**Paul:** Good evening. This is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, July 11th 1994. I’m in the town of Brunswick, just outside of Troy, with Dr. Vozchan Parsegian, known as Lawrence to some.

Dr. Parsegian was born in Turkey, came to the United States in 1916, and he was eight years old at that time. Thank you very much for having me out. If we can begin with you giving me your birth date please.

**Vozchan:** May 13th, 1908.

**Paul:** Can you tell me where in Turkey you were born?

**Vozchan:** In Van, the city of Van which is one of the ancient capitals.

**Paul:** Where is that in Turkey?

**Vozchan:** East of Lake Van, Eastern Turkey. The year I was born was the year by the way that the Armenians and Young Turks forced the Southern to give them a representative government, so there was happiness the year I was born but the happiness did not stay long.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about the city when you were born? What was going in the city for industry?

**Vozchan:** My mother and father had both been in the missionary schools, the German and American mission schools. They had gotten their education and some training there and my earliest memory is of my mother being the cook at the American hospital where the wonderful Dr. Ussher presided, and my father was a carpenter.

He had been trained as a carpenter and he had had rather poor luck in business dealings, so he finally decided he had to come to the States with the idea of bringing us here eventually.

**Paul:** Can we talk a little bit about the city of Van and what the city looked like?

**Vozchan:** The city of Van, the old city, is a very crowded, commercial bazaar-type place with sections devoted to Turkish groups, population, and portions to Armenia. But outside the old city to the east of it, there’s what they call The Garden City which is still part of Van but it’s more open and the hospital was there, the missions were there.

I remember the home where we were, the street had a little brook into which I fell and had to be saved. The street where we lived, a little in from the street, next to an orchard which was an abandoned source of fruits and my mother was pretty well set as the cook for the hospital except it was pretty hard work getting there in the winter months.

There was the annual preparation of food for the winter with large jugs, clay pots for meats that were prepared and kept in fat, they’d be liquors, wine as well prepared, and it was a tolerable situation.

**Paul:** Can you describe the house that you grew up in?

**Vozchan:** As I remember it was fairly a conventional home. I remember the large pole that was standing in the corner, to which a mule had been tied, and the mule kicked my grandmother which put an end to her life. The big pole fell on her when the mule pulled away.

The home was one level home in which there was a central area where there would be a little container of coals from the wood, charcoal like, which would be the kursig we would call it. This would be under a little table-like thing but with a large quilt-like cover over it and at night we would simply sit around that with our legs covered for warmth and that would be the heat for the house. I remember that part very well…I remember the year 1915…

**Paul:** Let’s talk a little more about the house. What kind of floor did it have?

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember really.

**Paul:** Do you remember what it was made of on the outside?

**Vozchan:** It would be probably baked clay and the roofs were rather heavy earthen roofs and that’s about as much as I remember.

**Paul:** You said it was one room, the house or was…?

**Vozchan:** I remember the room where the kursig… where we sat. I’m sure there was kitchen type of arrangement next to it but I don’t remember the details on that.

**Paul:** Was the house right in town or was it outside of town?

**Vozchan:** It was in town, it was just in a little from the main street. Perhaps I seem to remember that the distance was about maybe a couple hundred feet in from the road so a little walk-way, and then just along the edge of the orchard.

**Paul:** Was there property that went with the house? Did you have a backyard or front yard?

**Vozchan:** No, I don’t remember any property that was part of our house. I just remember the orchard, walls of the orchard and the house. I do remember this, there was at least in 1915, there was a second floor because I remember steps going down. I remember that because I had a sword that had been given to me by an officer that was on our wall.

I remember at one time when I was having trouble with the boys, my playmates and I went in and grabbed the sword and came out swinging it to frighten them and I remember that there were steps going down to the ground. So there must have been some arrangement of second floor but the kursig room and that particular incident don’t tie together in my mind.

**Paul:** Could you spell kursig for us please?

**Vozchan:** I guess we could call it K-U-R-S-I-G, kursig.

**Paul:** Thank you, tell me how many people lived in your house.

**Vozchan:** We had the father and mother in 1915, we have my sister and myself and then while grandmother lived, and then father and mother.

**Paul:** Whose mother was your grandmother?

**Vozchan:** Father’s.

**Paul:** What sticks out in your mind about your grandmother other than her unfortunate death?

**Vozchan:** I remember her mostly as a usual mother- in- law who dictated what was to be done in the house and I do remember the orders that she would give to my mother. I do remember the time when she had had the accident and was in bed. She called my mother to her and gave her all the instructions that she could think of on how to do things, how to carry on, and that stays in mind. I don’t know how much of that is in mind from my mother’s telling though versus my actual remembering it.

**Paul:** What did your grandmother look like?

**Vozchan:** Typical elderly person with head covered usually and not particularly bright and somewhat on the sorrowful or sorry side of temperaments.

**Paul:** Is there a story or an anecdote that comes to your mind about your relationship with your grandmother? Something the two of you shared somehow.

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember anything that I myself shared. I remember just these little incidents of seeing things happen but nothing that was between the two of us.

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

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember that.

**Paul:** Let’s talk about your father for a bit, what was his name?

**Vozchan:** Sahag.

**Paul:** Please spell that.

**Vozchan:** S-A-H-A-G. He, as I said, had been also trained at the missionary school in carpentry. A good man, a little on the trusting side which didn’t help him in his business, so that it was matter of trying partnerships that didn’t work until he was quite disgusted and also the military situation was such where they were taking the men into the Turkish army and what happened to them when they went was always a question mark.

So he decided that he would come just about when my sister was born, four years after I was born. I remember the last parting. That oddly remains fairly strong in mind in memory.

**Paul:** What sticks out in your mind about that?

**Vozchan:** He promised that he would send candy, and that was what I remembered.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about your father’s background, what his parents did.

**Vozchan:** I know almost nothing about his parentage. I know more about my mother’s because my mother had been the daughter of a very large family in an area called Moks, M-O-K-S, south of Lake Van. It was a large family that had had good relationships with the Kurds who were neighbors until the war fever began to build up.

However, they had lost their parents to the massacres, the occasional massacres that had come. Her mother had the reputation of being quite a hoarse woman. The area was in the mountainous regions of Moks. I remember so clearly we used to go there for vacationing summers.

My sister and I would be taken there riding inside saddle bags on a mule, and we would arrive there and be welcomed and then we would enjoy the place except that my mother’s sisters couldn’t understand why we didn’t go so much for the honey and cream that they would provide for us each morning.

Each morning we would wake to the honey and cream but we just didn’t take to it, which surprised and displeased them.

I remember the one brother of my mother’s had taken to smoking to the degree where he died at 15. The other brother, who had been a very wonderful person according to my mother, I never did see. Her mother and father I never did see. Her sisters were the ones that I remember.

I remember playing in the fields. One of the boys was a playmate and we would throw stones up to knock down walnuts from the tree, only we stood at opposite sides of the tree and I got a stone in my cheek which stayed with me for quite a while.

I remember the taste of the water, the springs that would come from the ground, each spring with a different taste. I almost seemed to think that I can remember the taste of each. Undoubtedly flowing through the different kinds of minerals each developed its own taste. So those I remember.

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

**Vozchan:** Shooshanig, S-H-O-O-S-H-A-N-I-G, which means lily.

**Paul:** What was her maiden name?

**Vozchan:** I should remember that, that may come to me later. I don’t remember.

**Paul:** Tell me what your mother’s temperament was like.

**Vozchan:** My mother was the driver in the family. She was the one who had the feeling for progress and work. My father as I said was the retiring sort, quiet, but my mother she used to tell about how she decided that this was a stone that the builders had rejected, which she would help to mix ahead of the corner.

**Paul:** Which sort of adds a little extra something when you think about your grandmother trying to run the household your mom having similar ideas.

**Vozchan:** Yes. She was a hard worker, she knew what she wanted, and she was bound to get it. When my father did leave and came to the States, I remember the little silver spoons that came from my father for the two of us, one each.

**Paul:** For you and your sister?

**Vozchan:** For me and my sister, that was very precious. Referring to other conditions in the city, I remember the time when neighbors with whom I was visiting persuaded me to drink a little of the wine and then to act drunk when my mother came.

When she came she really thought I had been drinking too much so there were some words about it until we revealed to her that it was all a joke but there was good relationship with the neighbors, close relationship, mutual help.

**Paul:** This is all in Armenian neighborhood that you’re living in?

**Vozchan:** This was in an all Armenian neighborhood, yes.

**Paul:** Was the city divided ethnically that way? The Armenians in one place, the Turks in another?

**Vozchan:** Within the old city there was divisions, fairly rigid divisions but in this Garden City, I don’t remember that there were any Turks there. That was pretty much left to the Armenians and to the missionaries.

**Paul:** I’d like you to talk if you can, about the importance of the missionaries in everyday Armenian life. You mentioned that your father learnt his carpentry from them, must have been an important force.

**Vozchan:** It was a very important. It was a German and American mission. The German part of it kind of became reduced and the American became stronger. As I said, mother and father did go to their school. They were brought there as orphans although at the time there may have been one parent living but they decided that that was a place for education. When my turn came, they had training. As I said, my mother was trained as a cook and father as a carpenter.

**Paul:** Did the missionaries function like the settlement houses in New York? Were they to provide education and entertainment?

**Vozchan:** Yes, there was. In a number of areas of Armenia the missionaries had actually promoted the making of needle work for sale, that they would sell and the money would be brought back to the community. I don’t remember specific thing of that kind where I was. I do remember when I went to kindergarten at the same mission school. I do remember the Christmas celebrations and the music from Haydn’s Surprise Symphony that had been translated into Armenian for the enjoyment of all us. It still comes back to me very strong.

**Paul:** When you said you remember the Christmas celebration, what seemed different or unusual about that that stuck out in your mind?

**Vozchan:** It was the warmth of it. I don’t remember the ape tree particularly, I don’t remember any one thing particularly except that it was a joyous occasion for play and the music to dance to.

**Paul:** This was different than how Armenian celebrated Christmas usually?

**Vozchan:** The music certainly was different. The enjoyment was undoubtedly the same but in the missions where we were it was general happy day for the children and the parents were also there during part of it.

**Paul:** Was one particular religious sect more important in terms of the missions than others?

**Vozchan:** When I was born, my grandmother saw to it that I was taken very quickly, within weeks, to the mother church for christening so that there’d be no question about my being a member of the mother church.

The influence of the Protestant church was very great however in my case, in the case of my mother and her later life, it was always appreciated as something that was very beautiful but there was always the feeling of “it is not my church” and so the ties were there, the appreciation for it was there, and the pleasure of having been part of it was there.

**Paul:** Was the mission… the one that your family was connected more strongly with, was it one separate building? Was it a series of buildings?

**Vozchan:** I seem to remember only a large hall for the Christmas celebrations. I don’t remember the external features at all.

**Paul:** This is you said where your father learned his trade. What kinds of things were taught in the missions?

**Vozchan:** I think that there were quite a few trades taught. I expect Tinsmithing was undoubtedly very strong. My uncle was a tinsmith.

**Paul:** Your father’s brother?

**Vozchan:** Yes, my father’s brother and I don’t know whether he got that from the missions however, or from other training. I don’t associate him with the mission at all.

**Paul:** You started talking about school, you said you had began kindergarten. Tell me what the experience was like going to school.

**Vozchan:** There isn’t much in memory of the actual teaching and the processes. I have very faint memories of those.

**Paul:** Could your parents read and write?

**Vozchan:** Yes. They were both educated, probably the equivalent of seventh, eighth grade. That’s the impression that I have as to where they were.

**Paul:** Did they speak Armenian, Turkish or…?

**Vozchan:** Yes, Armenian. This was one of the features of the people of Van. They refused to speak Turkish.

**Paul:** Got them into trouble later, huh?

**Vozchan:** Yes, got them into trouble.

**Paul:** So Armenia was spoken in your house. What was your sister’s name?

**Vozchan:** Her name was Varsenig, which happens to be my wife’s name too.

**Paul:** Could you spell that please?

**Vozchan:** V-A-R-S-E-N-I-G.

**Paul:** Is there a story or an experience that you remember about you and your sister when you were a child? Something that might have happened.

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember too much. I remember the trips going to our mother’s family home in the summer and I remember the experiences when particularly one summer when the hospital had closed for the summer and there was a young man who had had a very badly infected leg. The question was what shall we do with him with the hospital closed? Mother decided that he would be taken with us to her family home for the summer.

I remember the…this was very vivid in memory. He was riding on one mule and my sister and I were in the saddle bags on another, and the mules had a way of walking along the edge of a precipice which frightened the daylights out of the young man. I still can hear him yelling his fear. That was very vivid in memory.

**Paul:** What is the terrain like around this…?

**Vozchan:** Mountainous.

**Paul:** You mentioned storing food for the winter, did you have snow and hard winters?

**Vozchan:** Yes, the winters were very harsh and my mother particularly had to walk through the dark of the early morning to get to the hospital through snow, and there were wolves around at night. It was kind of a difficult experience in that respect.

**Paul:** Could you talk a little bit about the clothing that people wore in this part of Turkey?

**Vozchan:** I know that I wore a dress. The clothing of anybody else, I have no memory of.

**Paul:** Were the fabrics home-spun?

**Vozchan:** I seem to remember that there would be occasional looking at fabrics that had come from somewhere so that there was apparently buying and selling of things that had come from abroad or elsewhere but I don’t remember weaving, I don’t remember anything in detail.

**Paul:** That wasn’t part of your home life.

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** What about appointments in the house, for instance, furniture, rugs, where did they come from?

**Vozchan:** The only memory I have is of that kursig, that metal container of coals with a little table-like cover and the quilt-like large cover spread over that. I remember that and I remember the wall where my sword hung.

**Paul:** I was wondering your father being a carpenter perhaps he was responsible for the furniture in your house.

**Vozchan:** No, I don’t remember anything on that.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about what people ate at that time in that part of the world.

**Vozchan:** We had meat pretty regularly, with lots of fat as I said it had been stored in.

**Paul:** What kind of meat?

**Vozchan:** Mostly sheep, lamb. There were vegetables, I don’t remember those in particular. I mentioned that we did have wine and…

**Paul:** Who did the cooking in your house, your grandmother or…?

**Vozchan:** Mother. The grandmother died fairly early, so she was not in that very long. I do remember that mother cooked but details of the kitchen I have no memory of.

**Paul:** There isn’t perhaps one single dish that she made that sticks out in your mind as being something you looked forward to?

**Vozchan:** The dish made from yoghurt and wheat was very popular in Van. That made for quite a story when we got to Yerevan later on, which I may mention. But I don’t have any sorts of specific foods.

**Paul:** Why don’t you tell me about when you first became conscious of some kind of unrest in the city?

**Vozchan:** Where was that when the Turkish army arrived and the city was under siege in April.

**Paul:** This is April of 1915.

**Vozchan:** Dr. Ussher, you ought to sometime read his book, *An American Physician in Turkey.* It’s a marvellous description of that period and his personal experiences. I remember that there was much commotion. I remember walking through the streets and hearing the bullets and seeing people duck. I remember myself ducking when I heard the sounds.

I was taken to play with Dr. Ussher’s youngest son at his home for safety but that didn’t last long and I found out since why not. Because in his book there are pictures of what happened to his home. The bombs wrecked it completely so there was no place for safety.

I remember the peoples carrying back and forth and mother being very much involved with the hospital. She had as assistants, a man who was dumb. He did not have speech or hearing. He was her assistant and she would take care of him. I remember his behavior. Mother tells of the time when he would implore God, “Why is this condition this way with me?” That continued on; I do remember the hospital being very busy.

When the siege was over, somehow the Armenians survived that month. They survived by organizing everything between the Germans and the Americans and the professional army, and professionals who were there. They just managed. The real leaders had already been killed. They had been told to go to a place for a meeting with officials ostensibly to find some compromise but they never returned. So that now it was the second level people; some professionals, pharmacists, and so on who were left there and the situation was such that the survival of the group depended on organization.

It was immediately arranged so that there was a mayor, and Dr. Ussher’s older boy who had translated the Boy Scouts code to the Armenian now was in charge of keeping the streets clean and orderly and helping to do whatever was needed for the general public. He organized a young men’s group for that.

The women became the ones who were entrusted with looking for the bombs that were dropped. The city of Van, the old city, is hard up against the Rock of Van which is quite an ancient fortress, [unclear 00:33:56], is quite a fortress and the Turks had their old canon on that rock. They had the big round balls. This was the very oldest of the old bombs which would be hurled down onto the city with fuses to blow up after they fell.

The city was divided up into sections and individuals were given wet rags and pails to stand and watch for these balls to fall, to grab the fuse out of the ball, and to use that powder for fighting back. One of the pharmacists, according to Dr. Ussher’s book, developed a process from producing that powder. Between these, they had the fighting material and then they had all kinds of [unclear 00:35:01]. It’s so exciting to read his book. I remember much of that, then I remember the time when the Turks left.

I was with a group that went to the Turkish part which had been deserted by them. Here we went there to see what we could get from what they had left. Chicken, I collected empty shells and so on, and one chicken. I remember bringing that home. This would be about the end of May in 1915.

**Paul:** When you said the Turks had left, I assume these were residents who were Turkish who got out of there because the Turkish soldiers were…?

**Vozchan:** The Turkish soldiers left their women folk and the children then a very sad thing happened. The American missions felt it their duty to also help the Turkish women. The conditions that Dr. Ussher describes existing in their homes was so bad. Disease very quickly, typhoid, came over them. Mrs. Ussher and Dr. Ussher both caught typhoid and Mrs. Ussher died. Dr. Ussher was sick to the point where when we did him flee he had to be carried.

He describes the difference between the two cultures. Whereas in Van the Armenians had been able to organize so completely, so effectively, the women who were left were impossible to deal with. [unclear 00:37:09], and they would actually deny their babies the little food that they could find. It’s a very sad description of what was there and they paid a heavy price for trying to help the Turks. That was what I do remember; our going hunting for what was left and then of course the other is from Dr. Ussher’s book.

**Paul:** What’s happening to your mother and your sister all during this time?

**Vozchan:** I don’t have any memory of what my sister was doing but my mother was a very busy woman in the hospital.

**Paul:** Because this is how she’s supporting you; working in the hospital. Did she ever tell any stories about things that happened in the hospital at this time or things that made an impression on her?

**Vozchan:** There were; she’s had many experiences with the soldiers and officers.

**Paul:** Any that you remember that sticks out?

**Vozchan:** There were a couple nurses there. These were nurses who later came to the States. One was a very strong, tall woman, and the other more frail but the two of them were working together at the hospital and mother would tell the story about how they had to overcome some of the patients because of the pain and the violence that some of them would show, and they would also have some Turks there because Dr. Ussher insisted that it was to be medicine for anyone who needed it.

There were the experiences with the Turks and Armenians, both in the hospital, but the stories that she did tell were largely of fine, young man here and fine boy there, and that memory still clings.

**Paul:** Was food difficult to find at this…?

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember any food problems.

**Paul:** So life more or less went on as usual.

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Just you knew there was something bigger?

**Vozchan:** We knew that people were getting killed; people were getting killed in the city so that there was devastation of sorts there. But I was spared much of it and until we survived that siege. It was within another couple of months that the Turkish army… we were saved, the Turks left because the Russian army were approaching.

What happened was the Russian general was in Van for a while then they proceeded West, and this is all from the book, until it developed that a huge army was about to be sent against the Armenians and the Russians had been ordered to the eastern front. They were doing so badly that they had to leave Armenia to return to whatever else they would have to do.

Word came that things were going wrong and then the general himself issued orders; everyone must flee. That gave us about a day’s notice to just up and leave. I remember that quite well. I don’t remember that I had anything more with me than what I was wearing. My sister, mother and I we started off on a cart, sitting on top of a cart which was loaded with somebody else’s furniture. That didn’t last long. We had to after a while take to foot. The rest of the flight had to be on foot.

**Paul:** Did you know where your destination was going to be or it was just a matter of getting out and then worrying about where you were going to go later?

**Vozchan:** It was all heading east but then part going north and part going south-east going to Iran, or up north-east toward Russian-Armenia. Dr. Ussher’s group also took to the north as we did so we were with that group although not in close contact with them. Dr. Ussher as I said had to be carried on lift tied between two horses until he got to Igdir and at Igdir according to the story in his book, there we were asked by him to go to America with him because he had this feeling of responsibility towards the hospital staff.

We would have been able to come to America early, at that point but through the trip through those two weeks that we were walking, my sister was lost. It happened that an officer who knew my mother saw a soldier who had a donkey and commanded the soldier to be responsible for my sister, to take her to Yerevan. We would meet in Yerevan and we had forgotten now, it must have been near Igdir when we were first accosted with Dr. Ussher’s group.

We looked for our sister. We found the soldier and the officer was there but no little girl. What had happened to her? He said, “She had insisted on leaving me; I couldn’t keep her”. I do remember the beating that that officer gave the soldier was a whip. He really whipped him for having left a child. Dr. Ussher’s group then went off and we were in Yerevan. We arrived there with disease conditions and crowding there.

**Paul:** Is this like a great column of people battling up on the [unclear 00:45:16]?

**Vozchan:** Yes. The first night during that period I remember her giving a gold piece for a loaf of bread which was so hard that I couldn’t eat it so we had to leave that. Another night she gave a smaller piece for a shoal to cover me with. We had hailstones that drew blood and if we had to drink the water that we walked in and had to simply pass the waters through whatever rags we had to give it some clearing. We suffered during that week and as I said, the food situation we learnt hunger.

In Yerevan when we did get there, again it was a case of my mother now hunting through the crowds for sister. It was a matter of each morning getting up and wandering around to look for her. I remember saying to my mother, “She’s lost but you can give me her love”, but that didn’t seem to satisfy her and we continued that search I’ve forgotten how many days until one day, we saw in a distance something red on a pole. We went to it; it was her dress with the Russian soldiers. The Russian soldiers were playing with her and they had hung the little dress to dry. My poor mother… [silence]. I remember running, grabbing a child and the soldiers laughing.

**Paul:** Your mother must have just been overjoyed because I’m sure she’d probably had given her up.

**Vozchan:** Yes, and I remember so well the evening prayers; the soldiers.

**Paul:** Seeing the Russian soldiers was a feeling of safety?

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** That was a relief to get to that point. Did they help to make things more comfortable for the incoming refugees?

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember any of that. All I remember is the evening prayers, so beautiful and the incident of finding our sister.

**Paul:** Did you stay… where did you say you were, Yerevan?

**Vozchan:** Yerevan, yes.

**Paul:** Did you stay there for any period of time?

**Vozchan:** Then it was a question of what do we do? We have arrived and we’ve survived so far but diseases everywhere; cholera, typhoid, the food carried disease, and the strangest thing happened. My sister and I stopped eating. We would not take fruit, we would not take bread, we would not take anything. One day we saw a family eating bread dipped in garlic and vinegar and we said we want that. We lived on that for two weeks.

**Paul:** Who was left in the town? Were there residents in the town? Was there an Armenian population?

**Vozchan:** This was now in Yerevan where the crowds had come in and multiplied the population. Yerevan was just a small city but now the hundreds and hundreds, by their thousands were now piling in. What brought the difficulty for the local people; they couldn’t manage it.

Then my mother went to the archbishop who was in charge of the orphanage of the church and she asked for work. He wanted to know, “This little woman, what have you been doing?” “I was cook at the American hospital.” “What do the people in Van know about food? All they know is this food prepared from yoghurt”. My mother tells the story of she stood up to her full five feet and a few inches and said, “It was with that food that we held [unclear 00:50:43]”.

The other incident was the bishop could reach over, as was the custom for the person to kiss the ring, and she refused to do it. She had had Protestant influence. He says, “So you’re Protestant?” This is her story as she tells it. He did give her work as a cook in an orphanage, with the two of us with her and that’s where we were for the next year.

**Paul:** So you had beds and you had a place to stay and your mother lived in the orphanage too.

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** I should think the orphanages would have been very full at this time.

**Vozchan:** They were full and I remember a wooden structure of a large open area. I remember the place where we had our food and she took over in a real way and made sure that the food was prepared so that the orphans who were there could enjoy it. She found that she’d really have to defend the interests of the orphans against some of the teachers.

**Paul:** Defend in what way?

**Vozchan:** For example the girls would walk in to the kitchen where she would be in the morning and cry because they had been told by some teachers to empty the night pans. She chased them out, said, “Get out of my kitchen” after having handled that and then went to the teachers and had them understand that these children were already orphans.

**Paul:** Who were the teachers in the orphanage?

**Vozchan:** There were some teachers who were the natives of Yerevan but one teacher my mother brought in, who had been one of those from Van. She had been a teacher and this proved to be a serious mistake because this woman had no sense of humanity about her and she became one of the sources of trouble for my mother.

I remember the time when we were told by her that there was to be no laughing, no noise in the orphanage. This became a matter for confrontation with her and my mother. How can you dare to say that? I brought you here and now you are denying them the joy of just laughing? Then also there was some thievery of the blankets and things by some of the teachers which they discovered.

It turned out there was a supervisor who depended on my mother to tell her how things were in the orphanage and then they would make the corrections as she reported things. This was quite helpful, and also my mother would regularly see the archbishop and each time she went he would reach his hand to be kissed and she wouldn’t do it. The Protestant element in her…the influence was there. We were there for a year.

**Paul:** Do you remember anything about being in the orphanage, an experience that you had in that situation? Something that might stick out in your mind about every day in that circumstance.

**Vozchan:** Food was there. I remember the problem we had with the glasses of hot tea and having to pour them into the saucers to be able to drink. The relationship of the children with each other was beautiful as I remember it.

There were some instruction, there would be periodic going to the baths for combined group bathing weekly, and there would be singing, there would be some instruction, I don’t remember details on those very much but I do remember that when the barber was going to come to cut our hair, the girls objected to getting my long hair cut.

The older boys and the younger boys and there were some I guess who were in their teens who were beginning to feel their maturing and I remember one time when they let us play, when these older boys would call us to their place and then expose their genitals to us and that was big fun. Those little incidents; I don’t remember too many.

We have a beautiful picture of the orphanage taken on a staircase with my mother up there with the teachers and I sitting quietly by myself, and my little sister sitting close to me but she was so disturbed about that one teacher that she dug her eyes out of the picture. So we have the picture but that woman’s eyes are not there.

**Paul:** Tell me, in the orphanage, did you stay with your mother at night or were you in the boys’ section and your mother had her own quarters?

**Vozchan:** As I remember it we had a room where was with us. I don’t remember being with the other children.

**Paul:** These hundreds of refugees or thousands of refugees that have come in to this city, were a lot of the orphans at the orphanage made of these refugees?

**Vozchan:** Yes. They were collected.

**Paul:** So they are all Armenians in this orphanage?

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Where did the adult refugees go to stay? Did they set up some temporary quarters for them?

**Vozchan:** The adults of course these were orphans which means the parents were not living, but what else had happened to them I don’t know to any who survived.

**Paul:** You can only imagine that this city or this town would have been changed dramatically by the influx of all these people coming in.

**Vozchan:** It was completely upset and the curse that one would give to the other woman would be, “I hope one of the refugees comes to your house”. Conditions were that bad for everybody. Later on, my wife will tell you about the time that she was in Yerevan much later in 1935 and even then it was just a city of 30,000 so you can imagine what would have been the situation in 1915.

**Paul:** Just chaos, all these people coming in. We’re going to pause just for a second. We’re now beginning tape 2 with Vozchan Parsegian who came from Turkey in 1916 when he was eight years old. We were in Yerevan and you stayed there about a year.

**Vozchan:** Yes, then mother began to feel that we had to leave for America. We had not heard from our father.

**Paul:** When was the last time you heard a word from him?

**Vozchan:** When we had been in Armenia, sometime probably before the siege. I remember getting letters at the time and when we did get a letter in Van, I would take the letter and pace back and forth as though I were reading it and my mother used to tell that I would walk back and forth and keep saying “[unclear 01:00:46]”, whatever that meant as though I were reading his letter.

We did not hear from him again. Mother was quite concerned but she decided that we had to get to America. The thing about mother was this; she had been so frugal she had always kept with her a belt of gold coins. That was what she depended on and it was now going to make the most of that to finally get us to America.

When she went to the archbishop and said that she wanted us to leave, he tried to persuade her not to. He said, “Why do you go? There’s education here.” “No, I want American education for my children.” Somehow that thing was very important to her, whatever it meant. In time, he became persuaded that she would not stay and made arrangements so that she would leave.

Meanwhile, mother also found a husband and wife who were desperate to get to America. They made arrangements so that she would be sister to the man, and we her children, and we would arrive in that family relationship. That was the way we got our passports. In fact there was also another man and wife that my mother helped with some money, she helped both couples with some money, and we started off as a group of eight. My sister and I, my mother, and then the two, and then two more, the seven of us and I remember how we were going to go on the train. The two men had to rush in and pull us children in through the window with the crowding of the train being so bad.

This was how we headed north from Yerevan. Apparently I remember we were in Sweden, exactly how we got there by train of course we could only go so far, then there must have been a boat and then from there we also somehow landed in Liverpool, England.

**Paul:** When you left Yerevan, do you remember your mother talking about what you had with you that you could take to America?

**Vozchan:** We had nothing really except perhaps clothing that we were wearing and I’m sure some other clothing and that was it, and the money that she had.

**Paul:** Do you remember anything of the trip to Sweden or what you had to do to get to Sweden?

**Vozchan:** I don’t remember any of that. I do remember Liverpool, taking boat there.

**Paul:** Was Yerevan a large enough city where ship could have gotten together all the necessary papers and all of that being located in Yerevan?

**Vozchan:** I’m sure that through the Russian. That was where the archbishop had to come in to help with the Russian; all of it had to be under Russian help.

**Paul:** I think it’s interesting you have such a vivid memory about so much but yet there’s this big gap, because that must have been quite a trip to go from Yerevan to Sweden.

**Vozchan:** I remember only the crowding, everywhere we went but in Liverpool was where we finally took boat.

**Paul:** What was the name of the ship that you came on?

**Vozchan:** I don’t have the name of the ship. It was one that had a steerage and we were in the steerage.

**Paul:** How long were you in Liverpool before you got on the ship?

**Vozchan:** I seem to remember that it was just matter of a few days.

**Paul:** Do you remember being in Liverpool? Seeing things that might have been different to you?

**Vozchan:** No, only that that’s where we took the boat.

**Paul:** Do you know where along the line your mother finally connected with your father? Did he know you were on your way to America?

**Vozchan:** No. Two weeks before we started on our trip to America we got word that he had died but that made no difference to my mother about coming to America. That was all we heard; he had died.

**Paul:** Where was your father in America?

**Vozchan:** Up in the Boston area.

**Paul:** What was he doing when he was here?

**Vozchan:** We learnt later that he had had an accident; he had been sick much of the time, his back had developed some infection from the accident, and he died a miserable death and was buried in the paupers’ grave.

**Paul:** Of course as you say, you didn’t know this then.

**Vozchan:** Yes. I remember my mother though, when we got here, finding a batch of his letters that had never been mailed and weeping over the beautiful love letters.

**Paul:** Tell me what you remember about being on the ship.

**Vozchan:** It was crowding and somehow managing to have some food now and then and waiting to see what would happen next.

**Paul:** Do you know where you slept on the ship? What it looked like?

**Vozchan:** No, I don’t remember that. I remember I was sitting on the floor eating something and that was all; nothing else about the trip.

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

**Vozchan:** I suppose again a week or so.

**Paul:** What about Yerevan?

**Vozchan:** That of course was undoubtedly a longer period but it’s strange that it’s a blank and all I remember is the crowding.

**Paul:** Your mother knew as much as your father had died, but she decided to come anyway.

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Had she any other friends or relatives in the United States?

**Vozchan:** I had an uncle here.

**Paul:** This is her brother?

**Vozchan:** His brother. He was the one who was still alive, and he had not proven to be very helpful. He was the one who had failed to mail those letters and then he had done worse, we found, when got here.

He met us at Ellis Island and took us to New York City where there were a couple other men with him, and took us to a restaurant and I remember the restaurant on Lexington Avenue and they asked us what did we want to eat, and again we asked for that same dish prepared with yoghurt, and we finished that. “What else do you want?” “More”, and so on, until we finally got up to the Boston area and there we found that our uncle had bought a house that we were now going to live in.

He was unhappy. It wasn’t just seven of us, it was eight because we brought with us the girl that our uncle had been engaged to. When he saw her, he was disappointed. He had planned to marry my mother and she would have none of it. They did get married, they did move away but we had some unfortunate court cases because it turned out that our father had insurance of $1,000 with wife and children as beneficiaries and because of the loss of contact, the uncle had betrayed us and declared that we had been lost and he had taken the money and bought the house.

We went through the unfortunate experience of having to go through a court case and the court decide that the house belong to my mother. It was [unclear 01:10:55] house but a house. This was in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

**Paul:** Before we get too deep into what happened when you got here let me just get the boat docked in New York. Do you have any recollections of the boat actually coming into New York Harbor, or seeing the Statue of Liberty?

**Vozchan:** No, none of that.

**Paul:** Were you already at Ellis Island other than the [inaudible 01:11:17]?

**Vozchan:** The crowding, and the question of will we be admitted? Because that’s the time when the diseases of the eye kept so many out of America. Fortunately, we were in fair health.

**Paul:** What was the uncle’s name?

**Vozchan:** [unclear 01:11:43] Hovsepian. My father’s name by the way was Sahag Hovsepian; Josephson would be the equivalent.

**Paul:** Could you spell the Armenian please?

**Vozchan:** H-O-V-S-E-P-I-A-N, Hovsepian. We’ll come later to where the change was.

**Paul:** So his brother met you, took you out for dinner in New York. Is there anything that sticks out in your mind about seeing things in that short manner of time being in New York or getting your way to Boston that you had never seen before?

**Vozchan:** Yes. New York City was a big city and now there were no longer the crowds of the kind we had been living with. I don’t remember the trip from New York to Boston; somehow so many of these things have gone from memory but I remember when we got to this house how immediately it was a matter of how do we improve on this situation? How do we start working?

My mother immediately got work in a shoe factory, Walton Shoe Factory in Chelsea. As I have been writing in another connection, she became good friends with Mr. Walton. Mr. Walton regarded her very highly because whenever there was a strike he would send his automobile for my mother. Of course she had to learn the hard way what it meant to be a stabber. Anyway she went to work in this factory and she made $6 a week, and then we had to learn to live with that.

**Paul:** Do you remember exactly what she did in the shoe factory?

**Vozchan:** Yes, she was working with heavy lasts that were really much more suited for a man working with than a woman, particularly a small woman. It was hard work and of course this was where she began to learn America. Italian, Irish refugees like herself; that was America.

**Paul:** You mentioned that she was dependable labor for this gentleman and that he would bring her in whenever there was a union problem. Did she ever talk about any specific experiences or do you remember a specific experience of when she did that and something might have happened?

**Vozchan:** She used to very often recite the experiences they had where it was almost a fight on occasions for the piece work that would pay a little better. Apparently there were some variations in the job and everyone was out after those better conditions, better work, little more money, and so it was a constant fight for that little extra advantage.

**Paul:** Did she ever bring work home that you can remember?

**Vozchan:** She did do work at home; we did quite a lot of curtain work.

**Paul:** Curtain work being what specifically?

**Vozchan:** What it demands to is getting ordinary curtains and then doing needle work with them, decorative work.

**Paul:** Was that something the children also participated in?

**Vozchan:** No, I don’t remember doing any of that. She would do it; other women would join in and would do this. My wife would be able to tell you much more about those things. Then I got to working… I got to school…

**Paul:** Tell me about going to school and what it was like to be flunked into an American school.

**Vozchan:** Here we were, without language and it was terribly difficult to know what to do. They put us in a special class and tried to push us with English and to see how far they could go with getting us into the right grade to which we belong by age, and they did remarkably well. It was Williams School across the tracks and the park to the big Williams School which they bragged about being the biggest school this side of the Mississippi.

The teachers were kind. There were occasions… I remember how terrible it was for me when I couldn’t seem to get her permission to go to the toilet and wet myself and felt deep shame from that.

**Paul:** Were there lots of immigrants in the same situation in school for instance, would you be in a class with lots of different immigrant children of different ages?

**Vozchan:** In the first classes that we went into we were pretty much all immigrants until we could join the other classes which we I think did fairly quickly actually. Then it was a matter of just going through the routine and learning what education could be like because I had not really had any schooling that amounted to anything up to that point. I remember it was a new experience for me to see a Negro.

**Paul:** What did you think when you saw a black person?

**Vozchan:** My reactions were not particularly negative except when I saw one black and one white so close that they were breathing into each other’s face. Somehow that made a big impression on me. They tell me about my personal habits having been so peculiar. When a very little child, I would rub and try to clean whatever I was going to drink from with my dirty clothes.

That impression carried even to that period of the two breathing each other’s breathe. This was the thing that struck me as something to wonder about, and not just to black and white. We did manage to get to the fifth and sixth grades.

**Paul:** Can you talk a little bit about learning English specifically and what obstacles you may have had to overcome in order to do that?

**Vozchan:** As I remember, the fifth grade was a difficult year for me. In the sixth grade I had to cut enough of the education so that I could be almost naughty in the class. In the seventh grade, suddenly got back to my normal self; quiet, studious, and well-behaved to the point where the teacher made me her favorite. She would tell my mother when she would come to visit the school.

When I got to the eighth grade, found another wonderful teacher who sensed that I was one year behind the others in age and class and she was bound that she was going to get me advanced. She helped; I remember the time when she told she wanted me to be promoted in the middle of the year and I hoped she might be able to do that. It was a commercial class and in Chelsea the population is almost completely Jewish and so the competition can be rough in school.

I remember though that I was better than the girls in shorthand, which created quite a stir because boys were not supposed to be smarter than girls at shorthand. But this teacher took such joy in that and then I remember the time when the grades began to come in and she looked at the first one, and she called me and said, “Vozchan, those grades have come in. [unclear 01:22:14] came in but it’s only a B”. But then it turned out that the others were ‘A’ so I got promoted anyway.

**Paul:** Because the American missionary schools were so important in Turkey, had you learned any English prior to coming to this country?

**Vozchan:** No. There may have been a word like ‘God’ and I remember there were some words we used to use but that was about it.

**Paul:** Do you remember what your first English word or phrase was here in the country that you learned?

**Vozchan:** No I don’t, but I do remember when I became puzzled about the custom of the country when a boy larger than myself stopped me and wanted to get into an argument and we began to fight. I put him down. There were some people standing around and when I had him down and then apparently what they were saying was, “You’ve got him down now let him go.” And they began to call to me to do something. I was so struck with this question of what have I done? All I’ve done is put him down and the question of custom in this country.

Another time when I was headed for the factory to meet my mother when she would be coming home and two boys, one with stick, stopped me and banged me on the head with a stick for no good reason. My mother from a distance saw that and how it tore her heart. Then it was a matter of growing up in this home to try to improve our things. We did have our first Christmas though.

**Paul:** Describe that for me.

**Vozchan:** It was Christmas time and we knew how to enjoy Christmas. The house had a tree in front; not a particularly attractive tree but it did have one branch that I could cut off. We brought that branch into the house and we had our first Christmas in the States with cotton for decoratives. That was real joy I remember.

**Paul:** Talk to me about how your mother adjusted to America. For instance, did she learn English?

**Vozchan:** Yes, she gradually learned English and we began to do the best we could on the house. It was a two-family house. We had tenants in one and we were in another. I began to try to work the garden or what was supposed to be a garden, but it turned out to be all ashes and so I had a miserable time and we would look over the fence to the house next door which was a corner house which had beautiful garden, green and big house, and just longed for the time when we might have some soil that we might plant in. We did finally buy that house.

**Paul:** Where was your uncle during all this? When did he fade out of the picture if he did at all?

**Vozchan:** He faded out fairly quickly by going to California.

**Paul:** He finally did aqueous and married the woman that you brought?

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Did they set up housekeeping?

**Vozchan:** Yes they set up housekeeping but did not stay long in Chelsea area. They decided that California was the place for them. He was a tinsmith who was a very capable tinsmith, quite bright, able to make a living, but he was a difference of day and night between him and my father. It was such a joy to me when some people who knew my father, particularly one man who was a very religious man, he was a Pentecostalist for all the years I knew him, he had named my father ‘Christus’.

**Paul:** When your mother got to Boston, did she do her best to try to piece together what your father’s life must have been like? Did she try to find people who knew him?

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Was that of a concern to her? What his life had been like?

**Vozchan:** Yes, that was of concern and we did find but again it was all gone. He had simply left those beautiful letters.

**Paul:** You said that your uncle had ideas about marrying your mother when she got here. Did she know of those ideas prior to getting here?

**Vozchan:** I don’t think so because up until we learned of my father’s death there could not have been that.

**Paul:** Did you learn of your father’s death from the uncle?

**Vozchan:** No. I’ve forgotten how we got word; it was somebody who had come back who knew him. That was how we heard of it, not from him. There was no letter that I recall.

**Paul:** Just tell me a little bit about this woman that you brought in for your uncle. I assume she’s a young girl; just a little bit about her and what she might have been thinking about all this?

**Vozchan:** She was a nice enough person. I remember her as being very nice, young woman. She had not been close to us in Van but apparently there had been the engagement arrangement before my father and uncle left for America. It was that that my mother was respecting with respect to the girl and what would happen to her. She was not with us during the flight. We met her in Yerevan and it was there that there was talk about her being engaged and going to America.

I don’t remember her having much to say about the marriage. She aqueoused, she had come for that. I think she sensed what was going on that time and that he was not so keen for her but they went through it. I think it was the shame of not going through it that did cultivate the marriage. But they left and disappeared from us and incidentally our son was in California tried very hard to find some word of them and we’ve not been able to find any word of them. So when they left Chelsea that was the end of our relationship.

**Paul:** Did your mother buy the house from your uncle or did you rent it from your uncle?

**Vozchan:** No. When the court decided that the house belonged to mother then of course the title was ours.

**Paul:** How long after you got to America did all of that happen?

**Vozchan:** It happened fairly quickly because my uncle did not stay in the area very long. I’d say it probably took a year or so for it to be completed.

**Paul:** Your mother went through such a tremendous variety of experiences, most of them not very good, right after she got here. How did she feel when she got here? Was she still glad that she made that decision?

**Vozchan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Within the first couple years though at that time did she regret that she had come over here?

**Vozchan:** She was so determined that her children would get American education that she was willing to take anything. That’s how we survived, but she worked many years at that factory and it was… I remember the days when she would drag herself when she could hardly walk. Then something terrible happened to us.

We used to get milk in the big, metal containers with a heavy, wooden plug because making yoghurt was so important for our diet. We’d buy two or more gallons in that. One day I put the can on the stove as I was leaving for school without removing the cap. I came back from school… there was a woman there who was living with us. I came back from school I guess I probably was about 10 years of age at the time, and I saw what I had done. I took the can down and began to apply the tool for removing the wooden cap and the thing exploded. The boiling milk was all over me and all over the room.

The woman was there, she pulled the clothing from my body, along with the flesh and fortunately there was an Armenian doctor, Dr. [unclear 01:33:32], who was called and when mother got home she saw what had happened. My head, face and all, and arms were all completely scalded and the doctor was really concerned. It was a very serious burn.

Mother watched as he bound my arm. This is the scars left from it. But my mother refused to let him bind my face. She knew enough about the hospital experience to refuse to bandage the face, and so it was left raw. The boric acid ointment and whatever else that she applied would be applied over the raw face. The face recovered; only here where I scratched it did it show any effect. They were sure that one eye was gone and unsure of the other.

When the doctor came in the morning, she had all been all night giving the rest of my body alcohol rub and when he walked in and saw me silently sleeping, he was sure I was dead; but I was six months in bed. This was quite a trial.

**Paul:** Tell me what’s running through your mind in terms of this has happened couple years after you’ve got here. What are you thinking as a young man having experienced something like this and having been uprooted from what you knew?

**Vozchan:** I think it was just a question of accepting it and learning what was all about. I don’t remember having any intense feeling of rebellion at all. No intense feelings of any sort but recognizing that this is life, this is what it takes. I worked hard. My mother was working very hard but I was a good son and appreciative of what was happening.

She married again; a man who had known my father. He and a friend had been in South America and they arrived; a good man. His name was also Sahag Parsegian. They were married; a younger sister was born from that marriage. It was a fair marriage, not a good marriage.

He again was not an earner. He had a job that again paid very little and so mother had to continue to work. There were occasions when he thought that children should be disciplined differently from the way we were and mother would have none of that.

**Paul:** Do you remember a specific instance of that happening? Something that either you or sister did and…?

**Vozchan:** It would be a trivial matter of behavior, maybe more noisy than we should have been. Nothing that was very dramatic, nothing that you could say was really wrong or should not have been, and yet she was so sensitive; oversensitive about her children. He was used to the old ways of bringing up children; a good man but just different ideas.

**Paul:** What were those old ways that you say specifically?

**Vozchan:** The matter of how you accost somebody. For example, when you see somebody greet a visitor have you done it just right? Have you paid the courtesies that are due? Nonsensical things as an American would see it but again it was part of the question of he wanted us to be at our best as well so that there was also this feeling for us largely because mother had to work and it was a matter of living under tension all the time because of that.

**Paul:** Did he legally adopt you?

**Vozchan:** Yes, he legally adopted us therefore the change of name.

**Paul:** Tell me how you felt when your mother remarried, because you have big recollections of your father. What were your feelings when she chose this man?

**Vozchan:** There was no objection that I can recall. There was simply the hopes that we would have a father. He was a good man and now we had a second sister who was much younger and we could almost be father to her and protect her.

Sadly, he was working on the roof of the house and fell and broke his back and died. That was again the tragedy that hit us.

**Paul:** What year was that?

**Vozchan:** I can’t remember. I’d have to dig up the records to find that.

**Paul:** Here’s yet another tragedy that your mother has endured.

**Vozchan:** He died and then mother continued. Meanwhile we were doing better at school. Mother had her eye on this house next door. She had saved enough money so that we could put down our first payment. We did move into this good house which had two apartments and one small apartment. That began to give us a little bit of prestige as regards living with American customs.

**Paul:** The first step to making it.

**Vozchan:** Yes. Meanwhile I had become involved with the Adventist church almost across the street in Chelsea and I became a very fervent evangelical. Here we are, friends, others who are… this was the First Day Adventist, not the Seventh Day type. I was a very serious young man and at 17 years of age I was elected a deacon of the church.

**Paul:** How did your mother feel about this?

**Vozchan:** By then I had pretty much taken over running the house. We couldn’t play cards, we couldn’t go to the movies, we couldn’t do this, we couldn’t do that. It was mostly a matter of what we couldn’t do and I lived by that and insisted on them living by it, which didn’t help any. This continued and I was very much part of that church; more than the native borns, by far.

**Paul:** Must have been an unusual circumstance for an Armenian to be a [inaudible 01:43:20] by this church.

**Vozchan:** The strange thing is that my mother did not particularly want us to go to an Armenian church which did have services occasionally.

**Paul:** Why do you suppose that is?

**Vozchan:** She knew the young minister. They had been young people together.

**Paul:** I’d really like to hear about the first job you ever got here that you were paid for.

**Vozchan:** The first job I got was my mother had the feeling that while she wanted American education, she said the first thing is for you to learn a trade so I learnt auto-repairing.

**Paul:** How did you do that?

**Vozchan:** We found a place where I got a job as assistant to learn and found this group that would curse and swear and cheat and it became a terrible experience for me. When I’d complain to my mother she’d say, “You stay there till you learn that trade regardless of whether you like it or not.” So I learned that.

**Paul:** Why auto-repair of all the trades you could have learned?

**Vozchan:** Someone said that was a good thing to learn, some advice.

**Paul:** Were you in high school at this point or were you out?

**Vozchan:** I was in high school at the time. What happened was this, one day while I was repairing a car… I finished high school. Then I was still at it with the auto-repairing, didn’t know what else to do, and while repairing that car of a man who just happened to stop in with some little work, he asked me, “Have you gone to school? What is your education like?” and I told him I’d finished high school. “Are you going to do anymore?” I said we didn’t have any money for anymore. “Why don’t you go to the Lowell Institute School? It’s free and you can learn engineering.”

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

**Vozchan:** Lowell Institute School. He took the trouble to come to the house to explain to us in detail how to go about this. We found out that Lowell Institute School was an evening school within the MIT buildings. How proud we were when I drove my Model T with my mother in it, and sister, and we drove by MIT. This is where I’m going to go to school.

I finished a two-year course and by that time I learned enough about MIT to enter regular four-year program. In time I worked into Physics and that was the beginning. Between, I had my own auto- repair business. At 19 I had four people working for me. I then passed into the education, I got into MIT. By that time I had had enough of the Adventists. I did enter MIT, I did meet my wife and we became interested in each other. She was a teacher of the deaf at the time.

**Paul:** What was your wife’s name?

**Vozchan:** Varsenig, V-A-R-S-E-N-I-G, and her maiden name was Boyajian, B-O-Y-A-J-I-A-N. That was the first experience at MIT. We finished that in Physics and that was in the depths of the Depression, 1933. Then I went without any more help, no jobs of any kind, continued to take on another year of study at Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis where I went but at the time I fortunately also found my way to Washington University in St. Louis to take graduate courses there.

I was a second lieutenant at the time. The Civilian Conservation Corps opened up an office and I could be a reserve officer there, go on active duty. I had a winter of that, and then a job in New York with an instruments company, and then I felt a need for more education and went on to doctorate in nuclear physics, then got into nuclear work, and then got into a lot of other things besides.

I was director of research of the New York operations office of the Atomic Energy Commission 1950-54 and got much involved with the nuclear issues. By that time I had decided that education was where I belonged and I got an invitation to come to Rensselaer Polytechnic and I became their first dean of engineering. They had just reorganized the school and wanted to get into the nuclear age so they wanted somebody who had had engineering experience but was in nuclear physics besides. This is how I came to RPI to start my new career and their new way of life as it turned out too.

I’d been much involved with many of the nuclear issues. I have appeared much many times for hearings with the Joint Committee of Congress on Atomic Energy issues, worked nine years with the US Chamber of Commerce committees on nuclear issues. It continued on and then got into many of the Armenian questions and the many activities I guess we don’t have room for.

**Paul:** I would like you to mention on the tape, your involvement with the oral history project that you did with Armenian people. I think that would be of interest.

**Vozchan:** Around 1965, the Armenian communities began to be quite concerned that so little had been said about the massacres, about the genocide. There began to be public preparation for observances. By that time I was close to the mother church and the diocese in New York City. We decided on the observances to be a concert that we would give at the Lincoln Center.

We had a big event there and I was the one who helped manage that, and I was the one who gave the six-minute talk. There was only a six-minute talk to be given; the rest was going to be music.

We had that and it was quite impressive but we began to worry about the monuments that had been left behind in Turkey, which had become the next victims. Van destruction of the churches, let’s go back centuries. Also about recording the events of the massacres, a group of about six of us got together and organized the Armenian Educational Council Incorporated.

First, we wanted to do something about the monuments in Turkey but we didn’t know what to do so it had to be left. This was in 1966. But then we said we could get started with oral history. The Jews had already been active with that. We wanted to do the same and so we set up… my wife and I and some friends we explored how to set up questionnaires and we began that program of oral history of those who had lived through the massacres. I have some 200 tapes of those.

Then others got started with that and we helped a couple of groups with some financial help to get them started and they took over that part so that we’re not doing that any more. Now to the question of how do we use these effectively? A young man came from Germany, who was an architect who had set up a group there who were also worried about the monuments in Turkey. They needed money.

At the time, the Educational Council had some thousands of dollars which were from royalties from my books that I had been author and co-author of. We supported them and that became a 20-year project but then I was about to retire from my professorship at RPI so I began to plan on making use of the RPI as home-base for this and it worked. It turned out that RPI when they learned about this project, the architecture school wanted this to be centred at RPI. I was the only one available to work on this without salary. That’s how a 20-year project began but the 20-year international project produced seven volumes of material on the architecture of some 940 sites, monasteries, fortresses, churches of any kinds, 42,000 images in microfiche and documented which are now located on the shelves of well over a hundred of the major research libraries of Europe and the United States, and Canada. That has been something that we’ve been very pleased about.

**Paul:** I’m very pleased to have found you. It’s been a great interview but especially to get that last bit of information on tape because I think that people using our collection would like to know about this.

In just a couple seconds, is there something that your mother taught you as a child, a philosophy, a way of living that has stayed with you your whole life?

**Vozchan:** To just do your best and the morality in [unclear 01:56:29] that we grew up with I hope stays.

**Paul:** Dr. Parsegian thank you very much for letting me on. This is Paul Secrest signing off with Vozchan Parsegian on Monday, July 11th 1994 here in the town of Brunswick outside of Troy. Thank you very much sir.

**Vozchan:** Thank you.