

Interviewer 1: Judith Garfield

Interviewer 2: Athena Mandis

**Interviewee: Paul Gulbenkian**

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Well I was born Parsegh Gulbenkian, Armenian names and they couldn't pronounce those names at school or anywhere that I went after school so erm, my parents called me Paul which is a translation of Bōłos, literally I got so fed up with being called bogus or baz and all these sort of things that changed my names to Basil Paul those are my first names and then Gulbenkian.

*And your date of birth?*

23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1940

*And where were you born?*

London

*And could you tell me a little bit about your parents where they were born...*

My Mother was born in London also in Notting Hill, I was born in Stamford Brook, my Father was born in Izmir, Turkey and he fled with his family the fire of Smyrna of 1920 when a lot of the Armenians were massacred at that time and he with his family managed to eventually come to London and the reason they chose London was because we had my Mother's family living here, they were distant cousins.

*Did he ever talk about his time in Smyrna or Izmir?*

It's now Izmir, it was called Smyrna then, he found it really difficult to talk about that period as did my Grandmother who lived with us erm, his Father sadly died fairly soon after he came so I could really get very little information out of my Father about that period or how he got on in Smyrna. And if I pressed he was not very pleased so I realised it was a touchy subject.

*Did he talk about travelling over here at all, I mean how did he get to the UK?*

Yee...sort of and again not very much um, but they came by boat, I know they went, they travelled to Egypt first as I remember and they stayed at all the places they went they stayed at Marseilles, I think they stayed in Marseilles for a time, the aim was to get from Smyrna to London and after stopping off on the way, they stayed at Greece for a time and Athens,

eventually they got to...it took about a year before they all arrived so it was him, my Grandmother, his brother, and his sister. He was the oldest brother.

*And, your family first came to the UK much earlier though didn't they?*

Yes, my Grandfather, that's my Mother's Father came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he came from where all the, the majority of the Gulbenkian family came, from Caesarea and er he established a business here a commodity broking business in the city of London and he spent the rest of his life, no that's not quite true he spent a large part of his life in London until he eventually retired and went to god know why, and I shall be rude about the place but he went to XXX in north wales and that's where he retired [laughs].

*So he was born in Caesarea so that's Palestine?*

No, no its Turkey.

*Turkey, okay, there's another Caesarea I think in ....*

Yeah, yeah I think there is.

*And did it, are there any family stories from his time living in...*

In my Grandfather's time?

*Yeah*

Not that I can remember, sadly, my Mother and my Father, sorry my Mother and Father and my Grandfather broke up, um and the reason is that my Grandfather did not want my Mother to marry my Father even though they were distant cousins because my Father worked for him for a time they had a huge row and this is a Victorian type Grandfather [laughs] coming from Victorian times and he said, 'he will not marry that man' and she did and after that moment he cut them off completely, had nothing more to do with them, wouldn't even speak to them and the only memory I have of meeting him was when my Mother took me on a god knows how many hours on a train to meet my Grandfather and he didn't know we were coming his butler opened the door and my Mother said this is you know Mr Gulbenkian's daughter, I want to see her, but will they let him in with me and I can picture now to this day, something sort of remain in your memory forever, my Grandfather sort of sitting in that seat in the huge and vast room and I was about six years old, erm and the far distance there was a man sitting in a chair with a pile of newspapers by him and as soon as I walked in and my Mother said I brought your grandson to see you he put up his newspaper or a newspaper and he said 'I do not want to see my grandson, I do not want to see you, I do not want to have anything to do with you, get out of this house and never, never speak to me or darken my doors again;' I mean...then my mother, that journey back to London on the train was one of the most horrendous I can imagine, I mean she was in tears throughout that journey for months afterwards that she could not have any reconciliation with him he wouldn't entertain it.

*Goodness, because he had...*

It was a shame because I would have loved to have known him and there's a sequel to this which is probably not of any interest but ultimately he left a very large estate when he died

and he left it to the Yorkshire bank to manage for any Armenian charity, er we're talking of 1960 at that time a lot of people didn't even know what an Armenian was let alone an Armenian charity was I'd just qualified as a lawyer and ironically the Yorkshire bank got in touch with me and said 'we understand you are the grandson of Mr Gulbenkian' I said yes, 'do you know that your Grandfather left all his estate to the charity which we're running as trustees?' I said 'yes I did know that,' he said 'we have a problem', I said 'what's the problem?', 'the problem is we don't know where to give the money because we do not know of any Armenian Charites we do not know of how to find them or, or where to spend the money'. I was involved with Armenian charitable work at the time and the trustee of some London Armenian charities so until my Grandfather, until the Yorkshire bank decided they could no longer run this charity I was their consultant, I was advising them as to where to spend this money so, money which might have possible gone to me [laughs] I had the great privilege of spending on the Armenian charitable purposes, quite remarkable, it's a lovelier thing to be able to do anyway. So in a way my grandfather's money did benefit lots of people who deserved it, probably much more than me.

*That's amazing story and did he actually set up the museum aswell?*

So no this is Nerses Gulbenkian was the first cousin of Calouste Gulbenkian who set up the museum in Portugal and who also established a charitable foundation which is still in existence, still running in Portugal, as we said earlier and has a UK branch.

*So your links to Armenia go back a long way erm through five generations, so you must have heard stories of the various times when em, the community were under siege or went through deportations.*

Yep

*Do you remember any of those stories or have you heard from your family any of those stories?*

My family, as I said earlier would not talk about it, I could not get them to talk, my Grandmother witnessed some horrific things I believe would not say anything and I also believe because I was told by someone else that a member of the family, I don't know who actually died during those massacres because I have a photograph of all my family, I say on my Father's side with one other person in that photograph who no one will even mention I don't even know who his name is but I since not found out but I believe that this mysterious person in that photograph was either another brother or was a very close cousin or certainly a member of the family who was killed during those massacres, and because it was so painful for them they wouldn't talk about it, the most, it sounds strange, the most information I have about a personal experience arising during that period, is actually through my wife who is also Armenian erm and came from Lebanon but her family also came from turkey and her Father, I can't' remember which town in turkey it was, I think it might've been Istanbul her father who was six years old at the time that this happened, on the occasion that he himself told me about and obviously my wife knows it even better than I do, opened the door because someone wanted to speak to his father and when he opened the door he was asked by some people who were on horseback that Turkish people that they wanted to talk to Grandfather and he went in and said, 'dad, there's some people who want to talk to you and he went out in front of the son in front of my wife's Father they beheaded him and he felt to the day, for as long as I can remember as long as she can remember that he could remember he felt that he

was responsible for his Father's death because he was the person who asked his Father to go out and when he talked to me about it he used to burst into tears because he was so upset at what he had caused, but that's the only specific family if you like incident that I'm aware of, I've heard all sorts, I've read books, I've read stories, I've read historical explanations of all these things I've seen photographs but that's the only one...but on my side of the family I couldn't get them to say anything.

*Yeah it's something they close off from isn't it and can't bare to, so many people have said that ...*

They couldn't bear to talk about it, couldn't, but even my Mother who was so close to my Father obviously couldn't get him to open up about what he went through during that time where they were being persecuted and but Armenians were facing horrendous times before they fled it was a terrible period, but my Father wouldn't talk, my Grandmother wouldn't talk his brother, his sister wouldn't talk, none of them would talk about it, I used to probe, but no they just shut up.

*So when they came over here you then had to start again to a certain extent.*

Mmm so what happed was its quite funny in a way he was due to start and did start with my Grandfather as we explained earlier thinking that he would work with my Grandfather in the commodity business, very quickly didn't work, there was a huge clash of personalities as I understand it, and my Father was therefore left jobless with a Mother, a brother and a sisters, none, of...he was the eldest brother, none of whom could obviously work. The only thing that he had brought over with him was his stamp album [laughs] god knows why he had collected stamps, he had trained as a lawyer and he would have been a lawyer if he had carried on and his Father was a lawyer, quite an eminent lawyer in turkey was a lawyer to the British embassy and to the ottoman bank and various other things and that's what my Father was going to do but he was I think twenty or something when he came here so he couldn't do that and he just had this stamp collection and he went into the philately business and that's what he did for the rest of his life, but he was determined that I was gonna be lawyer and I was [laughs] didn't want to be but I was.

*Very interesting, collecting the stamps*

Yes!

*Really, really.*

Yes, I've still got those stamps but I've now given them to my grandson because as I said to you earlier, I'm trying to give away as much as I can of things from that time and er I thought my grandson would appreciate and carry on because they're mostly Armenian stamps and Turkish stamps and Armenian stamps so they have a sentimental, I don't know if they're worth anything but sentimental value.

*So for how long did he collect the stamps?*

Well he must have started in this teens to build up this collection and then and then he had the most wonderful collection, I mean he loved stamps, I know that was his business but he loved them I mean he used to devote time because he loved you know even weekend he used to sit

and look at them, I mean I couldn't understand it, possibly because I saw so many damn stamps...

[both laugh]

All over the place! It wasn't for me, or did he wish me to go into the stamp business anyway but he absolutely loved the business but he also loved the physical stamps and the history and the geography, everything that goes with stamp collecting.

*My brother did it for a while and I must admit, some of them were so beautiful.*

There are some stunning, yes, there's some gorgeous stamps, absolutely.

*You said that his Father, so that'd be your Grandfather if I've got this right was a lawyer in the Ottoman Empire?*

Yep

*Did you hear any stories about that, if he came so involved in the Ottoman Empire.*

Well the only thing that my father would say, he would never say anything negative about those times, everything he said was positive and he used to say that my Grandfather his Father had got on extremely well with eminent people in Turkey that in dealt with in Smyrna which is where he was based and he worked hard to qualify as a lawyer, he was respected as a lawyer as soon as he qualified and he was on other these positions and , they had the ottoman bank and they had the British embassy but also had a lot of very good private clients whom he represent and he was you know considered part of Turkish society, he did not see that there was any real treat to the family until things happened. Exactly what happened I don't know but things happened where he said we can't carry on here we've got to go the whole families got to go and then dashed onto this boat that was fleeing the fire of Smyrna.

*It's quite something because they were the Armenians who were very prominent and had businesses and had positions in the Ottoman Empire ad it kind of just broke down.*

There is interestingly and I have it somewhere, wherein my Father gave it to me, when my Grandfather died in London, and in London he carried on as a lawyer, as a Turkish expert lawyer at the time he used to give evidence on Turkish law as an expert but there's an obituary of my Grandfather in the daily telegraph at the time which gives a little bit of history at how well known and how prominent he was in Turkey until he came to London.

*It must have been so difficult to give all that up and then*

Yep, yeah.

*Flee for your life basically.*

He gave it all, he came with nothing

*Okay, so I know you've done some research about the first war world, sorry I feel a bit far away but, you've done some research about the first world war, can you tell me a little bit more about that and how your family was involved.*

Well this is all very recent because CAIA got in touch with me in fact they got in touch with my daughter who is a storyteller among other things Armenian story teller and she does tell stories, Armenian stories at CAIA so they got in touch with her and they found out that there's a member of the family who was killed served in the first world war for the British army and was killed in the first world war and his name was Krikor Gulbenkian which you know anything about him so she said she didn't but she asked me because I might know something about it so she sent on an article that CAIA had received and asked me to look into it and then coincidentally another... a friend of mine sent me another article which I've got here in which he goes into much greater detail, because I couldn't trace this person, whose name was Krikor Gulbenkian the soldier er, that's say the same name as my Father, but that's not nothing unusual I know that that's not an uncommon Armenian name, but I couldn't see him on the family tree that I have , that had been donated to me by a cousin, and I thought well where does he fit into this and then I got this other article which explained that he was the son of Garabed and that Garabed was the brother of Nerves which was my grandfather and two other brothers so then I could see exactly where he fitted in so he is, well he's my cousin but he's my great uncle's son.

*Yeah, great.*

So technically cousin I guess I'm not a great expect on how these things work out [laughs] and this article talked about, it also mentions my Grandfather, that he helped to run um and establish an Armenian hospital which he named after my Mother in Aleppo which was run by this side of the family who went to the states so part of the family went, and this is the mothers, my mother's side of the family, part of them including Calouste came to London and my Grandfather of course and this brother Garabed and lived in Kensington and um, Calouste also lived for a time in Kensington and then moved to Hyde park and the other part of the family went to New York and the, the new York side of the family I knew and know, well I don't know but I know them descendants of my Grandfather's sisters who ...their family I'm very close to but I didn't know there was another brother in existence.

*Do you know why one branch went to New York and the other came to the UK.*

No I don't, I don't, that's a bit of a mystery I don't. I know my Grandfather came to London because he thought there was more opportunities for the sort of business that he wanted to run in London than there was in New York, he wanted to be in the city, he wanted to sell commodities and he had experience in that field and Calouste, as you probably know was in the oil, discovered potential of oil if you like, he got a degree in oil, at King's College London, so they came here because they saw the potential for their, sort of work they wanted to do but why the other part of the family went to New York I don't know that side, I've now made contact with that side of the family and I've sent them an email and I've said if you come to London it'd be nice to meet up because I'd like to know a little bit more just out of interest...I haven't had a reply yet, maybe they don't wanna know. [laughs] who knows.

*So you just discovered then that he served in the first world war?*

Yeah, only from this article.

*Right so it's all...*

Yes, I did there, there was talk in the family, my Mother my Father occasionally used to mention that a member of the family was killed in the first world war especially my mother used to say there was, but she never elaborated on it, it was a taboo subject just as my Father was sort of hint at the fact that his family was killed in the massacre also the first world war but during the massacres so I, I sort of vaguely knew there was such a person but that was it and then it came out of the blue a few weeks ago.

*That's really interesting; you said he came to Kensington, why did he settle in Kensington?*

It seemed to be place that, that the family went because my Grandfather actually bought a house in north Kensington, it's called Notting Hill now and Pembroke Road, I've seen it, it's still there, my Mother she used to show me so he moved there, Calouste bought a house in Kensington when he moved to London and moved north of the park to Hyde Park so it seemed to be the area that, and then Calouste built a church and St Sakis church is in Kensington as well, which they liked I guess.

*And then of course once he established a church...brings...*

Uhuh, yes and that was the first Armenian church in London, built in 1920 if my memory serves me right and there's the you know, big focal point because the church is a very important aspect of Armenian life, it's held the Armenians together in many ways and he built that church, when he built it I believe there was about maybe twenty Armenian families in London so a small church built in memory of his parents his father's name was Sarkis, his Mother's name was Nevarte and he, there's a memorial there for them and he thought it would be used by the small community but the community has expanded since and now there's another church, also in Kensington, south Kensington.

*Because at the time, I mean quite a few Armenians came over to the uk and what type of work did they do?*

The Armenians who came over? After the, which period are we talking about now?

*Around 1920s*

Around 1920s, well the Armenians who came over around 1920s were actually in the textile business and those Armenians, mainly they were from turkey, the vast majority of them went to Manchester, so there were more Armenians in Manchester than there were in London because that's where the textile industry was and they were involved in the textile and there's an Armenian church there aswell which was built by one of the people who fled, I'm not sure exactly when it was built but there was bigger community in Manchester than in London and then when the textile industry folded up so you know they came to London.

*Did your Grandfather have any connections with the Manchester Armenians?*

He did, sadly he did because I never got to know my Grandfather I didn't know directly but he was involved, I believe he was a trustee of the church there, he gave moneys to Armenian charities in Manchester erm, helped a lot of Armenians in that area and seemed to be very close to families, some of the families who I've got to know myself through my own charity

work um, living in Manchester say they remember my Grandfather as a sort of benevolent philanthropic person in the community even though he was based in London;.

*You've obviously got very strong ties to the Armenian community, even though there was a split with your Grandfather.*

Yep

*Was that through your Father keeping that going? Keeping that, or your Mother keeping that going?*

Yes, both my parents , um spoke no, I was born during the second world war and at home I only spoke Armenian during the war even though we were evacuated to Rhyl we only spoke Armenian that was because they wanted me to have that as my, as the tongue that I would learn first because they that otherwise I might forget it, so until I was five I only spoke Armenian and there was a strong Armenian culture and as soon as, they came back after the war, the first thing that my Father got me to do was to be a candle holder in the Armenian church which was sort of a family church if you like so I used to hold candles every Sunday, I can't say I enormously enjoyed it but that was [laughs] that was something that was expected of me and my cousin, my first cousin erm, Michael, he and I used to go along, luckily I had someone I was close to was like a brother to me, we were evacuated to Rhyl together aswell erm its to hold the candles and then I got involved I went to school I learnt English I learned Shakespeare and all these other things and I got involved in the English way of education and life etcetera and to some extent my Armenianism although my Grandmother insist I speak to her in Armenian but my parents were very lax about it , sort of took a back turn if you like , but when a lot of Armenians came over from other parts, who'd fled the massacre but then gone to Cyprus to, Lebanon, to Iraq, to Iran when they began to come here because of problems in their own countries, a lot of the young Armenians decided they'd set up an AYS and Armenian Youth Society and they asked me to join that organisation and I was the first secretary of that organisation I think I was seventeen, eighteen, I'd just gone to university and they asked me to join and through that link I got more involved again in the community and we used to put on, for the whole community, not just for the youth, dances and balls and we used to have interesting Armenians come in from various parts of the world to give lectures and recitals and music and all the rest of it so that organisation and by then the Armenian community was only a thousand erm, began to grow and then my Father helped to find an Armenian house which is now the Armenian embassy in Kensington, Kensington again. [laughs]

*Great, great place for property.*

Yes, it's not bad! In Cheniston Gardens so he found that with another Armenian, eminent Armenian carpet dealer and they, they bought this property for the community and that still is a sort of community hub although is used by the Armenian embassy now, and um, and then as time went on I became more involved in Armenian activities I was asked to be the trustee of Armenian charities, the carpet dealer I've just mentioned who found this house with my dad it's sad that he died he had no children, he appointed me and three others and trustees of the charity that he established, some other brothers, some Armenians brothers, they set up a charity they asked me to be a trustee of that aswell al for Armenian charitable purposes and then there's of course the family charity the Gulbenkian Foundation which I was appointed a trustee of the sister charity of that organisation which was based in London called the St

Sarkis charity trust and I'm still the trustee of that aswell plus other Armenian charities that are active so in that way I've kept in touch with the community I was asked to join the Armenian community council which I did for a year but while I was very happy doing charity work, I don't know if you've ever worked for community organisations.[laughs]

*Oh yes, I run one!*

Involving...[laughing] you know there's politics and there's um, personal aggrandisement and there's all sorts of things that really was not my scene so after a year of that I came out of that and never ever involved myself in any Armenian political or community organisation, or charities but as a lawyer, I became a solicitor in 1964 I was the only Armenian speaking solicitor in London so Armenians who came from all over the world and who wanted to get residency in London or in UK they came to me because I spoke their language so I started you know working for members for the community so I spoke to them in that realm etcetera and I started off on that basis as an immigration lawyer which is what I'm still doing after all this time.

*That's really interesting, so you must have , you 've seen the community obviously you know grow so in the past sort of sixty years...*

Hmm, hmm enormously, yes, it's about ten to fifteen thousand now from fifty when I was a child so it's grown enormously.

*From all over the world*

From all over the world yeah.

*So it really is quite a diaspora.*

It is, especially now, and lately from Armenia itself which is reather nice to have this mix of Armenians from all over the world.

*You say you were evacuated from 1940 to 1945*

Uhuh, Yep

*How was that being evacuated, I mean obviously you only spoke Armenian did you go and live with another family?*

Uhuh

*And how was that kind of relationship?*

Well I was born in 1940, it wasn't until 1942/43 that I was evacuated but I do remember, I think I remember bombs going off in London, we were living in London and I do remember sirens and um the horror of my parents when we heard bombs, my Father was a firefighter and locally during hat period and he stayed on but in 1942 or 1943 we were sent off and my mother my aunt, that's my, my brother, my Mother, my uncles wife, so aunt yes, so my uncle is my Mother's brother's wife and this two sons and me and my sister we were all sent off to Rhyl in north wales and I remember living with this English or probably welsh family I

would think um and all I can remember of the house was that it seemed constantly to be in the state of smoke and there was the smell of anthracite in the air [laughs] oh whether it was a boiler that didn't work, I still have this, if ever I went to China to Beijing as soon as I got out of the airport I could smell anthracite I'd say oh my god, that reminds me of my childhood you know [laughs] the smell of anthracite I could pick up anywhere it may be, any part of the world I will always smell and that house had that smell of anthracite, but the lovely part of it was as I recall that there were beautiful beaches in Rhyl I haven't been there since, and the kids, my sister, my two cousins used to go and play on the beaches as if nothing was happening in the world, my mother was very sane will about it all , my aunt was a very quiet and sweet lady so, it was if we just had this quite pleasant existence playing on the sands and going into this anthracite smelt house [laughs].

*Was there lots of, feel strange that there was this Armenian family suddenly coming into, um into wales, um, was it north wales?*

North wales yes.

*I know aswell!*

I know, yes.

*Yes, that is rather ironic isn't it.*

But um, well my mother if you saw my Mother, I've got a photograph of her somewhere um over there, you would think she was English and she spoke absolutely perfect, I mean she was born in London so she spoke perfect English and my aunt also spoke extremely good English and three of...we all spoke in English so I'm sure they must have known obviously that we were evacuated but I'm not sure they knew that we were Armenian I don't even know if my Mother would have told them, we were just a family who was evacuated, we all of us looked like, rather than possible having dark an English family that had been sent, so no never ever cropped up; it got cropped up when I went to school, and they used to ask me occasionally 'what's your ancestry?' or 'where do you come from?' and I used to say Armenia, and they used to say 'aluminium?' [laughs] but err.

*So did you have to explain to them where Armenia was?*

Yes, no one knew, there was no other Armenian in my school or anywhere approaching, the community in which we lived and spent our time we're surrounded, not surprisingly by English people and we lived in an English cultural world

*Your Mother then, I mean she spoke English and was born in London erm, but she spoke Armenian at home to you, so that must have come through very strongly form her parents.*

Her Father and Mother, well that's another story, her Mother ran off with a priest and went to Paris, an Armenian priest [laughs]

*Please tell me more!!*

[laughs]

*It's fascinating*

When she was quite young and fell in love with the local priest in Kensington and went off with him and then my Grandfather married his English cook, the one who hated my Mother and my Mother hated her but, but I guess because she spoke fluent Armenian that her Father must have brought her up to speak Armenian and he was clearly fluent in Armenian himself, very, very involved in Armenian affairs and Armenian culture so through she must have she wrote and...she was able to read and write Armenian and to speak it fluently um and I can only guess that's how it was and at home my parents was as I said, spoke to each other while, until I was once I got to five and got to school [laughs] then they reverted to English and then we spoke in English 99% of, except when I spoke to my Grandmother I had to speak to her in Armenian because she wouldn't talk to me otherwise [laughs]

*Where did you go to school?*

I went to my first school in Gunnersbury, we lived in Stamford Brook, um and then from there I went to Wimbledon to Kings College School in Wimbledon um when I was thirteen.

*And then went on to university...*

And then went onto LSE, so I'm London through and through you know, went to school in London, went to university in London, worked in London, the only time I've spent outside of London in surrey is when the girls were growing up and we thought they ought to be brought up with a garden and that sort of thing and we used to live in flats as a kid throughout all my younger years so, so um yes, I'm a cockney born Londoner [laughs]

*Have you been to Armenia?*

Yup

*Can you describe it to me a little bit?*

Well I first went forty years ago when it was under communist rule, the place was very door and very sad looking and people seemed very unhappy but were incredibly warm, friendly , hospitable and I knew I had a cousin that's why I went to see her and her family, um and she lived in a very, very ,very modest home outside of Yerevan which is the capital and that she put on the most incredible spread of everything you could I imagine you know, food, drink etcetera on this table and then we went into greet her, her name was Anahit and as I went with my family to shake her hand, suddenly I saw from all corners of this tiny little house all sorts of people turning up and I said Anahit what have you done who are all these people? She said, 'you thought you had one cousin? 'You've got twenty nine' she said [laughs]

*Oh my goodness*

And this was on my Grandmother on my Father's Mother's side so they're not Gulbenkian erm so this was all that side of the family who I didn't even know existed because she never talked about them, they fled again the massacres and went to Armenia, that side of the family, there they were twenty nine. I didn't go again the reason is that I promised each one of them that next time I come I will not just got to Anahit's house, I would go to all their homes so twenty nine homes to go to would take at least a month and then I was working very, very

hard and I just didn't have a month to spare to go there sadly but I kept in touch with them by phone and by letter etcetera and then I went again last year when I told you earlier I was invited to go with a group of judges and the people who run the immigration department in Armenia etcetera, etcetera and this time it is to fundamental change, er that hospitality and the warmth of the people is the same as it was but it looks so much brighter, it looks so much happier, the food I superb, the hotel we stayed in was great, the infrastructure had improved enormously, we were lucky we were blessed with very lovely weather with wonderful hospitality and with a great guide who took us around and I had the most wonderful time, I went by myself because it was an official visit but it was fantastic I would want to go again.

*Were there any tensions at all between you know, I know someone told me that they accidentally went up to the border of Armenia and erm...*

Turkey?

*And turkey and they felt very uncomfortable.*

Well we didn't go there um, because it was an official visit, because we were a group of judges we were a well-protected um, there was a lot of security and you know we were just spoilt really by everyone that we met so there was no tension, I just one little story that shows how wonderful the Armenian people are in Armenia, this group of English judges or British judges we go to this restaurant and they have a singer and a pianist there and he was singing songs, some of which I identified with and knew about by my parents and my days I was involved with the community and I , I um listened and the I plucked up a bit of courage because the singer encouraged us to join in so I started singing one of the songs, a very simple one I actually knew the words, so I stated singing along with them and all these judges male, female, English, British judges, they all started joining me in singing the song called Larry Temporalla, like [sings] Larry Temporalla ha ha haaaa...its very simple so they all sang along with me with this and there was a table next to us, an Armenian people, and they were so touched that this group of British people, judges – they didn't know we were judges – were enjoying and joining in this occasion that they presented to us, four bottles of wine, Armenian wine, so suddenly the waiter brought over four bottles of wine he said 'this is from your neighbours, next door is a family, party is so I was hugely touched by this so I went over to the table, I said that's very, very kind of you thank you so much, I'm actually of Armenian origin myself and we're here on official visit but you know it was so kind of you and he said 'well I'm so glad to meet you, this is my wife's birthday today and we're here to celebrate her birthday and we're so impressed that the, the way that you joined in with us' and then the evening went on we joined in, we did the what's it called the Soucserapar which is the one where you dance around, one of our group spoke some Russian, he made a speech in Russian which they loved because they all speak Russian [laughs] and we became one huge party so that was a sort of atmosphere in which we spent the, the ten days we were there.

*That sounds a lovely way to kind of yeah, for Armenia to be now after its difficult history you know, it has been a very difficult.*

Still difficult, still difficult, there's war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there's that problem, although presently there's a sort of ceasefire, there's a lot of poverty, it's a poor country, no real natural resources, there's blockades from all sides, especially from Turkey and Azerbaijan so it's not an easy place for the local people um to live and they're struggling to be honest but they appear to be very happy, yes certainly very warm and hospitable and

I'm sounds very bias which I am of course [laughs] but you know there are things that I've heard which I did experience myself about corruption and about certain tensions between certain people and between the diaspora and the Armenians there they somehow resent some of them, the Armenians from the diaspora coming back there and they don't really want them to integrate, I've heard stories but I can only speak to you from personal experience and that's been great.

*Well that happens to everyone, you know loads of communities who move away for whatever reason and come back, because I know the Armenian community has mainly prospered outside of Armenia.*

Yes that's right

*You know and then, must...*

And then the fact is that a large number of them wanted to help their motherland as many of them still perceive it and they help in charity work or they help in donations erm, orphanages and schools and especially after the terrible earthquake ah so there is a two way traffic, on the whole you know it seems to work very well, just because it's a poor country more and more Armenians are leaving and mainly going to Russia, which they can find employment there, they can earn much better there, the standard of living is much higher so there is that outflow of people from Armenia which is a shame because if only there were enough people there the only thing the Armenian people have above all is their intelligence, without sounding a bit pompous about it but they're a very intelligent people, very well educated, their IT is absolutely superb, and they've built IT parks and science and this sort of thing so, there is a future I think, I hope for Armenia.

*No that's quite exciting to own that kind of technology so quickly.*

Yes exactly I think there is real hope there.

*That's really interesting, is there anything else you'd like to add or...*

I don't think so, I can't think of anything, I think we've covered quite a lot of ground but if there's anything you want to ask or any other at any stage or any other information I can give please feel free.

*No that's, that's really, really interesting, um no I think I've kind of....*

***I'm okay.***

*Just quickly, you said your daughter is now story telling so it means the tradition and culture is now being passed down another generation.*

And this is an oral storytelling tradition so the stories she tells would be come down through word of mouth through books and their fairy tales, allegorical folk tales that have come down historically through the centuries and they were in Armenian and so she went to Armenia, she's been to Armenia many times my elder daughter erm and she translated these stories into English and she now goes round the world telling stories, literally to the states to India to Poland, you know lots and lots of countries in the English language.

*So did she research these or are they stories that you've told her?*

No she learnt from her Grandmother, that's my wife's Mother, well ex-wife's Mother erm who told her some, some stories, I told her a few but I didn't know that many, learnt them mainly from going to Armenia and meeting other storytellers in Armenia and then taking an interest, she also studied, did Armenian studies, that's her MA, at Oxford and then went onto do a thesis er for a OPHD in the Armenian storytelling tradition so [laughs] erm so there was, there's very interesting the...really I never pushed, not like my parents pushed me, I never pushed her or either of my daughters to follow anything to do with Armenian history or culture, I left it to them whether they wanted to or didn't, my younger daughter is not terribly interested but my elder one took a huge interest and has a great passion for anything Armenian and she's joined now a couple of the charitable trusts that I'm involved with and involved in Armenian culture in various ways including this story telling so I'm quite happy about that.

*Did she ever meet your Grandmother? Was she alive...*

Did my daughter meet...

*Um, your mother so it'd be her Grandmother...*

No sadly my Mother and sister were killed in a car accident before she was born so she never met her nor my mum, no sadly...

***Whats your daughter's name?***

Verigin, Virginia is the English equivalent.

*Beautiful name*

If you look at this family tree you'll see certain names, keep cropping up and Verigin is one of them and Krikor is another.

*Can you hold that up, just so we can get that.*

It's in a terrible state sorry.

*No but that's really quite nice aswell*

**[laughs]**

*It's the sort of tree everyone should do, at the start you know.*

Well it's a very personal tree as I was saying, prepared by Robert bless him.

**THE END**