

ELAINE DAHO
President, Clarksdale Cedars Club – Clarksdale, MS

* * *

Date: August 11, 2010
Location: Daho Residence – Clarksdale, MS
Interviewer: Amy Evans Streeter
Length: 1 hour, 44 minutes
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Project: Delta Lebanese

[Begin Elaine Daho Interview]

00:00:01

Amy Evans Streeter: This is Amy Evans Streeter on Wednesday, August 11, 2010 in Clarksdale, Mississippi, at the home of Mrs. Elaine Daho. And I'm with the Southern Foodways Alliance here documenting the Lebanese community in the Mississippi Delta. And, Mrs. Daho, if I could get you to state your name and your occupation, for lack of a better word, for the record?

00:00:23

Elaine Daho: My name is Elaine Daho and my husband [George Daho] and myself, we own a business in Clarksdale since 1979. I was born and raised till I was twenty years old in Damascus, Syria, and I moved with my—my dad, my mom over here to Mississippi—to Jackson, Mississippi. Anyway, and I was born in 1949 in December 21.

00:00:55

AES: And would you say the name of—of your shop and also mentioned the Clarksdale Cedars Club?

00:01:00

ED: My husband and I moved here to be close to my parents, who are still living in Greenwood, Mississippi. We moved in 1979 and we opened the men and boys' shop named Super Soul Shop. We took the name from my dad's—his store name in Greenwood was the same name and—.

00:01:24

AES: And your affiliation with the Clarksdale Cedars Club?

00:01:25

ED: And when I first came here we had a large Clarksdale Cedar Club. It only included women and, you know, I joined—since after three years since I—when I came here in 1979, it took me three years to know everybody and join. But anyway, now we have like twenty-five, twenty-seven members, and they're all women, and I'm the president. But I am not just a president. I'm the [*Laughs*]*—*the only officer in the club. We are affiliated with the Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese Club, and we are members with them and we get our bulletins every two to three months. We have two conventions a year, and we have the mid-winter around February and then we have the big one around the Fourth of July.

00:02:20

AES: Now if—if you don't mind, if we could back up and talk about your parents and how they arrived in Greenwood and give a little bit of—of that history?

00:02:26

ED: Okay, my dad came—I had—I have two—my oldest two sisters, since I'm one of eight—six girls and two boys. My two sisters were married and settled in Jackson, Mississippi. So when my—my dad is the kind of person who likes his freedom, and he used to trade and, you know, work a lot in free market like, you know, I mean bring in merchandise from, like, anywhere he wanted to. Like, he—my dad and us, when I was the youngest one, we lived in Brazil, so he has a family in Brazil. And he used to trade and bring merchandise to Syria to Damascus and sell it

then. And little by little, the government changed, and we had a socialist government where you cannot do exactly what you want to do, you know, except through the government.

00:03:22

By then my two sisters were married, and they were living in Jackson, Mississippi. My dad decided to take us again, since he took us before to Brazil, we lived three—three years there, went back to Damascus. My mom was very unhappy. And then time went by and my two sisters were married to—to two nice guys from back home and they were these—their husbands were living in Jackson, Mississippi. They came, and after, I think, maybe five years after that, my dad decided to immigrate. And he came first; he came two years before we did, and he established a business. And it was a ladies ready-to-wear, but his store name was—was Youthful Stout Shop. It was for oversized women.

00:04:16

And, I don't know. He never worked in there. I don't know how my dad did it because he wasn't familiar with that kind of business. But anyway, after two years in 1970, we came with my mom. We were six children: four girls and two boys. We came to Jackson and within a year and a half, I got married, and I moved to Tennessee. We lived there like seven, eight years. I have two kids. And then I was really homesick. I wanted to come back because—to be closer to my parents. We hardly had any family where I lived.

00:04:52

Anyway, and since we—by that time, my dad decided to change his business and have a woman—I mean instead of women's clothing, men and boys, which was better than—in the market, you know. I mean the business—the income was better if you had that type of business, so he moved to Greenwood, Mississippi. And so when I decided—when we decided, my husband and myself, to move, we couldn't move close to them because we had the same business

[Super Soul Shop]. It's a small Delta town, and it would be competition, so I'm like an hour and maybe fifteen minutes away from my parents.

00:05:28

And I have two married brothers there, too, and one sister, who, thank God, never remarried, but thank God she still lives with my parents in their old age. And she's a good, good daughter to them.

00:05:42

AES: Wow, that is quite a timeline. And I—I apologize if I get any of that wrong as I ask you questions, but—

00:05:49

ED: It's not—

00:05:49

AES: —I'm curious about Brazil, for one. Is there a—a large Lebanese community in a certain area of Brazil, or how did that connection happen?

00:05:57

ED: Okay, to my knowledge, and I mean the truth—it's not to my knowledge, no. When the people from my region back home, like Syria and Lebanon, now, the Lebanese people, a long time ago, Syria and Lebanon was one region. Then it was divided into Lebanon and Syria. Well, the people in Lebanon were the first ever from the Middle East to immigrate, and when they started immigrating, they didn't come to North America. They went to South America. So my

dad, my dad's family, his sisters and brothers, they all—he has stepbrothers and sisters. My grandfather was married—his first wife—and when she died, he married my grandmother. So all his brothers and sisters from his dad's side, they went to Argentina and Brazil to live.

00:06:52

And one time, my—my aunt, who is the real sister of my dad, I mean from both his parents, she's his sister, came to visit Damascus with her husband, and then I was the youngest one in the family. I was number four, the fourth girl, and she really encouraged my dad to go for a better life. And they—in 1953, I think they immigrated, and they came back in 1957. My mom was very miserable. But, talking about community, they have a large community—a lot more in South America and they accomplish—I mean the Syrian Lebanese accomplish a lot more than—than before they come, I mean, because they all went there before they came to North America. And even like now, I think the President of Argentina is part Lebanese. So I mean they're well known. And, growing up in high school, I finished high school in Damascus. We were learning about the poets and like Khalil Gibran and a lot of big ones that really flourish in the—in their new country that they move to, but we learned very well that they moved to South America way back years before they came to North America. So they have a big, big community.

00:08:15

I have—I mean I was young when I came back. With my parents' luck, I have one sister—number five. She was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, so they spent three—four years there; came back to Damascus and they would have one like my—you know my sister, she has—she can—she's a citizen there. She can go back to Brazil, but of course I mean she is—she lives—this one lives in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

00:08:41

But anyway, they went back and—and the reason they really went back, it’s my mom. I don’t know if she regrets it now [*Laughs*] because he tried again, I mean to take the whole family and—and travel again after a few years, you know.

00:08:58

AES: Yeah, those are some big moves. Can I get you to say your parents’ names and also their birth dates?

00:09:03

ED: Okay, my dad his name is Joseph—Joseph Rustom—R-u-s-t-o-m. Instead of the “n” here in Ruston, it’s Rustom. And my mom is Nada Rustom. And my dad is—he’s eighty-nine years old, and my mom is eighty-five years old. And they live in Greenwood, Mississippi. They’re not in the best of health, but God is good to them.

00:09:28

AES: And so then, now tell me, if you will, about your sisters who ended up in Mississippi and if—if they were married first in Syria and then—and then came or if it was an arranged kind of thing or how that worked.

00:09:41

ED: You know, you’re talking a long time ago in a way. I mean their husbands came back home to marry from their culture, in a way. And then when my first—when my oldest sister got married, her husband has a partner in the business. They—they used to have a children’s shop in the downtown—in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. So after a year when his partner wanted to

get married again or thinking to settle, he came. I mean he came to the same place his partner, I guess, since he knew, you know, it's so many sisters.

00:10:20

AES: *[Laughs]*

00:10:20

ED: And he married my second—my second-oldest sister and they were living in Jackson, Mississippi. They are still living in Jackson, Mississippi.

00:10:27

AES: And what do they do there?

00:10:29

ED: They have shops. They have a—I mean first, they—they used to have a children's shop and now—and one of my brothers-in-law, he used to go and take stuff in his car. I mean, it wasn't here—and I mean they sell—go around the gift shops and sell it, while my other brother-in-law stayed at the business.

00:10:52

After a while, for some reason, they all turned to the men—men's shops, you know. And now they—I have still one of these two brothers-in-law I'm talking about, my oldest sister's husband, only one is still in downtown Jackson. And by the way, we stopped by them yesterday, too. We did, you know, long-day visit. We stopped by them and, you know, downtown Jackson is not like it used to be anymore. There is no shops.

00:11:19

My oldest brother-in-law, who is married to my oldest sister, they had a tragic thing happen two years ago. He lost his oldest son. [*Emotional*] Well, after my—my sister and her husband lost their oldest son, it was very hard for them, and they were planning to retire and leave the store to their son. And after the shock of that, they—altogether, they closed their—their business. It was in a shopping center. It wasn't in downtown; it was in Westland Plaza in Jackson close to the Jackson Mall. That—I don't think it exists anymore in Jackson.

00:12:09

AES: So, I'm curious of the—the age of your older sister and what year it was that she was married and—and they settled in Jackson.

00:12:21

ED: What year—well, my oldest—when I say my oldest sister, it seems like there is twenty years between me and—it's just six years. When my mom had us four girls, we were one—you know, I mean like a year and a half, a year between us, so she's only six years older than me. And when she got married, she was seventeen or eighteen years old before she even finished back then—before—and in that region even before she finished high school. She was in the eleventh grade. I think she was seventeen.

00:12:51

And my second sister was in the eleventh grade—never finished high school—and she came to, you know, to Jackson after one year with—after my oldest sister came.

00:13:02

AES: And the reason I ask is because, you know, for example, Pat Davis [owner of Abe’s Bar-B-Que in Clarksdale], who, you know, we’ve visited with for this project that—that big wave of—of immigrants that came from the Mount Lebanon region of Syria prior to Lebanon’s independence, and so then they—they eventually called themselves Lebanese. And so I’m wondering, being from Syria, if you, as a family, call yourselves Syrian or Lebanese for, you know, conversation sake.

00:13:26

ED: I mean when I talk about myself really to people who, you know, I mean like sometimes I used to have—not trouble. I mean sometimes when I say, “Syrian,” you know, they look at me. When you say, “Syrian Lebanese.” “Oh, okay,” you know. So I’m really Syrian. I was born really, you know, there and—and, you know, like, I don’t know if I told you or I told [James] Thomas on the phone when I talked to him that we are—in a way, my dad is the—the latest immigrant in a way, while Pat Davis is—I mean, his mother was born here. And if she lived till today, she would be over 100 years [old]. Her parents, when they were young, came, so it’s a lot different. I mean all the—the old ones who came, they came in ships. They came to Ellis Island. I mean we flew from Damascus to, you know, we stopped in Europe somewhere but straight to New York. And from New York, we came to where my two sisters and my dad were in Jackson, Mississippi.

00:14:32

So I mean when I look at us, you know, I—my family and the other people, like Pat Davis’ parents, you know, or—they—they struggled more to achieve than us. I mean my dad was able—honestly, in two years, to have—to buy a house and have everything ready and to—to open a business. Of course, he brought some money with him back then when Syrian money was

good. Now the Syrian money is, you know, very cheap when you compare it to the dollar. And—but the people before, they really struggled. My dad spoke well—English and Portuguese—when we came—when he came here, so—and where I came from for—for—I mean, when you’re in junior high school, seventh grade, you have—back then, you have to speak between two languages: English and French. You don’t have a choice. And for six years, you take it.

00:15:33

So when—when I came here—I mean when we came here, like me and my—the sister who is not married, living with my parents—I’m the fourth one. The third one is older, two years, than me. And, anyway, we were able to read and write, but we couldn’t just carry on with people. We were very shy. I mean because the dialect—the American dialect is different than the books. I remember on the plane when we were coming and I wanted water, I mean—and it took me three, four times to tell, you know, the—the, you know, the person that I wanted. When I said, “Water [*vat-ter*], she said, “What?”, you know? I said, “Water [*vat-ter*].” I mean we couldn’t—“Oh no, you said water [*wah-ter*]?” You say butter [*budder*]; we say butter [*but-ter*]. [*Laughs*] So we weren’t, you know, too good with conversations, I guess, back then. And so, I mean, I started saying that there is a very big difference because the people who came a long time ago, they couldn’t speak.

00:16:35

And a lot of them were shy about where they came from, maybe, and they were very, very poor, and they encouraged their children, from what I understood—the people here in Clarksdale—to speak English. So I mean, like—like I have three children. My oldest speaks and understands—she doesn’t write and read, but she speaks and understands [Arabic] better than I do. We have dialect back—back home for our language, I mean a little different, like we speak very close, the Syrian and the Lebanese, Jordanian, we speak very close dialect. But if you go to

the—a little farther, you know, like to Egypt who speaks Arabic, too, but if you're not familiar with the Arabic language, they really speak different. Like Saudi Arabia and Qatar and that region, Libya—whatever. They—they—they speak our language, but it's hard for us to understand.

00:17:35

But, see, my daughter does understand the different dialect, even though she was born and raised here. Now my son, my—my second one was very good, to a point, but he married a girl from back home, who was an immigrant here. You know, she was here for three years with her parents, so his language really improved. Now, I come to my youngest one; my youngest one [*Laughs*] can understand every single word, I mean and laugh at any joke you tell him in our language. But he doesn't speak; he speaks very funny when he tries to speak.

00:18:14

AES: Now is your daughter's—is—her grasp of Arabic, being so strong, did she teach it herself or did she learn from you or is there—?

00:18:21

ED: Yeah, when, you know, I mean—when I had her, she was my first, and we really—to communicate my—you know, myself and my husband at home, we speak our language. We can express ourselves a little better than, you know, like you learn another language to express yourself. You're always going to find English to you. Well, we find the Arabic, you know. And I was so terrified, honest, when she went to kindergarten. It hit me suddenly. You know, I didn't send her to kindergarten, you know. Back then—I mean she's thirty-five now. Back then, it was, I mean, only four, maybe—not many people sent them to—four years—kindergarten. I waited

until she was five. And it hit me suddenly that she could not really—she watched—back then she watched *Sesame Street* nonstop and, honest, before she was trained—she was two years old. One day she was sitting down, and I had the *Reader's Digest*, you know, on the table. And I heard her from another room saying the alphabet. Honest to God, I never had to teach her. I mean she was two years old. And she was, you know, sitting and saying, “R, E.” I mean I was about to die. I went—and she completed it all from *Sesame Street*.

00:19:37

But anyway, she—I think she understood, watching TV. You know, children’s programs and whatever, but she couldn’t really speak it that well, you know, in a way. And when she was getting ready to go to kindergarten, I was really terrified—how is she going—how is she going to do, you know, with her friends? And then I was in a hurry to teach her, you know, the basic things, you know, to—to be able to say, “I’m thirsty” or “I need to get out,” you know, “and go to the—you know, restroom,” or something. But, you know, after she—but—but when she went to kindergarten where she was—her birthday was very late. It was August, and she started school really before she turned five. Because, here in Mississippi, you need to be five by the first of September—or second.

00:20:32

And anyway, she turned—she was still—but she was able to recognize and read names and do a lot with her English, to a point. I did ask the principal to give her a test and put her in the first grade. She was taller than other kids and—and, you know, but the principal wouldn’t. Even though it was a private school. I sent her to St. George’s, the school here in town where I lived back then closer to school. The principal refused, so I don’t think she learned anything in kindergarten except helping the teacher, like giving the paper and doing—because she knew everything basic.

00:21:09

And after that I never had any trouble in English with her. But she started with the Arabic, you know. And I have a brother—I mean we are six girls and then my brother came, and he's in his forties. He married a girl from back home, too. He has three children: one boy and two girls. And all of them—the oldest two, again, they speak, you know, just like they were born back home. And they never had—I don't know what the mom, my sister-in-law, went through when they went to school, but they speak beautifully. And he's just finished a four-year college, his oldest son, and accepted at UT [University of Tennessee] Dental School. So he's following his cousin—my son's footsteps, I mean, and both of them are named Joseph, by the way, after my dad. His son is Joseph, and my son is Joseph.

00:21:59

AES: So have you, as a family, traveled back to Syria, and has your daughter been able to make use of her proficiency in the language there?

00:22:06

ED: I really—I mean the problem with our family is that we don't have any family back home. My dad has very distant cousins and all his family, you know—and my mom has nobody there either, so when one of us sisters or brothers go, we have to rent a house and—and so it wasn't too much encouraging for us to do that.

00:22:31

I have one sister, my second sister, who really went almost—took her kids—she has four kids—took them almost every year—every other year, back there. But I really didn't do that till I remember Amanda finished college and my son was—his second year in college and my

youngest one was like fourteen years old in 1996. I was dying back then—back then because I came in 1970—to go back and see my own country and let my children see, you know, too, because I told them all about my school and to—to really—I’m going to say to my disappointment, after how many years, I mean twenty-six years, when I went back, I was telling my kids one story about, you know, like the weather is so pretty there. We didn’t live in homes with air-conditioners, and it’s so pleasant and you don’t need—. Only to find out, everything I told my kids wasn’t true. **[Laughs]** It was hot and people were different and it just—they weren’t too happy, to be honest with you.

00:23:47

Over there, I only stayed three weeks. The first week we—they really suffered with the changing—I don’t know the weather, food—even though I talked to the doctor before I left and I took a lot of medicine with me. They never drank the water except bottled water and never ate fresh vegetables and fruits, but they still got sick. And they were very miserable. So after a week I was ready to come back home with them, but I was lucky enough that my—my sister, who travels a lot there, was there with her one son that’s close to my youngest son’s age. And, you know, she really changed my mind about coming right back, and toward the end of the trip, they really enjoyed it. But the problem—they got sick and that bothered me and bothered them, too. We were able to go just to Damascus. I have a very dear—my in-laws’ side family—they have—I mean my in-laws, they have relatives in Amman, Jordan, and we were able to go from Damascus to Amman and spend three nights because that lady was very dear, and she visited them and us a lot here. So I promised, if I ever go, I’m going to go visit her.

00:25:05

Toward the end, they were very happy, got used to it, and—but the question—will they go back now that they're married and settled down? I really don't know. I don't know if I even— if I will go back.

00:25:20

AES: But it's so wonderful for them to at least have that taste of their—their heritage and homeland.

00:25:24

ED: You know—you know, the real life there—but, like I said, it's changed. I was able to take them to my school. It was June and July when I went, and the school opened like two days a week. And I mean it was—I was amazed how my memory was about it and when I went back to see it. I think—I do think people change and life changes, but the problem, which, to me, I mean, thinking about us as—I came here, I was twenty years old. I mean I remember every way of life—all our life there. I mean and every little thing and how that stays with you, and after twenty-six years, I mean, you think that you changed a little bit, of course, in every way, but you still think that the people back home didn't change. I mean like they—you come here, and you don't grow anymore. Well, we did this; we used to do that. And that a lot reflected on my children, how I raised them. I mean I was hard on them in a lot of areas, you know, and like, you know, their friends, when they went to school and spending nights. You know, I used to tell them, "Well, back home, we never spent the night in relatives' or friends' houses," you know. So they weren't—my kids weren't as free as their friends to do the other—you know—and they always, of course, questioned. And I'll jump to say, "Well, we didn't do that. How I'm going to let you do something?" So I feel like we—we froze when we come here. We just—I mean we

always go back and say we used to do it—forgetting these people changed back home, too, and they even—their kids back home, when I went, you know, after twenty-six years, their kids back home and families, they live completely different than when I was living there with my family.

00:27:24

And I—for a while, I was hearing that from my children nonstop. “Oh Mom, you did this.” “Oh Mom, your country was pleasant and cool, huh, Mom?” We were dying from heat. Well, I mean I lived at home and my sister, who was there before I—she was there the time before I went—.

00:27:44

AES: Can I stop for you a minute?

00:27:51

ED: You know, it’s—it’s a different life, it’s true. But I don’t regret going. It cost us a lot, you know, all four of us, to fly back there and—and but I wanted to my—to put to myself a closure about that—the country that I was born and raised in. That really stayed with me for some reason, you know, but now I know I cannot go back and live anymore—over there. In a way it helped me, too, because I changed. The people over there changed so much and it’s not like—the same like when we were living there.

00:28:33

AES: Well, and I want to ask you about your family’s arrival, but also, when you were speaking about your father, and—and saying how things were so much easier for him when he came here; it just took him two years to open a—a store. And that—that first wave of immigration from

Syria and Lebanon in the early part of—well the late 19th and early 20th century, and, you know, Pat Davis is—again, to mention him and his family—and that the—the history of peddlers in the Mississippi Delta, who then got storefronts and then started this merchant class of Lebanese immigrants, and—and what your family found once they got here and what that community was like for them to—you know, what kind of support did they get when they—when they arrived and—and how they, too, got into the businesses that they were in?

00:29:20

ED: Well, see, when my dad decided, I mean, to come, he really came by himself. And back then, I mean, I think my sisters were here for maybe five, four—I don't know exactly—years they were living there. They still were—they didn't mingle too much, even though they had, you know, a Lebanese Club—Syrian Lebanese Club in Jackson that they still have till now. And, I don't know, maybe they got busy having kids and—but they did know a lot of people. But for my dad, my two sisters with their husbands were the support for him when he stayed with each one two, three months before he bought his own house. And the reason he did that because he said when he went to—decided to come by himself first, when he went to Brazil, he took four children, my mom and himself. There were six, and it was a really hard life for him to make ends meet. And with my mom nagging about how unhappy and unhealthy—she thinks she wasn't healthy there—there was something wrong with her. I mean he didn't do a good start, so he decided to come by himself. But, having my two sisters and their husbands, they really—the ones who really supported my dad and helped him in every way. They did know a lot of Lebanese there, but I don't remember them mingling a lot with them because when we first came here, I mean, followed my dad after two years—I don't remember. They introduced us to many families and, you know, and people that they knew. And within a year and a half I was married,

and I left. I mean like when I go to Jackson, I don't go too, too often to Jackson; I mean when I first came back to Mississippi—and when I left, North Jackson wasn't in existence. I mean it was—so I wasn't able even to drive or know my ways in Jackson.

00:31:23

So, because I got married very quickly, and then, after that, my family—my parents moved to Greenwood. So when I come to visit, not too often, too, I'm talking about years back, where a phone call when I first came to Mississippi, if I wanted to call my sister in Jackson, I mean the—the bill for one call, you know, when you talked too much, it was \$30 and \$25 and *[Laughs]* \$20. So when I was far away from my family, my parents and my—in Tennessee, I just didn't—we didn't call more than two or three times a month because it was too expensive. I didn't come see them, like, you know—like, you know, I mean like what now people do, like my daughter-in-law, her—her parents live in Orlando [Florida]. And they come and go all the time. Holiday—one holiday she picks, she goes—travels there with her husband—my son, I mean—to be with them, so life has really changed. And I cannot say my dad really struggled; I cannot say that. I mean—.

00:32:22

When we came, when I came here, I mean with my mother, it seems to me I had my sister, who is two years older than me. I was affected more than her about my own country, and I wish we never came, and I want to stay there because you really come here, you don't have friends, and you don't know anybody. And my dad had the store, and we helped him with the store. I mean, day in and day out. Every now and then—often enough, though—we used to see my sisters when their kids were young you know, and it wasn't any fun for—. I mean it was very hard to me. I mean you always talk about, I mean, how many immigrants come here and how—and how. I mean, but when I look back at myself, they have their own struggle. I'm not talking

financially. I mean some people have their own emotional struggle, to a point I was very miserable, and my dad was very angry with me [*Laughs*] to a point that I don't know if he meant it, but he gave me choice. I mean, if you're going to be happy or go back. But I didn't have anybody to go back to.

00:33:36

And my dad, the one really that wanted us all to be here and not—he told my mom he doesn't want—you know, back then, thirty-eight years ago, I mean, whatever. I mean girls used to get married a lot earlier back home. So he made sure to tell my mom he doesn't want anybody to stay behind; he wants all—all six of us. You know myself and my other sister, who was older than me, all of us to come here. He didn't want anybody to be left. So it was like a *must*—we come here. And I don't know—I mean he felt how unhappy, you know—and my sister was able to hide hers, but I couldn't hide mine, and my dad was very angry with me about that, you know.

00:34:18

But then I got married, you know. I mean I was twenty-one, I think. And—and I mean I started my life, and I have kids and I just, you know, forgot about my emotions, to a certain extent. I mean, you know, and I have family to worry about now, so—but deep in my heart, there is still that hole that's still empty. I mean because it's hard. You know, I mean when you live twenty years in one place and then you move and—and to a complete different life, different way of life, I mean we were—we didn't know anybody to go out with or to do—I didn't know how to drive. You know, I mean when I came here, it was a hard life.

00:35:08

AES: And what—you know, I've spent a lot of time in Greenwood, but I have not really realized that there is a Lebanese community there. Is there—is your family—?

00:35:18

ED: They don't have a big one. They used to have a big one, but they used to say, I mean, I hear from the older people here, who I met, you know, I mean, when I first came, that they used to call Clarksdale a Little Lebanon. That's how much Lebanese were here. They didn't have a lot in Greenwood, but now, I mean, I have my parents, my sister, and then two brothers with their children. They might have very few families, but they don't have as much as we have—till even now we have more than they have. But they never had a club. But back then what I heard, they used to travel like from Greenville, Cleveland, and Clarksdale and Greenwood; they used to mingle a lot and visit each other. You know—and you know, our culture, the Syrian Lebanese, every time they meet, you know, they—it's like a party to them. They start singing and doing the *dabke* [folk dance] and the music, so they kept, you know, like they did when they first came here, you know.

00:36:15

When we came, we didn't do that because it just was us and my two sisters and their little children, you know. But when the Lebanese came, it looked like, you know, like from—they have a town, you know, a little town in Lebanon called Zaraane, and the majority of people here are from there. So it seems like one family will come, and then the other people will hear, “Oh so-and-so,” like, say—like, “Chafik went to Clarksdale.” So they all try to come to the same place. So till now it surprises me sometimes when I hear this family is cousins with this family or this is—. I mean till now, and I have been here thirty years. They're all related in some way. I'm the one who is related to nobody here. **[Laughs]**

[Recording is paused for approximately five minutes, as Elaine Daho retrieves some photographs.]

00:37:02

AES: We're recording again, and Mrs. Daho just brought out this beautiful family photograph that—and was joking that everyone in the photograph came from two people, her parents. And we started—she started talking about when they would get together as a family for holidays—Mother's Day, Father's Day, everything—and your mother would cook for everyone. And we can pick up there, and you can tell us about that. That would be wonderful.

00:37:26

ED: Yeah, I mean, since we've been here—we came here in 1970, and that makes us this summer was forty years. In July 5th we—we came and my mother got into a habit. You know, back then, all my sisters, their kids were young, and I wasn't married. But anyway, she kept the tradition every Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Mother's Day, Father's Day, she always had a big feast, cook all the Syrian and Lebanese food: the *kibbe* [balls or patties of bulgur and ground meat that are baked or fried] the *tabouli* [bulgur salad with parsley, tomatoes, lemon juice and olive oil]—I mean grape leaves and—. But getting older, like now, you know, God bless them, my mom is like eighty-four [years old], and my dad, eighty-nine. There is five years difference between them. My mom had to slow down a lot where she just takes Christmas, but still she insists Christmas is hers, so we take turns, you know, taking Easter and Thanksgiving. And now Father—Mother and Father, they—we go there, depending on, you know, maybe sometimes not all of us because we are in a stage now where we have children out of town and grandchildren. So sometimes, you know, you have your own family—your own—your own immediate family

to—to—to go and do with. So it—it is now very hard for everybody to get together and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren, too. So it got to be a little hard.

00:38:55

I mean, you know, it's very rare now. God forbid, unless something—God forbid something bad, you know, like the passing of my nephew two years ago, I mean we really don't get together at the same time in one holiday. And it is sad. I mean because I feel like my children not seeing their cousins as much since each one in different towns. I mean me, myself, I mean my three kids in different towns. And yesterday I was coming back, and my daughter, you know, she said, "Mom, what did I hear about, you know, my—." Her brother is going to spend Christmas maybe with his in-laws in Orlando. **[Laughs]** "Do you know anything about it yet, so I know when I take my break, Christmas or Thanksgiving?" I said, "Mom, it's too early for me yet to decide now." I really—he didn't run it by me yet to see where we're going to spend it. So it's getting to be harder and harder, even my own immediate family.

00:39:58

Like last year, my son went to Orlando. They flew to Orlando with one child, and now he has two, and it looks like they might go again. But he's going to check with his sister and brother at least to spend one holiday together. You know, to me, it's very bittersweet, very, since I was very close to my children. And, you know, like my—when my youngest one went to school to college, I had that empty nest that I'm still struggling with. **[Emotional]**

00:40:34

AES: Well if—.

00:40:33

ED: I'm still struggling with it with the little one because it was—well his brother, the second one, was four years apart, and I enjoyed him, you know, four years. I spoiled him to pieces. Like to his high school I used to always take his lunch, and I mean he loved *kibbe* sandwich, beyond and above. Now *kibbe* sandwich, it's [Chamoun's] Rest Haven's own creation. When you go back home, you don't hear about *kibbe* sandwich. We eat it mostly—I mean we have a lot of stuff. I never ate *kibbe*, the—the patties, never back home. We have another dish that—vegetable dish, very famous, that they do them in patty and fry them. I never eat patties, *kibbe*. It's either in a tray and in between two layers; it's stuffed with nuts and meat and onion or stuffed patty, whatever they call it. I mean all stuffed individual like football-shape things. So they—they created their own, you know, that *kibbe* sandwich. It's very delicious. And my youngest one used to be crazy about it. And we used to go often and eat there, you know, and every time, without looking at the waiter—waitress, you know, I mean my—my little one, he'll—he'll say, "Well, I'll take the usual." And they always knew what his usual thing [*Laughs*]. And one time it—the—the one who waited on us was new and without looking he said, "I'll take the usual." And then she looked at him, and she said, "What do you want?" [*Laughs*] And we laughed because he always said, "The usual." That's the only thing he ate over there.

00:42:07

So I started making it for them, too, at home, since they like it so much. I started making the *kibbe* sandwiches, and it's very nice. You have to order the bread, the flat bread that—like you ate today, I mean, from out of town. But way back, they tell me that Rest Haven, you know, Louise Chamoun used to make it fresh when they first came here, just like back home. Now I'm—I came from Damascus. I wasn't familiar with this. This is how the villages outside Syria—we have the pocket bread. So I relate it a lot to the pocket bread. That was our daily bread, the pocket. And back there, I mean, you buy, every day, fresh bread. And you make sure,

too, you know, in a way—to have enough for you, and if you have left over the next day, nobody will eat one-day-old bread. You buy it while it was—it’s hot. I mean, it’s just—I cannot even explain how—where I lived in that area back then, we had in our neighborhood—we had specialty places. We didn’t have supermarkets. Like, we had a butcher shop; we had a bakery, you know, and mostly breads. We had a bakery for the sweets and a bakery—just bread. And we had a little shop where they sell only vegetables, fresh vegetables. So, and it’s a daily thing to—do. I mean like, when we’re old enough—old enough, I mean, my mom, since she had, God bless her, so many children, and people there shop daily for stuff. When we got an age where we knew what we’d do, I mean, we were still in school, you know, say, like high school, instead of my mom going shopping, she’d say, “Elaine,” you know, what—what we buy you know this and that and how—? “You go get me,” let’s say, “squash,” you know, “two—three pounds, whatever.” I mean—so we used to help my mom a lot. But it was a daily stuff. I mean I don’t remember my mom never froze a lot of dishes, you know, in the freezer. So everything was fresh. You buy it, you cook it, and you eat it. I remember even chicken, sometimes.

00:44:15

But before we came here, they used to have places where you’d buy it just like here, already, you know, cleaned, and you’d just cook it. But it was fresh. I mean I don’t remember too much frozen. But I remember my mom, way back, used to make all the, like, tomato paste and jams and whatever. And I hated that because every time we have to help her with it. So it was, when she does something, we have to be there to help her, too. And anyway, that’s, in a way, you know, reflected on me. I never let my children work a lot at home. I said, “By the time you get married, you have a whole family, you’re so tired from working and doing—.” They’ll have their time when they’ll have their own family, you know. But we did help a lot, my mom, in every sense of the way.

00:45:01

My—I have an uncle, who is my dad’s brother, and an aunt who have never been married—lived in our home as long as I remember. You know, back home, people lived together, and they had that tradition, like when the oldest son gets married, he stays with his parents and maybe the second or the third one, maybe, will live in different places. But always the oldest one stays with his family and inherits the house, you know, after them. So it’s a close—very close-knit thing that’s completely different, you know, than the things we faced when we came, you know. Because, you know, when you’re twenty years old, you really don’t forget stuff. It’s not like, you know, I never went to school here. I never went to school—well, my sister was born in Brazil and was five years younger than me. And she—she, of course, went to school here with my other sister and two brothers. So she went to graduation. We don’t have proms. We don’t have all this stuff. You know, we don’t have these big parties when you finish high school. I mean, you don’t think very highly of yourself and—unless you finished college, back then. I mean, “What high school is going to do to you?” That’s what I heard growing up. So I mean for—because of my—my circumstances, I was able to finish high school one year, and because I came from a Muslim country, I wanted so bad to go to college, but my dad was already here, and—and he—you know, he told me, you know, “What’s the use to go—one year, two years, to—you know to college because you’re going to end up here?”

00:46:48

So I was able to find a job there. I was teaching Bible Study for the seventh grade, you know. I mean one year, at eighteen years old, I graduated. The second school year I was sitting with teachers, you know, in the office. And I was able because—because it is a Muslim country. They don’t—they teach religion when you’re in junior high and high school, not in elementary school. Now it’s changed; maybe they do. I’m not too familiar, but I’m talking about when I was

back then. And—and starting seventh grade to high school, we used to divide the—the Muslim. And I used to go to girls school because we don't have mixed till college. So we have boys' school till high school and girls' school.

00:47:37

So when religion hour comes, you know, the Christians go like to the library, and the teacher will come and teach them, and the Muslims stay where they'll be taught from, like, you say, a priest here or a minister, what they called back then a *Sheikh*, you know. And he's the one who teaches them. He's very well educated. You know, it's not like, you know, the Christian student. So I was able, from high school, to teach what I'm saying, you know, religion. And that maybe put—put me in a way where I—we used to back home, the majority of people, the Christian people, which is a very small percentage, they were either Catholic or Orthodox, like Greek Orthodox, but Orthodox. We were Orthodox. So when I started, you know—I mean when they accepted me to teach, of course, I mean, we—since we went to a public school, soon there was a school day for me, because our holiday was on Friday, you know, the public school. The Muslim holidays, they take off Friday, not Sunday. But on special occasions, I never felt that all the Christian girls never—we never felt that we can take off, and they allow us to take off. I mean they weren't strict to say no, like Easter always on Sunday. We were very able to take Sunday off and allow us Monday off in school to celebrate, you know, our faith. I know that it's, you know, a problem between Muslims and the majority, but growing up in Damascus, I never—because till now, my best friend, my—two of my best friends are Muslim. One of—one of them moved to Abu Dhabi with her husband that she calls me till now sometimes and I call her back, and she had her three kids there. She's a teacher. And she goes [in] summer back to Damascus, and she goes and she always tells me how Abu Dhabi is out of the world. She says even, “Oh,

come see it. It's even better than America, Elaine. Come visit me," you know. So I'm still in touch, to some extent, with my friends.

00:49:50

AES: Well, if we can back up a little bit, I want to ask you about your mother's kitchen growing up, and if, you know, you were talking about her making jams and tomato pastes and things. Did she try to maintain those culinary traditions when the family came here to Mississippi and if that was difficult and what—how she—?

00:50:06

ED: I mean, when we came here, already, I mean, we had somebody to tell us even how to live, like my two sisters. So they introduced us to everything. My mom never did anything. I mean, you know, like we—she would buy the apricot jam, you know. We—she never did that. The—the house my dad bought in Jackson, it was on—in Clinton, I remember, and he had a shop in—on Capital Street in Jackson. But anyway, I remember the house was—was with no air-condition. We had central heat, but no air-condition. And I don't know what you call what we have, but we have a fan in the hallway where it—where, if you opened the windows, it makes a lot of noise and the air comes in but on the top of everything. We were dying. That summer in 1970 in July was the worst ever. We went through without and—poor—my dad, he promised my mom the following summer he will put an air-condition—. What my—my mother really did, she did bake a lot of pita bread. That she did. But I don't remember she did jams because my sister was saying, "Come on, this is ready." And we were amazed.

00:51:22

Before we came here, my sisters married within a year apart from each other, so before we immigrated, you know, to Mississippi, each one of them visited us with her first born, you know, different years. They didn't come together. And I remember they brought—brought some stuff with them that was very strange to us. One of it was the cake mix in the box. I mean we were overjoyed. I mean, “Look what they have in America. They have,” you know, “a cake in a box. You just add whatever.” I mean we were amazed. You know, they used to bring stuff with them, you know, that they knew because they, you know, had been married and newly married anyway, three, four years. I mean they knew we don't have it, and we're going to have a fit with it.

00:52:07

But I remember the cake mix when my mom went out and she—she told the people, “Can you believe in America, they don't have to do everything from scratch? We have a hard life and here they have a—you know, a simple—not simple, I mean, easy life in America.” So we were very excited about what they used to bring us.

00:52:25

AES: And in the early '70s when you were—your family was in Jackson, was there like a—a Middle Eastern market in the city where you would—that would import things?

00:52:33

ED: No, no. I mean, not that I remember, no. I mean, again, I go back to say when we came, you know, I mean, with my mother—and even though my sisters were here for a few years—seven, eight years, maybe, they were here, they weren't mingling with people much. So I didn't meet hardly anybody through my sisters, you know. I mean American or Lebanese. They hardly

knew anybody. It took them a while to know about the Federation [Southern Federation of Syrian Lebanese Americans], a while to—I was a member in my club here when I moved out of seven or eight years here before they even were members in their club in Jackson.

00:53:19

And I remember, I mean I knew about the [Cedars of Lebanon] Club, and I was a member here. And one time an old lady went to a convention, the Federation Convention to—to Nashville, and when she came—she went with a friend, family, whatever. She was up in age. And she was—I was close to her, you know, and when she came back, she said, you know, “What, Elaine?” The—it was summer that she went to the summer convention. She said, “Winter convention they were talking about Jackson, Mississippi.” And I said, “Okay.” I mean, Amanda by then, my oldest daughter, I’m going to say was twelve of thirteen years old. And I said, “Jackson, Mississippi? I mean, I’m going to try to go.” And that was something that my husband didn’t digest too much. I mean taking my three kids and drive all the way to Jackson to go to a convention. We weren’t familiar to what it is all about, even though our federation, I think, this summer celebrated seventy-six years, you know, in—you know and is still going. But my sister wasn’t aware of a lot of things.

00:54:25

And I went to Jackson to a point when I went to Jackson, my sister and, you know, the husband, they have downtown shops. And I stopped and, you know, I remember—blow the horn to her and she came out. And she said, “Elaine, I never believed you’d come. I never believed they’d let you.” I mean back then, that mentality, I mean the husband is—and whatever. Anyway, he said—and they came to that convention. After that convention, they did join their own club, and since then we went to a lot of mid-winter because it’s a smaller club and whatever. We went to a lot of—they did a lot of conventions that we went to. And since then, I don’t

remember missing summer or—or winter conventions. But I remember after Jackson, that’s—that mid-winter, they had the big one in Houston [Texas]. And they were writing an essay, you know, the seventh and eighth graders. And my son, my middle son, was seventh or eighth grade then, and he wrote an essay about, you know, how it’s—every year it was a different question, like how you—you know, how you do with having a home that—tradition, the Lebanese Syrian tradition and then you go to school. How you tell people about it? How are you proud? I mean he has to write an essay. And before the convention that summer, I received a phone call that my son won.

00:55:48

So we were excited, and he begged. He said, “Dad, let us go, please.” I mean I remember, I have a sister in Memphis, and she had two little ones. She came here, and we drove to Houston. I took my three children. We had a van, and she took her two kids, and we drove to the first big one in Houston. And since then, I missed only two.

00:56:09

AES: And what year was the first year that you—you attended?

00:56:12

ED: What year that—?

00:56:13

AES: The first year you attended?

00:56:18

ED: It was in the early '90s—1990, maybe '91 or '92.

00:56:23

AES: And then you say the Federation is seventy-six years old. Do you mean the National Federation of [Syrian] Lebanese Americans?

00:56:27

ED: Right, the federation, the national—our club—I mean the clubs in every town are a lot older than the Federation. It took them a while to have the Federation because the club here, I'm going to say—but I'll make sure maybe next time—I mean I will let you know. I mean it's over eighty years old, the Clarksdale Cedars Club. And I remember when I was the Mississippi State Vice President, they invite me in Vicksburg, Mississippi, to celebrate their 75th, I mean, and it was fifteen, eighteen years ago. But I mean they don't have a club anymore in Vicksburg, Mississippi. And I have a sister and her family live there. And I tried to convince my sister to take over like I did take over here. Their problem over there, they have St. George's Orthodox Church, where the Lebanese and the Syrians are very active in it. They have—once or twice a year they have, you know, they cook Lebanese [food] and sell for the whole community, and they make a lot of money for the church. And you know, I mean, they're very active in it that a lot of members—a lot of women, Syrian Lebanese women, didn't want to be in the club, too. It was too much for them, you know.

00:57:45

Back then, all clubs were active in a way, like they'll have some event where they raise money. And our club was raising money for St. Jude [Children's Research Hospital], because, you know, the founder [Danny Thomas] and whatever. Some people here knew—you know, they

met—he came one time to one of the hotels in town during a convention, so Clarksdale held one time, I think I’m going to say mid-winter before I came, mid-winter convention.

00:58:13

AES: And this is Danny Thomas you’re speaking of?

00:58:13

ED: Danny Thomas. And I was really lucky to meet this great man who was born and raised in this country. And he was in Memphis, Tennessee, dedicating a—not a wing, a little pavilion or something. He was there, and I talked to Louise Chamoun and another two friends of mine, and I said, “Why not go and meet him?” Because I heard so much about him and my kids were—when they were young, they were watching *Make Room for Daddy*, you know. Yeah, and then he had the book *Make Room for Danny*.

00:58:50

But anyway, and I was really amazed. I wanted to go so bad and meet him. I was amazed to see him sitting on a little bench outside his pavilion by himself. And I ran to him where Louise and the rest of my friends were laughing at me, and I mean I went and was—I was shocked to see him speaking my language. That’s how smart he was. And he said that Uncle Tonoose in *Make Room*, the—his TV show, he was—his real name of his real uncle— Tonoose and this is a very famous back then—name for the Lebanese people.

00:59:26

He said—I said, “How were you—were able to still, you know, speak it?” And I thought it’s amazing, you know. He said, “I had good ears, and I had my Uncle Tonoose.” Let me bring you the picture.

[Recording is paused for approximately three minutes while Elaine Daho retrieves some photographs.]

00:59:39

AES: All right. So we have before us now some pictures of Elaine and her children with Danny Thomas and—and that’s in Memphis, I presume.

00:59:48

ED: Yeah, it was in Memphis when he came to dedicate a little addition to his pavilion, I’m going to say, and they did the reception there and through the club and the Federation I knew about that. And we went running. I mean my kids were still, in a way, you know, in schools, I mean. It’s going to be over twenty years ago, and he was a down to earth person—person. I mean he was so famous and still, I mean, he was like—like anybody else. You know, you think, you know, he’ll have somebody like a bodyguard over them. No, he was sitting by himself. And everybody thought I’m crazy. I ran to him. I liked him very much. He was a wonderful man, wonderful man.

01:00:28

AES: Tell me about this picture.

01:00:29

ED: Okay. Every—every time they add to the—to his hospital in Memphis and now I mean they—they’ll have a little gala and celebration. Now they have like every five years, they have

like some event associated with St. Jude, which, when my kids were growing up, we did make an effort, you know, to go because his children would come.

01:01:00

Now this is [Danny Thomas's] son [Tony Thomas]. This is his son and—and this is his—used to be his girlfriend. And I'm not too good with names. She was the one in *Wings* [Crystal Bernard].

01:01:10

AES: Yes, the actress. Yeah, I don't know her name.

01:01:12

ED: The actress and I forgot. Now this is [my daughter] Amanda, and this is [my son] John. And it was an event there, you know, that we went to. We kept really—I kept a lot but lately, I think only every five months—every five years, they do kind of like a convention in the Peabody [Hotel] in Memphis. And, you know, they—and this is—is his daughter [Marlo Thomas]. And this is her husband, you know, [Phil] Donahue, and this is his son [Tony Thomas]. He's a little different. He doesn't have a beard in here. And this is my son and his wife. They were still newly married. I mean—and this is me and we went and they had something there, too, you know for—for them.

01:01:50

So, one time, I was at the airport going somewhere, and I saw his son and I—you know, I shook his hand and still, of course, I mean so many people, they're not going to be able to—but they're so down to earth. I mean they posed with you; they remember you. I have more pictures with them—different events, you know. And they're still going strong, which I'm glad, after

their dad, to keep it going. I mean we took—I remember every time they do something there, they let the people who register for the event, you know, they take them on a tour, and it's really wonderful. I think he is in Heaven. I—I—no matter what he did on earth, I think he's in Heaven.

[Laughs]

01:02:29

AES: Yeah, he was a good man and a great spokesperson for the Lebanese community.

01:02:30

ED: Yeah, very nice. Well I was happy and, in a way, honored to meet him because, not after—but a little—few years, I mean, maybe three, four years after he came, he passed away, after he came for the dedication he passed away [in 1991]. And I said, “Thank God, at least—.” I felt bad, but I said, “Thank God that at least I met him.”

01:02:50

AES: Uh-hmm. Well, we haven't quite spent much time on the Cedars Club, which is what, you know, got me to call you in the first place. And I've really enjoyed learning about your family, but I wonder if we could, you know, just to make sure that we get some history of the Cedars Club and—and we were visiting a little bit over lunch and talking about how it started as a—a men's club and how it's transitioned over the years. If you could give us a little bit of history with that?

01:03:13

ED: Well, I mean till yesterday when you called me and you told me about the picture, I said, “Well maybe I needed to do more, you know, and know about it.” But to my understanding, the—the club used to have all men, you know. I’m going to say over eight years ago. But I’m willing to give you a little more details. I knew it once, and I forgot, I think.

01:03:40

But anyway, then the women joined. And during war—I said, “Why the—it was just women?”, you know. They said, “During war, the men left, and when they came life was different and everything changed, and it stayed a women’s club.” And when I came in 1979, I didn’t join till three years after that, for whatever reason, and it was really—we had—I’m going to say seventy, maybe, members—sixty to seventy members—and it was nice. We meet at homes, you know, once a month all year-round where—because they used to have a clubhouse when the men were—I mean when it was only a men’s club during the War [World War II] or whatever. They sold that clubhouse, and that wasn’t too good for the—the—you know, because I think having a clubhouse will keep you going, you know.

01:04:33

So we meet at houses, and the lady of the house or the member, you know, feels free to meet. I mean sometimes over supper she’ll fix or sometimes just coffee and cake or—you know but they met. They were very nice. And back then they were doing some—a lot of events where they sell Lebanese food and—and they were a supporter of St. Jude’s, always sent the money to St. Jude’s, which, till now, I feel bad. I receive from St. Jude’s, receive—the club, something, but, you know, we don’t have the money. We don’t have the—the same thing we used to have a long time ago. But I remember when I was State Vice President, the Federation asked us, the club presidents, to do something solely—everything we do is going to go—an event that goes to the—to St. Jude’s.

01:05:27

For a while, St. Jude's and the Southern Federation was connected, and something happened between the two. Like every time you'd go to a convention, there is a corner in the lobby all the time about St. Jude's and what St. Jude's does. And, for some reason, something went on that wasn't right. I mean I don't know what misunderstanding, whatever, that you don't see that anymore. But the Federation is still strong about St. Jude's, and we have a lot of past presidents that are on the board now in Memphis, Tennessee—on the board of St. Jude's Hospital.

01:06:03

But anyway, I remember I was State Vice President and I did—we decided to do a supper at the auditorium here in Clarksdale, but because we weren't—back then, I'm going to say, maybe, twenty-five years ago, we weren't there so big and many, I went to the Chamber of Commerce, and I did ask their support in advertising for the event where we can sell tickets, you know. And back then it was Al Katool, who is still living, he was the president of our Federation, the whole Federation, and he lived in Jackson, Mississippi. We had a belly dancer from Jackson, though, not from Memphis, from Jackson, and we did make a lot of money. My small club ended up to be the second in the Federation of the clubs to have, you know, as much money we collected to send to the Federation to send to St. Jude's. So we were very proud. It was in the paper and I mean—.

01:07:01

But after that, I mean I had a very hard time keeping the club going and really, to a point, nobody wanted to do anything. I mean sometimes we—we were nonprofit, you know, but still, sometimes we used to auction—buy something, the—the club will buy something like a TV and we sell raffle tickets just to raise money. And then the members started saying, I mean, “Why we

need the money for?” So we—I mean not even they—I mean not even—we weren’t able anymore to even give like to St. Jude’s anymore, you know, because we’re not making any money. I mean and—and we kept going down in the number of women, you know, in the club and I—I noticed that if I say, “Well, let’s do this,” even selling raffles was a burden on the members. So really, I mean—really now, what we do is just get together, meet, nothing discussed. We just gossip like this is our tradition, maybe.

01:08:05

But anyway, they just talk and visit, and a lot of times we meet at [Chamoun’s] Rest Haven. And it’s funny, you saw all the Lebanese and Syrians, they all order Lebanese food that night. And anyway, I mean we just meet and whenever—now you know, I have—I try not to skip a month. We take off three months [in the] summertime. Whatever I feel it suits me, you know, I call them all and, I mean, we get—get together. And I do ask them a lot of times to bring their husbands and that really gives us a little ahead—to be ahead so—. You know, a lot of women used to say, “Well, my husband doesn’t like for me to go out and eat, and he’s home.” I heard that a lot. I said, “Well, bring your husband.” I started doing that where it’s kind of habit now that they come together, and that way I’m having more people, while sometimes when I just used to ask for women, honest, I mean you’ll sit there and just two—three showed up. Now I have fifteen. I have seventeen with their husbands, so—.

01:09:09

AES: Is there anyone, say, your daughter’s age, who is a member of the club?

01:09:13

ED: No, no. No, we don't have—I mean it's my age and older. I mean I don't have any young people. I mean to be honest, the reason why, we hardly have any young members—one young member, I mean any young member that they're still living here. Very few, you know, my children's age live here, very few of them. But one year I decided to have a—I mean a drive—a membership drive. I did something in my home, and I invited everybody I knew, you know, that—Lebanese or Syrian background. And I was able to raise it to, like, thirty-eight members. And at the summer convention I took the certificate. I won as the most—well, I still have—I have so many—the most one that I increased the membership according to—but I couldn't keep it too long, you know. I had—then when I had young ones in, you know, with little kids, but they—to be honest, they didn't last too long with us.

01:10:22

But generally speaking, we don't have a lot of young people still in Clarksdale. Just like my kids, I mean they go out for college and they get jobs, and they don't come back. So it's very sad, in a way.

01:10:34

AES: So after your tenure of president if you—are you voted in, or are you self-appointed? Will you keep that—that title as long as you want?

01:10:41

ED: Yes. I just keep the title for a few years at the beginning. I said, “Well, we go January, you know, pay the dues,” and I said, “Well I've been a year, and you're here. I mean who wants to be you know? Who would like to—?” And you hear not one. I mean, “It's okay. You're doing a good job, stay there.” That's how I get to be president.

01:11:00

AES: So what do you think will happen when you decide to retire or—or no one is there to follow you?

01:11:06

ED: If I die, whatever I mean comes first, we're not going to have any club. We have a very little money in the bank. I mean and I have—I mean, of course, I mean I—you know the bank has my signature, but I have another signature with me. So if we want to do—we don't do too much. What I need to pay, I don't—you know, we don't pay for anything—the checks—and I struggled not too long ago because they were—they sent me a letter that they—because it's very low and they're going to charge me so many dollars a month. And I didn't know what to do because I am the responsible one. And I went to the bank, and I said, "You know what? In a few months we're going to lose all the monies in there." They were very nice and understanding, and I don't get any interest. Of course, I mean, there is no interest, anyway, that's good enough, but they're keeping our money just to keep it.

01:11:57

If I move or if I die or if—I don't think it will be anybody taking over because you hear a lot. I mean like when I invited the President last year, I mean, he'll come and tell me what the members, you know—mingle with him in my home and what they tell him, and, honest, he says, I mean a lot of them tell him, if it wasn't for—I mean I'm not trying to brag, by any means. I mean, if it wasn't for me calling and doing, they wouldn't have the club. So I think because, to me, I mean I love to have them over. I used to have it a lot more in my home. Like the first meeting in September, I will have them over and then Christmas, and we did go out when we had

a little bit of money. I treated them like to Chamoun's, you know, we'll pick the menu so she can, you know, like two meats—whatever, so she'll know how—. That's what I told you. She [Louise Chamoun] likes to know how much, but she's not involved as much—her daughter now the one [Paula Jackson]. They have to know how much so they serve you quick enough. And we used to eat a lot at their place. And then what hurt me, I mean every time for a while—for years we used to go all the time to their place. And then one or two members approached me and said, “Elaine, why we don't go some other places?” You know? And I never thought to change the place. This was my place to go to.

01:13:20

I mean I take them around, you know. I mean we don't have many choices here, so we go to other places now. But like if I want to do something I will choose Rest Haven. I don't know why. I mean it's just part of the community and part of me and my children. I mean they grew up on the *kibbe* sandwich and that I never heard—even though I was born and raised over there.

[Laughs]

01:13:42

AES: Well and—

01:13:44

ED: It's their own signature dish or—you know.

01:13:49

AES: Well and—and tell me more about that, your own kind of schedule, if you will, about cooking traditional foods. You cooked for the President when he came and—but you said earlier

over lunch, you kind of jokingly said that you don't cook traditional foods because you can get them at Chamoun's and what—has that always been true? And is that kind of, you know, the general opinion in Clarksdale that there is always Chamoun's?

01:14:10

ED: Oh, I'm sure. When Amanda was a kid, I mean she was in school, she—I mean she had a lot of her friends crazy about the Lebanese food, and they eat it maybe daily. I really don't know, or at least once a week. And one of her friends, she came back one day, and she told me, you know, "Mom, so-and-so told me if he dies and goes to Heaven, it has to be a Rest—Rest Haven in Heaven." I mean that's how much they—. You know, I do—I mean I still go in some ways with my tradition. Like, when I cook I don't just cook. I mean I cook, you know. It's a lot of food, like cooking to an army while I have only ten people in my home. But you know in my age now and my kids being away from home—just me and my husband, I mean it's really—I don't have the—not the—the willing to do that anymore. I mean I just like—you know, cook for the two of us. I cook, I mean, but I don't cook the heavy—that takes time. But when I go to my children, which I did this past weekend, and when they come even on special occasions or not, like when I had my second grandbaby, my daughter, who is in Hattiesburg [Mississippi], and my son in Louisiana, they came to see the baby a week or two after. And, of course, I mean I run. I don't walk. I run making their best Lebanese dishes and Syrian dishes.

01:15:44

Now I have a daughter who—in-law—who is from back home and one who is American, Cajun American, I mean from Louisiana. And the—the American one is crazy about our food to a point that it's certain dishes—when we went this weekend, this past weekend, she was doing, like *hummus* [chickpea] dip. I mean there's certain dishes that she will cook. She's crazy about

our food. And, you know, my son, when he got married a year ago, a little over a year ago, the wedding, of course, was in Baton Rouge [Louisiana]. When my daughter, two years ago—I'm going to go back to—when she got married in May, too, two years ago, I had a Lebanese dance—I mean a Lebanese—excuse me—band playing in her wedding. I mean something that this town didn't see for years. It was really—you know, just watching them doing the *dabke* [folk dance]. But let me tell you, at my daughter's—at my son's wedding, after—a year from his sister's wedding, when I have the band here, my son got married. And we have—you know, we had the DJ, the Lebanese—only she had a band, an American band for her wedding. And I said—I asked her if I can have some of our music. I mean I was amazed at the Louisiana people learning on the spot doing the *dabke* and how much fun they had with it. They dance [from music] on CDs more than we did the dance here when I had the whole band fly in from Miami to come do the music. I was amazed.

01:17:20

Honest to God. One of her friends was getting married a few months after her—my daughter-in-law's wedding. I mean she came to me, she said, "I love your *dabke*. I wish I can do that in my wedding." I never saw people who love fun and very open like the Louisiana people. Now that I know Louisiana people, they not just like to eat, they like to have fun.

01:17:43

AES: I bet that was some wedding.

01:17:45

ED: Yeah.

01:17:45

AES: I wonder when your family moved here and you were talking about the boxed cake and—and, you know, things that made cooking easier for American housewives when your family moved here, if it was important, then, for your mother to pass on traditional Syrian recipes and then, too, for you to pass those recipes and cooking traditions onto your own daughter.

01:18:04

ED: I wish I can pass it to my own daughter. [*Laughs*] Well, before I got married, we used to help my mom a lot, even in the kitchen, so it's not like she would tell us, "Come learn from me." No, we were there. We had no choice. So it's not like she said, "Okay, you're going to keep it. You're going to cook it to your husband and kids." No. We knew. And that's what we cooked. And that—I mean when I first got married, of course, I mean, you know, like we say roast, and, you know, we don't have hamburger back home. We have a dish that's very similar to what—but it's a complete dish. You put tomato and you put—you put the same thing in the meat, but you put on the top—you put it in a tray. You put tomato and you put tomato and potato and do it in the oven. It's—the meat is just like hamburger, but—except this is a whole dish with vegetables, I mean like tomato—what I'm saying.

01:19:01

Passing it to my—now my—my—one of my daughters-in-law, who is from back there, I don't know how much she cooks. But the difficult one like grape leaves, I don't know if she does it much, you know. But she, you know, does cook like back home. The American one, the hard dishes, she doesn't—she doesn't do the hard ones very much, I know. And now my daughter, Amanda, I don't think she ever rolled a cabbage or grape leaves or she ever did *kibbe*. Maybe

once or twice when she had a gathering at her home for their friends and, you know, they like to taste their food, you know.

01:19:43

The—the thing that, you know, with her that her husband doesn't—it doesn't matter to him, the Lebanese food. He's Lebanese. Her husband is Lebanese, who was born here.

01:19:54

AES: What about your grandchildren? Do your children, are they—is it important to them to—to teach them their Syrian heritage, and have they expressed that at all?

01:20:01

ED: I mean my—I have two grandkids. One son has two, and that's, you know, my grandkids. The oldest is two and a half, and I don't know how to judge what he's saying. He just started talking. And I'll be telling him in my own language, let's say, you know, something, I name it in my own language, thinking that his mom taught him that and, you know, he'll point to it and say it in English, like, "Airplane, airplane," every time he sees, you know. But some he will say in English and some he will say in—and then I point to him, and I'll say something in English that he says in the language—in Syrian language. So I really don't know. He doesn't put sentence yet. He just says words in a way. And he calls me *Sitto* and this very good name for a grandma in Arabic, you know: *Sitto*. And his grandfather, he calls him *Jiddo*.

01:20:57

So, but I know he's going to be very much influenced a lot more than my youngest son with the Louisiana wife, even though she knew(s)—she knows now some words, you know, some simple ones that she'll answer you. You know, like if she wants to say thank you, she says

it in our language. At the beginning she was very eager, you know, to learn, and I don't blame her because sometimes when we're together we might—I might speak to her husband, who is my son, in my own language not meaning anything, not—nothing that I don't want to hear because if I—you know, if I want to say something, I don't want her to hear, I don't say it in front of her. But I know she's frustrated in a way and, you know, I remember and I apologize and say, "Oh, I'm sorry. That's what I was telling my son." So, but I don't know. With the busy life now, you know, if they're going to be able to cook like we cook, that will be something to, you know—to see later on when they have children. But I'm sure my little ones now, my two grandsons, they're going to be speaking our language before they go to school because of their mother.

01:22:08

AES: I wonder—I know that the Vicksburg—the people who host the Vicksburg dinner every year that they put out a cookbook. I wonder if that's something that circulates through the rest of the Delta. Do you know anything about that?

01:22:19

ED: I really don't know if they ever put a book, but I do have a very—in English though I have a—a very good book that named *Sahtein* [*Middle East Cookbook* by the American Ramallah Foundation], and I had it for thirty years. One of my sisters gave it to me, and it's basically very—I mean, you know, what I cook—what I put in my food is in there—very close to our recipe. And it is a Syrian Lebanese book, and sometimes a lot I go back to it, certain dishes I don't make often, and I say, "I wonder what they put in it, too." You know, like we're crazy about fig, fresh fig, and they do jam, you know—fig jam back home a lot. And, of course, unless

you go to a place who sells delicacy or something—whatever you call it, I mean you cannot find fig jam, you know, in jars.

01:23:15

So it happened that my—I have two fig—fig trees outside. And one time when we had so much—and I never did it before [make fig jam]. Like the only time I did it was last year. And I went to that book, and I said, “I never did it before. How they cook it? What do they put in it?”, you know? Because you cannot find it unless you go to a place where they sell the Mediterranean stuff.

01:23:39

AES: Do you go to Memphis a lot, then, and—and shop there?

01:23:43

ED: I go to Memphis because they have a—a place in East Memphis where they have a bakery for pita bread where you get it hot to a point, they pack it hot on the plastic and—I mean, I asked a few times to let it cool off because you see the sweat inside the plastic bag, and sometimes it gets the bread to be a little wet, I mean from—. But they’re sell quick. They cannot sell enough, so they package them in a day and get it out of the oven.

01:24:12

AES: What store is that?

01:24:14

ED: Barakat in Memphis in East Memphis on Sycamore View [Road] in Memphis.

01:24:22

AES: Now the fig trees that are here in your yard, did you plant those or were they here when you got—?

01:24:25

ED: No, we planted—one person gave me a little, you know, he used to bring us—a long time ago, he used to bring us a little fig. And then I asked him to bring me a little, what you call it, to start my own tree from his tree. And he did. And then my dad, way back, too, he planted two for me and one died, and this is one of them. Do you like fig?

01:24:51

AES: Very much, yes.

01:24:52

ED: Oh, okay. I have some, if you'd like to eat it fresh. I mean, I'll get you some to try.

01:24:58

AES: And I'm sorry to keep going back and forth, but I have a couple more questions about the Cedars Club, and one is if there is like a formal mission statement for the Cedars Club?

01:25:05

ED: What do you mean?

01:25:08

AES: Anything that's like, you know, a slogan that y'all strive for as a group that keeps you together, kind of?

01:25:12

ED: I mean in general, why, I mean like the Federation, you know, I mean the—the—the thing they want to keep and we're going to keep—. I mean way back when they—they was the—the club was stronger, they bring their kids to the—to the meeting and get together. They dance; they eat Lebanese food; they listen to the music. So they want to keep the tradition cultural-wise. They have nothing to do with the politics, period, I mean. And it hurts sometimes, that misunderstanding, if you're aware of Syria and Lebanon and they—I mean they're next door to each other. And here, when we had something, it wasn't very pleasant going in the Federation about well, you know—but it is named for years, the Syrian Lebanese American Clubs, you know, the Federation. So, and I was very hurt because, you know, I mean the majority of people now and the majority of—I mean we have mixed, Syrian and Lebanese, but I think if you really want to find out what, I think the Lebanese are more in it now. And I don't want the name Syrian to be not associated with it anymore. But of course it was just a short period, and they didn't discuss it, thank God, anymore, because we have nothing to do with the politics. What do I have to—to do with the Syrian, what Syrians are doing or a Lebanese guy—what Lebanon is doing? I mean we're not going to bring our misunderstanding, our problem with us here. We don't need that. We don't need that for the children. So it's more a cultural thing. I mean we want to keep it going and the food. And to my amazement, I mean like—like Pat [Davis], okay, he was born here. His mom was born here. But all his children and grandkids, they—you know, they still know *kibbe* and grape leaves and Arabic. You know, they say it, *kibbe* and—and you know,

whatever they call the grape—. I mean they still speak that thing in their own language, even—you know.

01:27:12

So they want to keep that, and I hope that we can. But, little by little, I can see from what I see in my club, I mean we're getting less and less.

01:27:22

AES: And if you could also speak briefly about the—the name Cedars of Lebanon and the significance of the cedar tree in that culture?

01:27:30

ED: I mean the cedar tree in Lebanon, it's really their national tree, and it represents, you know, you say cedar and you say Lebanon, you know. And it's their own symbol for the Lebanese. It's on their flag. So, again, the majority of people in Clarksdale were from Lebanon, so they called it—you know, the club, Clarksdale Cedars. A lot of clubs are named after the cedar—cedar in it, you know, so they're very proud of their cedars. And you see lands and lands in Lebanon, you know, beautiful, all cedars—you know, trees over there, so it's part of them. I mean Lebanon and cedar are just one thing to them, more than the Syrian now, see—more than the Syrian thing.

01:28:17

And you know I—I don't know how they—not how, I mean I don't know how long we're going to keep going, since I can see in every club, I mean I belong to a lot of clubs in Clarksdale: the Kings Daughter, the BPW [Business and Professional Women], you know, I mean that they all—we don't have any more here in Clarksdale. They all, you know, don't exist anymore, and I can see how life is changing these—these forty years I've been here, you know.

01:28:46

When I first got married and now when I have my own grandkids, life has changed. I mean in every way. People are more busier with their own life, you know, to know who is your next-door neighbor or across the street neighbor. Of course, in little towns, since I live in a town, everybody is related to everybody, except me. I suffered more when I came. It took a while for the people to approach me. I didn't know anybody, you know, and we owned our own business. It's not like you work in a place where there is a lot of people and you—you, you know, you know them and become friends with them. We went to our business and came home, and it was kind of very hard for me, very hard.

01:29:35

But I hear not just the Lebanese. It's the Delta thing where people, you know, mingle together, and if you're not from here and you don't know anybody here, you know, it's hard for you, and for three years it was really hard on me. I mean you feel that—even I didn't live here; this is my second house in Clarksdale. Where I lived I was very close to the elementary school. I send my oldest one when she was five. I mean that summer she was five, I sent her to school, and I hardly knew my neighbor. I hardly knew their names, you know. It's not that—you know, they say about Mississippi and what—the Hospitality State but in the Delta, as much as people are warm, I didn't feel that when I first moved. And we moved after seven—maybe again years, I moved to this house I'm in and I wasn't that much welcomed either. I mean—

01:30:37

AES: From the neighbors?

01:30:38

ED: —from the neighbors around.

01:30:41

AES: Now do you think that was because you were not a Mississippian or because you're a Syrian or do you think it's a combination of the two?

01:30:49

ED: You know, I tell people, I mean, I tell my friends when we talk and joke about how it is really because I'm not the only one, even an American who comes to Clarksdale from any other state, you know, they say this is a weird town in a way. I mean, you know, people are to themselves. You know, they're in groups. Even the Lebanese are in groups. I mean, when they have misunderstandings, I say, "Thank God I'm not related to anybody to take any side."

01:31:13

But anyway, I tell people that it's very hard to come and live here in Clarksdale, you know. So I mean, I say, "If you think you have a problem, my—my problem is doubled." It's not that I'm not from Clarksdale. I'm a foreigner, too. So I suffer a lot—a little more than others, because I mean they look at me—oh boy, I'm a foreigner. You know, I'm maybe American—huh, will pass, but, you know, so it was very hard for me in Clarksdale.

01:31:42

I mean I love the town. People are sweet when you get to know them, but it's a struggle to know them.

01:31:51

AES: So do you think that, you know, I mean, when you think about the first generation of immigrants that came here and working so hard to assimilate and be accepted and—would you say that the Lebanese community and Syrian community is still trying to reach that goal, or is that no longer a goal, or is it impossible?

01:32:10

ED: It is no longer a goal because even the Lebanese themselves, who are related, you see them. I mean are you talking about, of course, Clarksdale, what I see? All the young generations are not here anymore, either American people or Lebanese [*Phone Rings*] and I'm one of these people who—.

01:32:32

AES: Do you need to answer it?

[Recording is paused for approximately ten minutes, while Elaine Daho answers the phone and then brings refreshments to the table.]

AES: Now we're back after a phone call from Mrs. Daho's husband, and she then, in the interim, presented all of these sweets before us for us to have a little refreshment. But we're going to wind this up. We've visited for a long time, and we've taken so much of your day, but I want to ask you two things, and one of those is if you consider yourself Southern at all? You haven't—you've—you've been here a few decades, but if—if Southern-ness is any part of your identity?

01:33:00

ED: Well, I mean, living so long in Mississippi, I don't know how I'm going to be acting if I go anywhere else. But I did live in Tennessee, which is [the] South, too, right? I mean for seven years—eight years, when I got married. Even though, I mean, it's a small town here, and it's a little different than what I wanted to be, but it's still my home. You know, this is where my kids grew up and went to high school and went—. I mean it's just very hard, no matter what you say. It is home and this is—when my kids come, they say on the phone, “Oh, Mom, I miss home. I want to come home.” So this is home to me and to them, and I love it dearly.

01:33:39

I mean, you know, of course, you wish something is not what it is sometimes, you know, or if it was different, but I love Mississippi. I mean in—generally speaking, yeah, people are generous and sweet and—and I mean open because you meet a lot of people. Like, Amanda, she—I mean she went to Kansas City, Missouri, to go to Medical School. She did her residency in St. Louis, Missouri, and she lived, of course, all her life in Mississippi and went to college here in Mississippi. And because of her husband, who was more established than her when they got married, he was already with a big group, Nephrology in Hattiesburg, whatever, and she just was out of Medical School one year and working for just one year, so she moved back to Mississippi.

01:34:28

And she really, I mean she never thought she'd come back to a small town, to be honest. I mean she always liked the bigger towns, since the minute she got out of Clarksdale. But anyway, she's adjusting and I mean I don't have any regret whatsoever. It gave me time to come here and be—to see, because when I got married and moved away, I couldn't see my family, you know. You know, back then, you didn't travel that much or talk on the phone that much. So I was away.

You know, I left my brother. He was—my youngest brother, I was seventeen years older than my youngest brother. So I missed him, you know, I kind of like spoiled him before I got married. And I didn't get chances to see them and being I was so homesick when—. So it's a lot of advantage of us coming here to Mississippi and with God's help and blessing, I mean the business was good and we were able thank God to provide for our children here. I mean, you know, and when they went to college and—but not things have changed to a point that, you know, the kids say, "When, Mom? When, Mom?" And I don't think I'm the problem but that is a big problem, living here—what I'm saying.

01:35:49

So every time we get together, like this past weekend, I mean especially my youngest one, I mean the other—the other day, now that he's working in Mississippi in Picayune, he called me from his clinic and he said, "Mom, did you hear about the shooting by in Clarksdale?" I said, "No, son. I won't hear till we have the paper that may be two days from now." *[Laughs]*. Twice a week we have a paper and that—. And I mean we hardly have a station that I listen to. So he gets so upset with us, you know, with his dad when he brings the subject, "Why you don't leave, Mother? Why don't get out?" And I don't know what God has planned for us. I'm just, honestly, leaving—leaving it up to him, you know, because part of me wants to leave and part of me don't want to leave because where do you go?

01:36:43

So it's a tough decision, to—to which son or daughter, you know. And when I talk about it, people say, of course, you go to your daughter's, you know. But I'm close to my sons, too, so—. And I have two grandkids that I love to pieces, and I'll be away from them if I move. Anyway, I never thought it would be a hard decision the older you get, but it is. Life doesn't get any easier. It gets a lot harder, and I never knew that, you know. You always think when your

kids are young, you're all close together, you know, they're close to each other, too, and life, you know, always is going to be that way then. You wake up one morning and say, "Where did my life went? Where I am?" I feel I'm in the middle of intersection, you know, a big one that I don't know which way to take.

01:37:35

AES: Well, I don't mean to ignore the sentiment of—of that comment and your plans for the future, but to maybe end on food and maybe a lighter note, we could—because I noticed— anecdotally, we had lunch together at Chamoun's Rest Haven today, and my intern, Kevin Kim, who is here with us today, he and I had Lebanese food, and you had a plate of Southern vegetables and cornbread. So I wonder if you might have a favorite Southern meal.

01:38:03

ED: It's not a favorite Southern meal as much as I came from a background, again, that we eat a lot of vegetables. Like, I don't know if you're aware or if you're familiar with other traditions. We eat our main meal for lunch back home, and it's a big meal. And even when I was in school, we used to take a—a break, one hour or hour and fifteen minutes, and go back home, eat our big meal, and then go back to school till four o'clock. So it's a different way of life.

01:38:35

But what I—you know, when we came here, I noticed that they have a lot of casseroles that like you eat roast or whatever kind of meat and you have—. We don't have casseroles back home. What we have is a full meat or vegetable. Like, let's say, green—green bean casserole. We cook the green beans with the beef stew meat and tomato paste. We—we do it over rice, let's say, which they don't do at the Rest Haven. We stuff everything you can think of. We can stuff it

with rice and meat, like squash and eggplant and tomato—potato, I mean. So our meals is more like vegetable and the meat together than separate, you know.

01:39:19

But about me eating vegetables, I mean I love to eat vegetables, really. I mean that I don't feel like I cook enough now that just me and my husband, but I made sure to cook all the dishes that are very healthy to the children. And sometimes I say, "What's happened to me?" We're still needing in our old age to take care of ourselves, too. So, but I love the vegetables. I love like it's not stuffing—we stuff, I mean the—I mean what you ate today.

01:39:52

AES: The grape leaves or the cabbage rolls?

01:39:53

ED: The other one, the cabbage rolls. I mean we stuff—we stuff the cabbage roll, too, and I don't—I mean I don't do much of either one as much. But, thank God, when I know that there is a holiday, my kids, I'm going to go see them, like what I didn't tell before that like this weekend, I made sure to take dishes—the frozen dishes over ice—and it takes me half an hour to load just the ice chest, you know, with a lot of ice to take it back, so they can put it in the freezer. And since they both work or whatever, I mean, you know, I feel good when they're having their Lebanese dishes. You know, we have a dish that you do with the eggplant. You put a layer after you broil or fry—whatever—the eggplant you put and then you put the meat and onion already cooked with the spices and put another layer of eggplant, and all my kids and their wives and husbands, they all like that dish. And I'm able to do it in small casseroles and freeze it.

01:40:51

And there's another dish that I—I freeze even lasagna and take it to them, you know. They just put it in the oven. And I took grape leaves, where they cook it, you know, at home. I stuff it and put it in the freezer, and I do the cabbage, too, that way. But I do it, you know, mainly I'm going to sound unfair—for my children [*Laughs*] even though my husband is crazy about stuffed. You—you can stuff everything for him. He loves rice, you know. So but I do some. I mean I really do some, but the majority I think I, you know, put in my—my freezer. I have two deep freezers in—outside where I stuff it and take it to my kids, so it's a struggle when I go. By the time I get there, I'm so tired from just packing the car.

01:41:42

AES: Well you've been so gracious with your time today, and I've enjoyed these stories so much. And we will let you have your afternoon and enjoy these refreshments with you, but is there any—any final thought that you'd like to end on or some—something that I didn't know to ask that you'd like to share?

01:41:57

ED: Well I mean I talked a lot about how much I miss my country, my own country, growing up to be twenty years old. I mean it wasn't easy for me. [*Phone Rings*] Even though all of that, I mean with the years coming and having children was raised here, I mean, of course I—I cannot deny my love to my country, but this is my second country. And I'm proud I'm here because, you know, like me and my husband always say this is the best country in the whole world. And people are dying to come to this country. So I hope and pray it stays prosperous and stays great for my grandchildren, you know, to have a—a good life like—thank God my dad, by coming here, he knew he was offering something good, you know, for us—a good future, what I'm

saying. And he insist all of us, you know, that he wanted to bring the whole family with him.

And—and I'm thankful to God in my old age that, you know, I mean I'm here because I know, if I go back—I never can go back. I never can go back to live there. I mean this is my life and, of course, I'm a very proud American citizen. And when I traveled to go see Syria in 1996, I went as an American citizen. I took my passport as an American, you know.

01:43:22

So it's just wonderful to be—I mean it's a great country with great people and—and the freedom, I mean here, there's just no end to the freedom as a human being. I mean the good freedom, I'm talking about, it's just no end to it. I mean you feel you are human, and you feel you are well respected. While you don't see that, you know—you see some but not to this extent like in this country. I mean you know there's a lot of good things here that every country and even my own country need to learn from.

01:43:53

I mean now I thank God that I'm here, to be honest, so it's great to be in this land, you know, and to raise my kids here. And then now, if God's willing, I'll see my grandkids, too, getting older.

01:44:07

AES: Well, thank you so much for sharing your family's story with us today.

01:44:09

ED: You're very welcome. I enjoyed it, too. It brings a lot of memories, you know, in my head.

01:44:15

[End Elaine Daho Interview]