing films one by one. You know, in the beginning it was two films a year. Then in the

late sixties, seventies, they were producing more films. I don't know what, then films a year, then twenty films a year.

Can you name some of the films?

Yes. I forgot, let me remember. It will come to me.

That's okay, don't worry.

Yeah, yeah. I know the...

What were they about?

It's like the Indian films. There was a love story, dancing. [01:10:00] Then there was a problem with a couple, then they come together. And there was somebody who was against them, they had to fight each other. And that's it. It's like the Indian films exactly, you know, the stories...

So, you started your business?

Yeah.

Your corporative. Were you speaking Persian by this point as well?

A little a bit, a little bit.

How did you learn?

I went – there was a course in the University of Tehran for foreigners, special courses they used to do, because there was a lot of foreigners coming to – businessman, all businessmen. And we used to go there, we used to go twice a week and that's how I learned it, yes.

What was your social life like in Iran?

It was quite interesting. My social life, we had – where did I used to go? If I remember [laughs]. It is coming with Israel, the social life.

Do you want to take a break?

Yes, yes, yes.

Let's take a break.

Let's take a break. Yeah.

So, before we talk about social life, we'll keep – we'll talk about film, because we were talking about it a bit in the break. You were telling us about the production before. Were you involved in the filming as well?

No, I used to – not filming, no. I did one really high – one film as the director, not only me, but with somebody, with one Iranian. **[01:12:01]** We were together to direct a film, we did a film, yeah. A feature film, a full length called Ataraf, which is – *ataraf* in Persian means confession. It was quite nice. But yeah, now you say the name of the film it's coming to me [laughs]. Yeah, this is one which I did only, but I didn't do... It was too much involved in the other company, which was medical.

Okay.

Yeah.

And was your father producing? Was your father involved in making them as well?

What he used to do, for example, he had a project – a director who would used to come and he would say, 'This, I have this kind of project, I have this story', this, this and that. And he needs

to do the product – the money for the people. So, he would agree to it and then they used to come. The director would either sign a cheque to each one, and they would give it to my father and he would give them – him the money. Or he would give him the money to do... Yeah, they would divide it, I don't know how. Mostly the studio man was – he would give him the money. But the actors, they – because they wanted it on the spot or I don't know what, so they used to give him a cheque. And he would – they'd come to my father, give him – it's like a finance. Yeah, finance, yes.

And with your photography business, your corporative –

Yes.

How did that work?

Or that was excellent. Up 'till now the company exists, yeah. But now it's okay. [01:14:00]
No more – they're sons and you know, yeah.

So, what was involved? What were you doing?

We used to import and distribute. I used to import. I didn't have to do anything distribution, because they will take it, yes, yes. They will take it. At the time, the big companies, I told you, like Kodak, like Agfa was very big. So, it was – these people, I meant, it's theirs, because I used to tell them, 'Look, this is your company. It's your film, so you do whatever you want.'

And were you friends with these people as well?

Yeah, not all of them because – so the provinces, in each province they had two, I think. But the one – there were two people in Tehran. There was a group which were quite close.

So, who were your friends? Who – what was in Iran, Tehran?

In Tehran, the friends? Or the social friends?

Yeah.

Social friends, we were a lot of Iraqis like me. There was a club, big club of Iraqis. There was a skiing community. The families of – used to come there because there was a big community. We used to go skiing, because Tehran was about half-an-hour just to the mountains. We used to go skiing on the weekends. We'd go in the morning, come back in the evening. There were three or four resorts of skiing, the one near Teheran was about half, three-quarters-of-an-hour. Whereas another one was further away, we used to go to stay there. But skiing was very popular, so I used to go skiing. We used to go to the movies in groups, in groups. We used to have a group also, boys and girls at the time, which I was not married, also go out together. **[01:16:00]** We had a lot of parties, yeah, a lot of parties at home. Several people used to come, yeah, it was very interesting that, yeah.

Were you living with your parents?

Yeah.

So, did they have a...?

Yeah, we had quite a big house. Yes.

And they had...?

It's a flat, a flat.

Okay.

Yeah, yeah, a big one. Yes.

And did they have a similar social life?

Yeah, they had. They used to go – they had, yeah, friends, a lot of friends, yes. A group of friends. They used to – sometimes they used to play cards. You know, just not bridge, kind of cards.

[FS2] Canasta.

Canasta, Canasta. We had to go – now I remember. We used to do – play a group Canasta, yes, Canasta. Yeah, after we got married, we had...

And were they also a part of the same club?

Yeah. The Iraqi club, yes.

Was it Iraqi or Iraqi Jewish?

Iraqi Jewish, Iraqi Jewish. Only Jewish, yes.

Were you friends with non-Jews in Iraq?

Yeah.

Where did you meet them?

Through friends. And you see, yeah, two or three of them. Yes, yes, yes. Through friends. They were, you see, the upper class there was – they used to mix with the Jews, yeah. So, we could see them. You see, they used to be – one day a week, one of the cinemas used to show movies in original English. [01:18:07] And one – of course, this one was also Iraqi Jew, Iraqi Jew, he has a movie theatre called Takht e Jamshid, I remember very well. So, the non-Jews also used to come, those who knew English. And I used to meet them, you know, we were good friends, yes. I had two good friends who were Muslims. Yes, yes. And they were – they studied abroad. One of them studied in France. Yes, yeah. The doctors, they are – some of them were French educated. Because it was very strange that a lot of them were French

educated. Yeah, I mean, I used to go to see them regarding the material which I used to sell, x ray and this and that. I used to speak with them in French. So, when I spoke French, they would give me the priority [laughs]. I know they did, yeah.

What about dating?

Dating? Not really, no, no. We were a group, not a very social group. Boys and girls, we used to go together. But single, no, no I didn't. It didn't go in Iran like that, no. I think in this country it's not – up 'till now probably, in these countries, Iraq and even in Iran.

So, you stopped working with the film import-export business?

Yeah. The film, I did another company, pharmaceutical. [01:20:00] How? I went to see a doctor. I don't know, he wanted an X-ray for me. And they say, he was asking me about the film, what I do. He said, 'Why don't you import X-ray film? Why? You see the people there', you know. So, I started importing X-ray film from East Germany. At the time, East Germany.

What year was this roughly?

1966, '66, '67. Yeah, yeah, East Germany. Then from Hungary. They didn't do – it wasn't a good – they wouldn't agree to it. And Ilford of England used to do some, not a lot, yeah. So, I used to go to East Berlin. I went to a lot, yeah, I used to cross the border. Checkpoint Charlie, I used to cross it a lot [laughs].

Can you tell us about that?

Yeah, you go to West Berlin. And then you cross, you go to Checkpoint Charlie. It was American controlled. So you see, they were getting – they would see my passport, cross the border, then go to the East Berlin, East. Then they will – I would give them the name of the company and this. Somebody from a company that was waiting for me, yeah, and I used to negotiate with them. And the evening, I used to come back to West Berlin to stay there in the house. Because East Berlin at the time, at six o'clock no light at all. They would shut the light

completely. That's during the Soviet period, it was very, very... [01:22:00] [Laughs] It was interesting.

What passport did you have?

Iranian passport. We used to get Iranian passports.

Did you have an Israeli passport as well?

Israeli passport also. Yeah, yeah.

So, you're working with the medical business in Iraq?

So, I started bringing medical – now, I started bringing X-ray films. And then, the doctors told me, 'Look, these people', Siemens they used to call them, 'They're selling us these X-ray machines, very expensive. Why don't you bring one?' So, I started a contract with a company in the United States called Leeton. It was a huge conglomerate. But they had a section which dealt with X-ray. So, I used to – started importing X-ray machines. And then ultrasound, ultrasound, sound, they had a company in Germany called LEG in Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau. So, I was doing import from these two companies. And you had – the American company used to send their engineers to make all the things. And we had engineers ourselves to do the installation. Yeah, it was a big company. We had – it's big – that was a company with other two partners. They were Jewish, two partners. They were, yeah, in the medical, yeah.

And then the revolution happened?

When the things when the revolution started, before the revolution there was a lot of strikes. [01:24:03] So, I sent my wife and the children to Israel.

You met your wife in Iran?

My wife? Yeah, not in Iran, in Israel. My wife, she is a cousin of my good friend's wife. So, he introduced me to her when I was in Israel. Yeah, and we got married in Israel. But I was living in Iran, I was going and coming, so.

So, how do you – sorry, just to get the timeline right, you met her while you were living in Iran?

I'm living in Iran, but I went to Israel.

You went to Israel, and did she come to join you in Israel?

Yeah, when we got married, yes, yes.

When you got married? Did you have children in Iran?

Both of them were born in Iran, a boy and a girl. Yeah.

Okay. And your siblings, did they meet people in Iran or...?

My siblings? My brother was in Iran. My sister, both sisters were in Iran, yes, yes. One of them, my younger sister, she went to Israel and she got married there. And her husband had a pharmacy in Israel. But his brother was in the States and he wanted to – he was very, you know, commercial. He liked money, so he went to the States with his – with my sister and they were there. They lived there since – yeah, my brother in Iran. And my eldest sister, well, she is younger than me, she was also there. [01:26:00] And she came to live here, she is now in Israel.

So at that time, it was your parents, you, your wife and your children in Iran?

Yes. And my brother and sister, eldest sister, yes.

So, things started to change? How did you...?

When – one year before the revolution, there was a lot of strikes. And some – outside they were – in some provinces, there were some clashes. And about three months before the actual revolution, I sent my kids and wife to Israel.

What in particular made you make that decision?

There was a lot of strikes and I didn't like it. I didn't like it, I don't... And I left about two weeks before, Khomeini came to Tehran. It was still – I came to London, because they used to have direct flights to Israel, three times, four times a week. So, it was about a month before, it was – there was no flights, only once, something like that. So, I came to London during one week before, yes, on week before. But then, when Khomeini came by plane from France and on all the things, nobody could leave, nobody could leave, yeah. There was a massacre really, they used to hang people every day, five or six or even... I don't know what I'm saying. [01:28:00] Maybe ten people, they used to hang. This one is here, this one did something. You know, it was for a period of six months, that was. It was very – yeah, it was – the one incident was that one who just to work, who knew my father, he went to complain that this guy used to take money and take interest. So, they used to tell them there was – so, they took him to a court there, called him to go to court. It was very dangerous, because when they go to court, finished. His – they called him *Mufsid fil Arz[ph]*. What do you call it in English? He is unworthy of living, or something like that. You see, he's – yeah. But the judge luckily, luckily, the judge was a Shia from Iraq. And my father when he went to the court, he brought with him somebody who helped him before. He helped with his wife, because she was ill. And he spoke with him Arabic. And he told him, 'Look, I took money. I used to finance people, but even I – but I helped people. And this is this man. His wife was in hospital, she had cancer for two years. I really gave her the money to – for the hospital.' And so, the judge told the guy who was complaining, he goes, 'Go to hell. Why are you complaining?' Yeah, he was very lucky.

Was this man Jewish that your father was helping?

No. Yeah, no. [01:30:00]

No, he was just...?

No, the film business in Iran was all Muslims and Armenians and Zoroastrians. The Zoroastrians were a very small minority, but they were very educated, so most of them. But they had their own way of life. They didn't touch them, because when Khomeini came he said, 'Don't touch the minorities.' That was Armenians, Zoroastrians and the Jews. But they hung only one, because he was very rich, Elghanian. There was a very big, about sixteen-storey building in his name, he built it before the revolution. And they stoned – they said he was a Zionist and that's why he was hung, yes.

So, when did your parents leave Iran?

My parents left Iran about six months after the revolution. My brother, he couldn't live. No, my parents left Iran one year after the revolution. They could get a passport at the time, my brother couldn't. So, he went – he had two kids. One was one year old and one was two, three years old. They went through Pakistan, they crossed the border illegally on a camel, on a camel, because they had to cross it. With the *okoie*, there were some guides with them. They paid a lot of money. [01:32:00] And they arrived to Karachi and they took the plane to London as refugees, because the Jewish agency, I told them here and they granted them, through the Home Office, refugee status.

And when did your wife and children come to England?

I came here and stayed about three months. Three months after, they came.

What was that like being in England, knowing your family were in Iran and seeing the news?

My family were in Israel.

Your parents and...?

Parents, oh, yeah. That was difficult, because I couldn't get in touch with them. Yeah, I couldn't get in touch, yeah. But my brother used to send me some letters through people he knew. I don't know, he used to – yeah, let me see if I remember how. Yeah, some letters with people who came – through some Muslim people he used to know, yeah.

So, you came to England?

Yeah.

Where did you come to in England?

Where did it come? The first month I came to my sister. My sister, my eldest sister, her husband had bought – before the revolution, had bought a flat here. He used to come here, he bought a flat. He was here also, so I lived with him for about a month. She was not here, she was in Israel until she came. So, I was with him. [01:34:00] But then, we rented a flat here in Golders Green. And when my wife and the kids, they were there. Oh, sorry.

Sorry.

We rented a flat, then we rented a house. And then, I bought a house in Maida Vale. Not this one. Maida Vale, Maida Vale and that's it. We live there for five years. And you had – I had some problems, I had to sell it. And then, we rented a house also in Golders Green Road. I lived there for ten years. [Phone rings] Oh.

Just one second. So, what work were you doing in England? Where – how did you find it?

I used to export.

The same business?

Yeah, not – yeah, same business. Medical to Middle East and photographic from – I used to export from here some Ilford films. And medical from Germany direct, I had contacts. Yeah, they used to say, ‘Send it direct’, yes, yeah.

Had you been to England before?

Yes, yes. When I was a student in Paris, I used to come here. The first time I came it was 1957.

And what made you choose to come to England, not to stay in Israel?

Because first of all, I used to work with Ilford and they had commissions here. [01:36:02] Okay, they would pay me anywhere, anyway. They were – it was very straightforward. Secondly, I had to – I wanted to be in contact with Iran, because I left a lot of things there. You see, a lot of things, a lot of money and the house. And so, I had to be in contact. And also, yeah, it’s easier. It was easier for me to work, yeah. It was easier, yeah. And they had – they gave me the refugee status. I could work anything, everything, you see, yeah.

Did you manage to take those things out of Iran?

Yeah, yeah. Well, my people, those photographers, when Iran opened slowly, they were very kind, very good people. They used to come here. Each time they would bring me something, you know, you know. Yeah, yeah. That was – they were very, very good people. Very good people, yeah, yeah.

So, you came with – as refugee status with your Iranian citizenship?

Yes.

Okay. What were your first impressions of living here? You’ve come to visit, what was it like to live here?

It wasn't difficult for me, because I lived in Europe before and I used to come here before. And it wasn't difficult and I knew a lot of people. I had friends who came here also, you know. When I came from Israel to London, there were two people whom I knew very well. [01:08:02] By chance they were there, I didn't know they were coming to London, you see. Socially, it was okay for me. Yeah, it was okay, yeah.

How would you identify yourself if someone says, what's your identity?

Very difficult, very difficult. [Phone rings] I would only add that – it's okay? Shall I...?

No, it's okay.

The only – look, the common thing which I have is I am Jewish, that's all. But I lived in France, I lived in Iran and I lived in England. But I am forty years here, so I am – yeah.

Did you continue any traditions? Or did you bring anything with you from Iraq, Israel and Iran in each place? Or did you kind of stay with the same way of doing things, your...?

There's a lot from France, because I think in French, you see, because I went there very young. And also, because I was studying, even before going to France I was in the French school. So really, what – now whatever, for example, when you ask me something, I get it in French and I have to translate it. Yeah, for example, we were talking about this fruit, *kubba*, this is a cabbage, *kubba*. [Laughs] Now it came to me. Yeah so, I count in French. When I'm counting, I count in French. I'm still a mixture, you see. But okay I live here, I love it here, you know. [01:40:04] It's – I'm British, I have British nationality, yeah, yeah.

What about food? You gave us cookies for Iranian New Year.

Food is all mixed, mixed, everything. I eat fish and chips [laughs], steak. I don't eat a lot of meat now, but used to go to... Food, everything. Chinese, I eat a lot of Japanese food because it's mainly fish.

Did you bring any Iranian customs with you?

Iranian? Yeah, I have some vases. Maybe they are here, no, no, because I collect only Art Deco. Yeah, I have some, yeah, souvenirs from Iran, yes.

What message would you like – if you had a message to give looking back on your life to the future, what would that be?

If it is okay, if it is possible, to live in one place, not to change. For me, but nowadays, you see, because times change, there is evolution. Now, only people change. People change a lot from country to country they go. But to be really – stability is very important, very important, not to change. Yeah, this is really what I think.

Has your Judaism been affected by moving to different places?

No, no, no. I told you the only common thing in all these changes is Judaism, yes.

[01:42:04] *Is anything that you think I've forgotten to ask you that you think might be important for us to know?*

I have some notes, can I bring them? Not for me, but somebody which I knew him, how the people at the time was thinking. I knew a man who came here, he used to be a stamp dealer here. In the – he was a friend of Gorgi Lawi [ph]. I don't know, Lavi Puri [ph]. In Iran, they took him and he – there is a –

[FS2] He'd been killed by –

He was killed in – they took him to prison and he was killed there. Or he committed suicide, we don't know, we don't know. Lately, lately. He was his friend, they were Zionists, really good. This friend of mine, this stamp dealer, he told me in Iraq, much – he was much older than me. In Iraq, they took him, just they came to his house, they took him to prison. And so, they brought him to the court. And he told him, the judge, 'What did I do?' He told him in

Arabic that, 'The odour of Zionism emanates from your body.' You know, so he told him, so he sentenced him to go to – in a desert place. Okay. So, when he was going out of the – this is the very comical thing. [01:44:00] When he came out of the court, people from the judges and this, they came and they wanted to send him, they took – to send him, that what is the odour of – the smell of Zionism? This was emanating from his body. So, you see, the way they think, this is about it. It's very comical. But he told me, 'Look, they came to send me, to smell me.' [Laughs] So, this is – I wanted to tell you about it [laughs].

[FS2] And he went to the desert?

So, he went to the – they sent him to the desert. You know, Iraq is very tribal. So, one of the tribes, they sent him to one of the tribes. And under the sun, it was very difficult. So one day, after a week, the head of the tribe wanted somebody to write him a letter. And he was asking was from the tribes, nobody knew, nobody. So, they told him there was a little Jew there, he could write. So, he asked him to come, he wrote him a letter to the authorities. Then he took him under his place and he said nobody has to touch him. And for the court, for the police when he came, they told him, 'We will shoot you', because the tribes in Iraq they're all – you know, in their area they are like kings. Nobody can... And so, they sent him to Israel after. So, I wanted just to tell you about this comedy, how they smell him. They smell Zionists. [Laughs] You see, it's very –

It's interesting.

It's very interesting. It's not the judge who smelled, but the other people who were working there. [Laughs] Yeah.

Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us?

[Laughs] [01:46:00] No, that's it. I think all that, I told you. Yeah. [Pause] Yeah, that's it.

Farouk Zubli, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed by Sephardi Voices UK.

You're welcome. Thank you, thank you for interviewing. [Pause] Yeah, this is a photograph of the first talking cinema in Baghdad, which my father with his partner, [inau]. The year is around 1929. This photograph is of my siblings and myself.

When was it taken?

Oh, it's – I was probably fourteen years old, something like that, yes.

Which one is you?

The one on the right.

And where was it taken?

Where? I think in Baghdad, I think so. Yeah, in Baghdad, yes. Yes, Baghdad. This is the bar mitzvah of my brother, with Father and Mother.

Where was this taken?

In Israel.

And do you know roughly what year?

[01:48:00] It should be around – it's now... 1951, '53. 1953.

Could you just tell us about your mother and the photographs in Iran?

This was in Iran. [Inaudible background conversation] Oh, I see. She had the – my mother had a lot of photos. And because of the – when the revolution came in Tehran she was scared, because photographs were showing we're Jewish, we have a connection. So, she burned them all. She had – there was a photo which really we missed it, this is my father with Jack Warner,

when Jack Warner came to Baghdad in the mid-thirties, mid-thirties, late thirties. And they had a photo with him, but she burned everything.

Thank you.

These are the students of the Collège des Frères, which is a French Catholic school, which I was studying. The whole school.

Where was this taken?

That's in Jaffa in 1953, '54.

Thank you.

Yeah. This is my class in the Catholic school, 1954.

Where?

In Jaffa, the Catholic school. Jaffa, Israel.

Thank you.

Okay, this is myself in Paris, 1957. **[01:50:02]** Okay, this is a photo of my father and mother in the early sixties.

In what country?

This is in Tehran, in Iran.

Thank you. Can you tell us who's in the photo?

This is a wedding with my wife, Arlette in 1973. In – the wedding was in Israel. It was taken in the studio. The – it's called the Farah Studio in Israel, in Tel Aviv.

Thank you.

Yeah, this is my daughter, Talia, and my son, Daniel, in 1980.

Which country?

Here in London.

Thank you.

These are my grandchildren, May 2012.

In which country?

It's here in London. That's –

Thank you.

Yeah, okay.

And what are their names?

That's Maya, the daughter, Maya, the eldest and then the twins, Emma and James.

Thank you.

[01:51:16]

[End of transcript]

