**Paul:** Good afternoon, this is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday April 27th 1995. I am in? Where am I?

**Dowe:** In Marcy, New York.

**Paul:** I am in Marcy, New York with Wadih Dowe.

**Dowe:** Dowe.

**Paul:** Mr. Dowe came from Lebanon sometime in the late 1930s. We’re going to talk about that experience as well as his experience as a taxi cab driver in Lebanon.

Present also in the room is Mrs. Zoghby who’s been helping me out with the Lebanese community in the Utica area and Wadih Dowe is also present. For the sake of the tape I will say that you make your -Mr. Dowe what is your birth date?

**Wadih:** May the 12th 1901.

**Paul:** Mrs. Dowe just said May the 12th 1901.

**Mrs.:** He keeps asking me.

**Paul:** If you know then. Where in Lebanon were you born?

**Dowe:** Bskinta.

**Paul:** Can we spell that please, can you spell the name of the town?

**Dowe:** In Arabic or in English?

**Paul:** Probably in English.

**Dowe:** B-S …

**Wadih:** B-A-S …

**Dowe:** K-N-T-A.

**Paul:** Wadih Dowe can you repeat the spelling please.

**Wadih:** B-I-S-K …

**Paul:** No, B-S …

**Wadih:** K-I-N-T-A.

**Dowe:** B-S-K-N-T-A.

**Paul:** Can you tell me something about that town. What did the town look like when you were a kid growing up?

**Dowe:** That’s the biggest town way up near the mountain, Mountain Sannine. Sannine Mountain is the highest mountain in Lebanon.

**Paul:** Spell that.

**Dowe:** S-A-N-N-I-N-E.

**Paul:** Can we spell that please?

**Wadih:** S-A-N-N-I-N-E.

**Paul:** That Mountain is near the town?

**Dowe:** S-N-I-N.

**Paul:** That’s a big mountain?

**Dowe:** The highest mountain.

**Paul:** Is the town on the mountain?

**Dowe:** No, the bottom of the mountain.

**Paul:** At the bottom of the mountain.

**Dowe:** It can’t be on a mountain.

**Paul:** Did your mother ever tell you anything about your birth?

**Dowe:** I don’t know my mother. She left me I was maybe two, three year old.

**Paul:** Very young.

**Dowe:** My old sister take care of me and my father.

**Paul:** What was your father’s name?

**Dowe:** Hikl.

**Paul:** Can we spell Hikl, someone.

**Dowe:** H-I-K-L.

**Paul:** What did your father …?

**Dowe:** He used to go from house to house sell some material for clothes.

**Paul:** A peddler? Would we call him a man who peddled clothing?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** What was your father’s personality like?

**Dowe:** A nice man, tall man, nice looking and very understanding. He could read and write very good.

**Paul:** Is there a story that you like to tell about your father? When you think about your childhood is there a story you can tell me about your father?

**Dowe:** My father, we used to have that time, they call him Amara.

**Zoghbi:** You have princes living in the village.

**Paul:** Prince Amara.

**Dowe:** Princes they were running the country, that time the princes was running the whole Lebanon, you see and my father, he used to go all the time visit the princes, not too many people could go over there, you’ve got to be high class.

My father, he used to go over there and they call if he don’t go, they call him. When he go the lady in Romain there, she go and kiss him because he was even nice looking you know.

**Paul:** What did he do when he went to talk to the princes? Was he selling them goods?

**Dowe:** No, just to pass time …

**Paul:** Just to be friends with them?

**Dowe:** Yeah. They live neighbor and they like my father, they call him to go over there and talk, spend the evening.

**Paul:** Can you describe the house that you lived in for me, in Lebanon?

**Dowe:** We lived?

**Paul:** Yes. What was in the house, what did it …?

**Dowe:** We had one part, the flat and a tub and they got them, the tar dirt. When they go in the winter they got roller, they roll it so the water won’t go inside the house. In one part, they got red cover. They call them, what the hell they call them? [Inaudible 00:06:36] in Arabic...

**Zoghby:** Red brick.

**Dowe:** Yeah, cover with the red brick that’s part of the house.

**Paul:** How many rooms?

**Dowe:** One room, big room, they were [inaudible 00:06:55], big room and down there big house.

**Paul:** What kind of …

**Dowe:** They get mud house, a house for the wood stocked for winter because in winter they used to heat the house with the wood.

**Paul:** How did they use the wood? When they heated the house, how?

**Dowe:** Pile them up and lit the fire on and let the fire remain.

**Paul:** What kind of floor did you have in the house?

**Dowe:** Dirty floor, they got clay and they make it in a tub. Every once in a while they fix it up.

**Paul:** Smooth it out.

**Dowe:** Smooth it out.

**Paul:** Did you have animals when you were growing up?

**Dowe:** No, we don’t have no animals.

**Paul:** What did you eat in Lebanon? What kind of food did you have?

**Dowe:** Wheat bread and they cook rice and eat at the crack wheat and …

**Paul:** You’re saying bulgur, like bulgur wheat?

**Dowe:** No, not bulgur, crack wheat and they boil them. They break in small pieces then they make kibbeh with the meat, raw meat. They smash them with the machine, bulgur [inaudible 00:08:51].

Then they mix the bulgur after they soak them with water. They mix them with the meat and then roll it like that. Some of them make it like this and fry them, and they eat it.

**Paul:** Who did the cooking in your family?

**Dowe:** My sister.

**Paul:** What was your sister’s name?

**Dowe:** Helen.

**Paul:** Helen?

**Dowe:** I have two sisters, the oldest one Helen, the second one Badr.

**Paul:** Badr?

**Dowe:** Badr.

**Zoghby:** B-A-D-R.

**Paul:** Were you closer to her?

**Dowe:** Badr, see what they mean in Arabic, the moon.

**Paul:** That means the moon in Arabic. Were you closer to one sister than the other? Which sister were you the closest to?

**Dowe:** The oldest one was married and the young one would stay in the house. The young one is take care because we grow together, she’s older than me. My father he’d do everything for us, he’s big health.

**Paul:** Did you grow any of your own food?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** You had your own field?

**Dowe:** Wheat and lentil, something like that.

**Paul:** Did you go to school in Lebanon?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Was there a school in town?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me what the school building was like?

**Dowe:** Building with the, what the hell do they call it? [Inaudible 00:10:51].

**Wadih:** Brick.

**Paul:** Brick.

**Wadih:** One bedroom inside and chairs and desks in front of the students.

**Paul:** Did girls go to school with the boys?

**Dowe:** No.

**Paul:** Separate?

**Dowe:** There was no schools for the girl.

**Paul:** Girls didn’t go to school?

**Dowe:** No school for the girls. Some the French sister, they had school for the girl.

**Paul:** The French sisters?

**Dowe:** They had school for the girls, but not all girls goes, just a few girl. The rich people they send the girl to the French nun. They got big building, the French nun, they’re about eight of them and they had a school.

**Paul:** Did the nuns ever teach the boys?

**Dowe:** No, teach the boy under 10. If the boy under 10 they’d take him, but up than 10 they won’t.

**Paul:** Could your sisters read and write in Arabic?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Your sisters?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** They could read and write in Arabic?

**Dowe:** Yeah, I teach it.

**Paul:** You taught your sisters?

**Dowe:** I teach her at home.

**Paul:** Was that unusual for girls to be able to read and write?

**Dowe:** At that time, not too many girl know read and write. Most girls they can’t read and write. Some rich people they sent their girls to school.

**Paul:** The rich girls could read and write?

**Dowe:** Yeah, but poor doesn’t care about teaching the girl. The people I mean they don’t care about teaching the girl.

**Paul:** What religion were you?

**Dowe:** Maronites.

**Paul:** Maronites?

**Wadih:** Maronite Catholic.

**Paul:** Maronite Catholic?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Was there a church in town?

**Dowe:** Yeah, a lot of church.

**Paul:** How often did you go to church?

**Dowe:** Every Sunday you got to go to mass. I used to serve in service.

**Paul:** Did you practice your religion at home?

**Dowe:** We used to pray.

**Paul:** Was there a specific time when you prayed?

**Dowe:** In the evening when we sat down, my father the prayer we pray.

**Paul:** Can you say a prayer in Arabic for me to record? Do you remember any of the prayers?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Could you say one please?

**Dowe:** [foreign 00:13:55].

**Paul:** What did that mean?

**Wadih:** Holy Mary Mother of God pray for us we the sinners, Amen.

**Paul:** Was this like a rosary prayer?

**Wadih:** Part of it.

**Dowe:** That’s the whole prayer, there’s another prayer too.

**Paul:** Do you know the other one? Go ahead and say it. No, don’t remember it right now?

**Wadih:** Guess he can’t hear you.

**Dowe:** When I want to think, that’s the worst thing when I want it.

**Paul:** It will come back to you maybe while we’re talking. Tell me about what did you do for fun as a child when you were growing up? What kind of entertainment did you have when you were a child?

**Dowe:** We play ball, we throw it. That’s the most I think, at that time, ball.

**Paul:** Did the boys play with the girls?

**Dowe:** No.

**Paul:** Were you pretty much separate?

**Dowe:** No, the boys separate.

**Paul:** Boys played by themselves.

**Dowe:** Rough game you know.

**Paul:** Who disciplined the children in your family, your sister or your father?

**Dowe:** My father.

**Paul:** How would he discipline you if you did something wrong?

**Dowe:** I don’t know different discipline. Some of them they hit them hard, kept the stick boom, boom, boom but my dad he never do that to me.

**Paul:** He didn’t do that to you?

**Dowe:** No.

**Paul:** Do you remember …

**Dowe:** One time he hit me with his head, but after he apologized, he felt bad.

**Paul:** What did you do that made him upset?

**Dowe:** I would come late, I was playing I come late after dark. He don’t like it, he wanted me home early. He was so mad and he hit me, after he apologized for me. Then after he start to talk to me, I won’t talk to him he get mad, he apologized for me after he hit me.

**Paul:** Tell me about what happened in your town during World War 1? Tell me about what you experienced during that time period.

**Dowe:** Very bad, people starve to death, you see the people die on the road in. Some of them you can’t look at, skinny just bone.

**Paul:** Why was there no food?

**Dowe:** In Lebanon we can’t raise no food, because all mountain. Where they raise the food in the Beqaa Valley. Beqaa Valley, the Turkish government send us over there to hold Germany.

He sent the army to Beqaa Valley not Lebanon because Beqaa Valley wasn’t belong to Lebanon at that time. The soldiers over there to bring all the food send it to Germany because that’s what killed –Helped that because starve in Germany.

**Paul:** The Turks came in and took all your food away from you?

**Dowe:** Germany.

**Paul:** The Germans came in and took the food?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** What did you eat during that period? What was there to eat left?

**Dowe:** A few cattle and lamb. We had lamb, we plant tree we used to raise worm for the silk.

**Paul:** Silk worms?

**Dowe:** Yeah. The people that want to cut that tree because they make a living from it. They [inaudible 00:18:43], the land over there wasn’t flat because you go over there that's a wall, that’s a land, that’s a wall, that’s a land, like that.

**Paul:** Like big stairs?

**Dowe:** Yeah. After they have start to plant wheat, to raise to eat.

**Paul:** During the war there just was no food? That was a bad period?

**Dowe:** A lot of people die of starvation.

**Paul:** Do you remember when the war ended?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** How did you feel when World War 1 ended?

**Dowe:** The people went crazy. The bells started ringing and everything.

**Paul:** Tell me when you began the taxi business. When did you start driving a taxi? I was told that you were a taxi driver in Lebanon.

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** When did that start? Was it after the war?

**Dowe:** Yeah. Before the war were no car anywhere. All the automobile after the war, they didn’t have any car before the war.

**Paul:** Tell me who taught you how to drive an automobile?

**Dowe:** One fellow he was here in this country and he want to go back to old country. He got a car with him, I went with him to -He teach me couple of days.

**Paul:** Was it hard to learn how to drive a car?

**Dowe:** No. When I drive the car I was driving very good. He grabbed the car and he showed me to go between the tree. When I’m alone in the car I don’t know what to do, I went over there between the tree, I don’t know how to stop the car.

I went down, the fellow he said I give him slap in his face, son of a God, you stay next to me, that’s the first time I drove the car. He said, “I see you drive very good.” I said, “Yeah I know, but don’t [inaudible 00:21:21] alone I don’t know what to do.”

**Paul:** You learned by trial and error. Tell me, who were the people that you were driving in your taxi?

**Dowe:** Who were the people?

**Paul:** Who was riding in your taxi?

**Dowe:** All people, every people because Bskinta, you can’t buy anything there Bskinta except, they aint got no big store in Bskinta. If people if they want to buy something they’ll have to go Beirut to buy the stuff. All the business you got up in -If they want something in the [inaudible 00:22:17] you got to have to go to Beirut, near Beirut.

**Paul:** That’s what you were doing? Taking people to Beirut?

**Dowe:** Taking people to Beirut and back and forth.

**Paul:** How long of a ride is that? How long does it take to go from the town to Beirut?

**Dowe:** It’s about 50 mile I think, but …

**Paul:** Up and down mountains.

**Dowe:** We had to go to Bskinta …

**Paul:** Everyone’s making windings.

**Dowe:** To go to Bskinta. ? Bskinta up in the top and the road way down, you go this way and you go this way.

**Paul:** Yeah winding down.

**Dowe:** Till you get to town then you, [inaudible 00:23:07], but you could make it.

**Paul:** Did you charge people for this service?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** How much did it cost to go from the town to Beirut? Do you remember?

**Dowe:** Two dollar and a half.

**Paul:** What is that in Lebanese money? What is Lebanese money called? They didn’t pay you in dollars, what did they pay you …?

**Dowe:** No, by Lebanese money.

**Paul:** What is that called?

**Dowe:** They call it paper.

**Paul:** Paper?

**Dowe:** Yeah Wadih. Isn’t it?

**Paul:** Paper?

**Dowe:** Do you remember?

**Wadih:** Livre, L-I-V-R-E is the French word for the Lebanese.

**Paul:** L-I-V-R-E is the French word for the Lebanese currency.

**Wadih:** For the Lebanese unit.

**Paul:** Were some of these people going to Beirut to leave the country?

**Dowe:** Some of them to leave, some of them to shop and came back. Mostly comes back, nobody leaves, maybe once a year, not too many, especially that time.

**Paul:** We’re just fixing the microphone here, it came undone.

**Dowe:** I forget I was wondering with this.

**Paul:** What did you know about America before you came here?

**Dowe:** My brother was here ahead of me.

**Paul:** Did he come a long time before you did?

**Dowe:** Who?

**Paul:** Your brother was he here for …

**Dowe:** My brother came here early 1902.

**Paul:** Very early.

**Dowe:** Then he went back to the old country in 1910, with the two brother. One of them he don’t like it he came back, the one who stayed over there and when war came in he came. He’s stuck, he stay with us over there.

**Paul:** Why did you want to come to America?

**Dowe:** Me?

**Paul:** You.

**Dowe:** I come for visit, but I came here I wasn’t like it because everywhere I go the people that speak English I don’t understand one word. The war started, I couldn’t, I went to school, night school.

**Paul:** Here in America?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** What did they teach you in night school?

**Dowe:** They teach me how to read. I start in the bottom one, the first grade and end the year I went to high school, I got the diploma.

**Paul:** Do you remember the first English word that you learned? What was the first English word that you learned?

**Dowe:** How do you do? The principal come especially see me. He was wondering how come I start down in the same year. I was up there I got the first one, he come to visit me.

I couldn’t speak very good English. He said, “Mr. Dowe I will give you diploma, but I want you to come back next year to learn how to speak English.” I told him, “I’m coming back.” I had to tell him because I want to learn.

**Paul:** You went back that second year then to learn more?

**Dowe:** Yeah, but …

**Paul:** You think that you came to America in 1937, 1938? What year was it that you came to this country? We figured …

**Dowe:** ‘38 the war start, I was here.

**Paul:** You were here?

**Dowe:** Yeah, it came ‘36.

**Paul:** You came in 1936?

**Dowe:** Yeah. Because the war I was there, Mahmud I think came 1938, isn’t it?

**Paul:** How did you get to America? How did you travel to America?

**Dowe:** By the ship.

**Paul:** What was the name of the ship?

**Dowe:** I don’t know.

**Paul:** You forgot? Do you know how long it took?

**Dowe:** It took four days Mediterranean, from the Beirut to Italy, you got to stop in Italy ship. Because the ship come in from Mediterranean small, they came, get in, you get a chance to take bigger ship. The Atlantic they got the bigger ship, but Mediterranean again.

**Paul:** You took a small ship from Beirut to Italy and then you got on the big ship from Italy to the United States?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Where did you land in the United States?

**Dowe:** New York.

**Paul:** What happened your first night in America? What did you do your first night that you were here in America?

**Dowe:** I was home.

**Paul:** You went to your brother’s house?

**Dowe:** Yeah.

**Paul:** What did they do for you? Did they do anything for you?

**Dowe:** People like that they come from all over. Some of them to see me, some of them to ask about their people in old country. The house was like that for almost a week.

**Paul:** They were coming to see the new immigrant.

**Dowe:** A lot of people they want to find out about their people over there.

**Paul:** Are you happy that you came to this country?

**Dowe:** Yeah I’m happy.

**Paul:** Did you ever go back to Lebanon to visit?

**Dowe:** No. I was going to go back for visit, I don’t know I think the war started and I couldn’t make it, I never …

**Paul:** Never did. Mr. Dowe I want to thank you very much for letting me ask you some questions.

**Dowe:** You’re welcome.

**Paul:** You did a good job. This is Paul Seacrest signing off with Wadih Dowe on April 27th 1995. Thank you very much.

**Dowe:** Thank you.