

# MICHAEL HAGOPIAN

## INTERVIEWS WITH THE CHITJIAN

### PART 3

**December 9, 1997**

#### **Tape 1**

**Interviewer** – Now, please tell me how you met my father.

**Mr. Chitjian** – In 1917 I escaped and joined the Kurds. After many difficulties I came to Kharpert. I met a woman in Kharpert who told me that my uncle's wife (her name was Zarouhi Meshmeshian) could help me. Zarouhi took me to your house. They didn't accept me the first time because I was wearing Kurdish clothing and shoes.

**Interviewer** – What kind of work did you do there?

**Mr. Chitjian** – In your house?

**Interviewer** – Yes.

**Mr. Chitjian** – In the morning I would go to the market to purchase fruit. Then I would take you for a walk. That was my work. I would take you to the garden and then I would bring you back home.

**Interviewer** – Did we have a garden? Was it close to our house?

**Mr. Chitjian** – Your house was two or three miles away from the garden – right in front of the German orphanage. Your garden was directly across from the German orphanage. The garden was full of different kinds of berries and grasses. The gardener was Asadour from Kasserig. Occasionally when the caretakers took the orphans outside for a walk, I was able to see them. They were all cleanly dressed, but they were very thin and malnourished.

#### **Next tape**

**Interviewer** – You said there was a garden there...Please look at him and explain that...

**Mr. Chitjian** – Yes. It was quite a large garden. There were mulberry trees and apple trees there. Grasses, cucumbers...There was everything there.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Tell about the mulberries.

**Mr. Chitjian** – There were large mulberries, white mulberries...but they were all very sweet. Mulberries were the most important things in Kharpert – even more important than bread.

**Next tape (with a sketch map)**

**Interviewer** – Start talking and explain where those places were.

**Mr. Chitjian** – The doctor's house was situated on the road called Pahpooryoly. There was a hospital 3-4 miles away from the house. It belonged to the Americans. The doctor worked there. On the left side of the house there was a German orphanage. This orphanage was as big as Doctor Michael's house. There were mulberries, cucumbers, cherries...I would gather all the fruits and vegetables in a basket to take it to the German orphanage.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Explain one more time. We will not say anything.

**Mr. Chitjian** – I went to Dr. Michael's house. His house was on the road called Pahpooryoly. On the left side of their house, 3-4 miles away, there was an American hospital. The doctor worked there. On the left side, there was a German orphanage. Dr. Michael's garden was close to it. It was a very big garden.

**Interviewer** – Where was the garden?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The garden was directly across from the German orphanage.

**Interviewer** – Was the garden large or small?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The garden was large. It was as big as the German orphanage – 200-300 feet in width and 300-500 feet in length.

**Interviewer** – What was there in the garden?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The garden was filled with a variety of vegetables and fruit - mulberries, apples, cucumbers...

**Interviewer** – Now I will ask you the same question again. Say that there were a lot of mulberries there. Focus on the mulberries. So what was there in the garden?

**Mr. Chitjian** – There were a lot of mulberries in the garden. There were minimum 15-20 mulberry trees there. The berries were very large and white. There were red mulberries, white mulberries in the garden. I would gather all the fruits and vegetables in a basket to take it to the German orphanage.

**Interviewer** – Where did they get water?

**Mr. Chitjian** – There was a well in the garden. They would water the garden with that. The water came from the Upper Mezreh.

**Interviewer** – Where was the well located?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The well was in the upper part of the garden.

**Interviewer** – There was a well in the upper part of the garden.

**Mr. Chitjian** - Yes, in the upper part.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Tell us what kind of work you did when you lived with my father. How did you help me?

**Mr. Chitjian** – My main chore was to inform the patients about the doctor's arrival in advance. Sometimes the patients would come to his house and wait for the doctor right there.

**Interviewer** – So what was your duty?

**Mr. Chitjian** – I would take the children for a walk. I didn't have any other duties.

**Interviewer** – Did you help me too?

**Mr. Chitjian** – I would only take the children for a walk in the morning. I would go to the market place to purchase whatever was needed for the household. That was my work. I spent most of the time with the children.

**Interviewer** – OK.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Now look at her and explain what happened when the Russians were about to come. What did the Turks do?

**Mr. Chitjian** – In 1917-1918 the Russians were very close to Kharpert. The Turks living in Kharpert became afraid. A lot of them left everything and went to Malatya.

**Interviewer** – Wait. Start again. Say that they escaped to Malatya.

**Mr. Chitjian** – Yes, they escaped.

**Interviewer** – What did the Armenians do?

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Start talking.

**Mr. Chitjian** – When the Russians approached Kharpert, the Turks of Kharpert ran away. That made the Armenians a little happier but soon the war stopped and the Turks came back again.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Start telling about my father.

**Mr. Chitjian** – Shall I start?

**Interviewer** – Yes.

**Mr. Chitjian** – 82 years have passed since the massacre but Dr. Michael is still the only person who has ever given so much support to the survivors of the massacre. During the hellish days...when the Armenians were terrified of the Turks...when his compatriots were in a difficult situation. He cured his patients and sometimes he helped them financially. He went out of his way to help the survivors. Besides, every day he would divide 10-20 loaves of bread into four parts for me to give them away to the poor. It was that time when I met my little brother. One day I heard a knock on the door. I opened the door and I saw my friend with a poor child standing next to him. I handed the bread to the child but he didn't take it. I asked my friend why he didn't take the bread and my friend replied, "Look at his face and see if you can recognize him". I looked at his face. That was my brother. I felt quite uneasy. Luckily, Dr. Michael was at home. He asked what had happened. When he saw my condition he took me with him and helped me to lie down in bed. I spent about 30 minutes or 1 hour lying. I felt a little better so I got up of bed.

**Next tape (with books and writings)**

**Interviewer** – You can talk to yourself. Can you read that?

**Mr. Chitjian** – No, I can't talk. I mean I can't read. I wish I could read. If I could, I would read them all. This is a very old writing. I wish I could read it. If only I could read at least a few words.

**May 4, 1989**

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Tell us how they changed your religion and gave you new names.

**Mr. Chitjian** – Shall I start from the beginning?

**Interviewer** – Yes, start!

**Interviewer** – In 1915, the Turks took my father to jail. They beat him harshly there. Soon my father was released. He took his four sons to the Turks. He knew they would kill him. We never saw him again. He took us to the Turks and walked away.

**Interviewer** – What happened next?

**Mr. Chitjian** – They gathered 150-200 Armenian boys in the Protestant Church. We were to become Turkified. My name was changed into Rooshdee, my brother became Rasheed. They taught us their religion.

*Leh eellalah, hemdeellah, hawk dour Mehmed rahzoul ohllah.<sup>1</sup>*

Then we had to learn their national song.

*Yashasoon Hurriyet.*

*Ahdalat, Moosehfat.*

*Yashasoon meellat.<sup>2</sup>*

**Interviewer** – Can you sing that song?

**Mr. Chitjian** – Oh, yeah.

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<sup>1</sup> Mohamed is a saint and his teachings are correct.

<sup>2</sup> Long live Liberty,  
Justice and Fraternity,  
Long live the people.

**Interviewer** – Sing, please

**Mr. Chitjian sings**

*Yashasoon Hurriyet.*

*Ahdalat, Moosehfat.*

*Yashasoon meellat.*

Here is another national song we used to sing.

*Osmahnlee yeesh kardahshleek deer, kahnahneemeese azerlee.*

*Beer vahtahnah johnlahrr koorban.*

*Osmahnlee yeesh kardahshleek deer.*<sup>3</sup>

I would like to say that at first the Turks announced that we were brothers. But soon the moonehdeeks (town criers) would cry out for several times a day "Anyone harboring an Armenian will be jailed with a chain around his neck for five years!" Sometimes you could see this announcement on walls. If you hear this announcement or see it on the wall, you'd better search for a hole to hide like a mouse. Every time you have a little argument with any person, whether it's a Turkish boy, man, woman and whether you're working or walking on the road, if you don't give in to their demands saying, "As you wish, Effendi" or "As you wish, Khanum" they will put you in jail. They were telling us that we are always going to be their slaves.

Here is a story. An Armenian man was walking with his wife and boasting, "No one will dare to hurt you when I'm with you". A Turkish horseman, who was passing by, heard their conversation and stopped the couple. He said to the Armenian man, "Hold my horse so that it doesn't run away". The Armenian man had no choice but to hold the horse. The Turk grabbed the man's wife and took her aside. He raped her and came back. Then he got on his horse and left. The woman turned to her husband angrily, "You were boasting and saying that no one can hurt me. " The man was a slave but in order to show his "courage", he said,

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<sup>3</sup> We are Ottoman, we are brothers, our customs are ancient.  
We must devote our lives as a gift towards our country.  
We are Ottoman, we are brothers.

"Do you know what I did?". The woman asked, "What did you do?" The man replied, "He ordered me to hold the horse reins tightly but I was holding them very gently".

Back in those days we were told, "When Armenian boys grow up they will be ashamed of themselves."

Nothing has changed up to this day. They are disunited but they keep boasting all day long. 74 years have passed but there has never been a leader who would unite the Armenians.

### **Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Mr. Chitjian is going to tell a story about his father while he was digging outside. Start!

**Mr. Chitjian** – At the end of every April my father took me to the garden to dig it. You had to do that once a year. When we started digging the garden I noticed a grape vine with a very long spring. I helped my father to dig around the roots of the vines and clear away some rocks. We buried the new sprigs with the anticipation to have bigger crop of grapes next year. In the evening, when we were halfway home, and a frightened Armenian from Perri, running towards a nearby village, stopped to warn my father, "Mardiros agha, don't go to Perri. There are soldiers everywhere who are catching people and putting them in jail." My father told me, "Go straight home and wait for some time until you hear from me". When I reached home it turned out that all the men were already in jail. My father was not there. A week later we were informed that my father, not being a member of any political party, was not going to be arrested. That was a lie. My mother believed them and informed my father that he could come home as it would be safe for him. When my father came back home, he was immediately arrested. One or two weeks later my father came home, all beaten up. He looked like a skeleton - his clothing splattered with dry blood. Without hesitating a moment, my father informed me and my brothers that he was going to take us somewhere. We asked, "Where are you taking us?" He replied, "To the Government. They are going to send me to America. I will let you know when that happens". Without saying a word, he gave us to the Turks and walked away – he didn't look back or give us a kiss.

**Interviewer** – Repeat the part where your father came come.

**Mr. Chitjian** – From jail?

**Interviewer** – Yes, the part where he was released from jail... tell that again.

**Mr. Chitjian** – OK. My father stayed in jail two weeks or more. We can understand from my brother's writing that when we took food to our father he didn't eat anything. He had been beaten for two weeks. His clothing was all covered with dry blood. A week later he came home and knocked on the door. He ordered his four sons, "Come here! I'm going to take you to the Government. They will send us to America. I will let you know when that happens." As we walked, my father did not utter a word. He could barely walk. He gave us to the Turks. We never saw him again. The same day all the Armenians living in the village were taken away. The orphans from the Turkish orphanage, 150-200 boys, were gathered in the Government building. No human being was left in the village. Everyone was taken away. We never saw anyone again. We were taken to the Protestant Church. They started teaching us their religion, their national songs. They Turkified us and changed our names.

### **Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Now he's going to talk about my father. Start!

**Mr. Chitjian** – For a year or two, I was escaping from one Turk to another because if they found out I was Armenian, they would kill me. There are 300 villages in Kharpert. I moved to one village to another (I changed about 20-40 villages). The last time I stayed with the Kurds, I faced so many difficulties that I was unable to tolerate it any longer. One day a boy came to me and said that there were a lot of Armenians in the town of Kharpert. I went to Kharpert. My aunt Zarouhi lived here. She said she would take me to the doctor who might need my help. My aunt did the doctor's wash. She walked me to the doctor's house. I stood barefooted, dressed in dirty Kurdish clothing. Both the doctor and his wife came to see me. They didn't accept me. The next day Zarouhi and her nearby friends changed my clothing and helped me to bath. We returned to the doctor's house. This time he accepted me. It was so great there! I have never seen such a house in my entire life. Our house was not like that either. They were very nice to me. The doctor had two children – Hagopig and his sister. They also had a little white sheep. I would graze the sheep and purchase fruit from the marketplace. Every day the doctor would accept at least 4, 5 or 6 Armenian patients. They were all poor. The doctor would take care of them, give them medications free of charge. If they didn't have any money with them, he would even give them a few ghooroosh.

In 1917-1918 famine was spread throughout the regions of Turkey. It was impossible to find bread. There was an Armenian baker Askiar from Kesserig. I would buy 10, 20 and sometimes 30 loaves of bread from him. I would cut each loaf into four quarters to distribute to the poor. One day I told one of my friends, whose name was Hagop (he was repairing shoes), to send his Armenian customers to me so that I could give them some bread. One day I heard two knocks on the door. I assumed there must be two people waiting, so I went to the door with two pieces of bread to hand out. I opened the door and saw Hagop standing

with a little orphan. I handed a piece of bread to the orphan, but he refused to take it. So, I offered him both pieces, thinking he might have been very hungry, but he didn't accept them either. I asked Hagop why the little orphan wasn't accepting the bread. At that point Hagop told me to lift the boy's chin to see if I could recognize him. As I lifted the orphan's chin upward, I realized he was my brother. I hadn't seen him for three years. One week...Two weeks...No, he stayed with us for a month. Soon, the doctor was told that he could have only one slave so he had to throw one of us out. My brother was accepted by the American orphanage. Once in 10 or 15 days, the doctor's mother-in-law, whose name was Doodoo, prepared food for me to take it to my brother. Every time I went there, he would start crying. One day he asked me, "Brother, why are you returning to that beautiful house leaving me here alone?" I couldn't tolerate it any longer. I left the doctor's house, took my brother from the orphanage and started making a living by repairing old shoes among the Turks and Kurds.

**Interviewer** – What else can you tell us about my father?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The doctor helped not only the orphans but also the poor – both with food and money. Many times he released Armenian boys from jail. As I said you could be arrested for a very small fault such as not showing respect to a Turk or swearing at them. One day the doctor ordered me to go to the local jail and release an Armenian boy. That was a boy of ten or thirteen. He had been tortured in jail. The moment he was released he said "I no longer want to be an Armenian. I no longer want to be Christian. I just want to die. I no longer want to live." I took the boy to the doctor, but what happened next, I don't know. I don't know if he recovered or not. I stayed with the doctor for more than 1.5 years. He experienced a lot of difficulties too. The Government left him alive just because he was a doctor. I have never seen a man as faithful and helpful to the Armenians as the doctor was. Some of his patients barely walked, and they were very dirty - yet he still invited them in, gave them medications, gave them food and helped them with anything he could. He was as kind as Jesus Christ. Nowadays people donate 100.000, 200.000 to help the Armenians. That's worth appreciation - but saving an orphan's life during those miserable and fearful times...I have never seen such a thing. He is the first person who did that. I'm always saying we need to call him "Rahvira".

The next person I would like to talk about is Deukmejian. I think he is a good Armenian leader – a very wise man, who never favors any particular party, who wants to be helpful to all Armenians. He became a Governor of California. He always supports Armenians. I hope we are united due to him and people like him. I wish I could see that before I die.

**Next tape**

**April 20, 1993**

**Interviewer** – What were the town-cries shouting?

**Mr. Chitjian** – “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!”

**Interviewer** – Were they saying that so softly?

**Mr. Chitjian** - Softly? (laughing). They were shouting.

**Interviewer** – Then, you can shout too.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck! The ones who will bring them to the Government will get monetary reward”. (more loudly)

**Interviewer** – Were they swearing at the Armenians?

**Mr. Chitjian** – They were swearing at the cross.

**Interviewer** – How were they swearing? Give an example in Turkish.

**Mr.Chitjian** – Swears in Turkish.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Shout like the town-crier.

**Mr. Chitjian** – “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!” Shall I say the same thing again?

**Interviewer** – Yes, repeat it for several times.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!”

**Interviewer** – Repeat again. Three times.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!” (repeats twice).

**Interviewer** – Say it more angrily!

**Mr. Chitjian** – More angrily?

**Interviewer** – Shout again.

**Mr. Chitjian** - "Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck. The ones who will bring them to the Government will get monetary reward".  
(Repeats three times)

#### **Next tape**

**Mr. Chitjian** - Staying in different villages for a month or two... suffering for two or three years, I finally went to Mezreh. I was lucky enough to work in Dr. Michael's house. I was a little happier there. Leaving his house, I started making a living my repairing shoes. I had two little brothers – one was 6 and the other one was 9. My brother, who was 9, was taken to a place called Pertak and was saved, but the other brother of mine, who was 6, was thrown into the water. I found my brother in Dr. Michael house. In his house one of my chores was to bring bread from the bakery – 40 or 50 loaves daily. I would cut the bread into four parts to distribute to the poor. I had a friend in Mezreh, whose name was Hagop Holopigian. He repaired shoes in Verin Shoogah (Upper Market). I asked him to bring his Armenian customers to us. One day that boy knocked on our door. Then he knocked on it again. I assumed there were two people waiting outside. I opened the door. I saw a poor child standing next to him. I handed a piece of bread to the poor but he didn't accept it.

#### **Next tape**

*Two ladies talking – interviewer and probably Mrs. Chitjian (I'm not sure about that because no name or surname is mentioned) - only audio*

**Interviewer** – You used to sing a song when you were a child. Where did you learn that song?

**Speaker** – Little children in the streets of Malatya were singing this song. That's how we learnt it.

**Interviewer** – Whose children were they?

**Speaker** – They were Turkish children. They created a song about us.

**Interviewer** – You mean about Armenians?

**Speaker** – Yes, they created a song about Armenians. They used to sing that song in the streets and that's how we learnt it.

**Interviewer** – Can you sing that song now?

**Speaker** – Yes, I can sing that song.

**Interviewer** – Will you sing for us?

**Speaker** – Yes, I will.

**Interviewer** – OK. Please start singing.

**Speaker** – *Sings the song in Turkish.*

**Interviewer** – Can you explain the meaning of the song in Armenian?

**Speaker** – If you wish, I can explain the song to you in Armenian.

**Interviewer** – What does it say?

**Speaker** – A played drum – you thought it was a bride,

A red and green flag – you thought it was a bride,

The one who returns from exile – you thought he would come and fulfill his dreams,

The one who kills an Armenian will have a special place in the heaven.

**Next tape**

**Mr. Chitjian** (singing *Der Zor* song- four times)

*Der Zor cholarheendeh gunash parlyor,*

*Osmahnly askehree goorshoon yaghleor,*

*Ermehnee moohageeree yahmahn aghleor,*

*Deenee beerr oghroonah geeden Ermehnee!*<sup>4</sup>

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – What were the town-cries shouting?

**Mr. Chitjian** – “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!”

**Interviewer** – Were they saying that so softly?

**Mr. Chitjian** - Softly? (laughing). They were shouting.

**Interviewer** – Then, you can shout too.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck! The ones who will bring them to the Government will get monetary reward”. (more loudly)

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<sup>4</sup> **“Der Zor” song in English**

*In the hot desert of Der Zor, the sun shines fiercely,*

*The Turkish soldier oils his bombarding guns savagely,*

*The Armenian refugees weeping profusely,*

*While tenaciously clinging on to his Armenian Christian faith!*

**Interviewer** – Were they swearing at the Armenians?

**Mr. Chitjian** – They were swearing at the cross.

**Interviewer** – How were they swearing? Give an example in Turkish.

**Mr. Chitjian** – Swears in Turkish.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Shout like the town-crier.

**Mr. Chitjian** – “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!” Shall I say the same thing again?

**Interviewer** – Yes, repeat it for several times.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!”

**Interviewer** – Repeat that again. Three times.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck!” (repeats twice).

**Interviewer** – Say it more angrily!

**Mr. Chitjian** – More angrily?

**Interviewer** – Shout again.

**Mr. Chitjian** - “Whoever harbors an Armenian will be jailed for five years with a chain around his neck. The ones who will bring them to the Government will get monetary reward”. (Repeats three times)

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Tell us how they changed your religion and gave you new names.

**Mr. Chitjian** – Shall I start from the very beginning?

**Interviewer** – Yes, start!

**Interviewer** – In 1915, the Turks took my father to jail. They beat him harshly there. Soon my father was released. He took his four sons to the Turks. He knew they would kill him. We never saw him again. He took us to the Turks and walked away.

**Interviewer** – What happened next?

**Mr. Chitjian** – They gathered 150-200 Armenian boys in the Protestant Church. We were to become Turkified. My name was changed into Rooshdee, my brother became Rasheed. They taught us their religion.

*Leh eellalah, hemdeellah, hawk dour Mehmed rahzoul ohllah.*

Then we had to learn their national song.

*Yashasoon Hurriyet.*

*Ahdalat, Moosehfat.*

*Yashasoon meellat.*

**Interviewer** – Can you sing that song?

**Mr. Chitjian** – Oh, yeah.

**Interviewer** – Sing, please

**Mr. Chitjian sings**

*Yashasoon Hurriyet.*

*Ahdalat, Moosehfat.*

*Yashasoon meellat.*

Here is another national song we used to sing.

*Osmahnlee yees kardahshleek deer, kahnahneemeese azerlee.*

*Beer vahtahnah johnlahrr koorban.*

*Osmahnlee yees kardahshleek deer.*

I would like to say that at first the Turks announced that we were brothers. But soon the moonehdeeks (town criers) would cry out for several times a day "Anyone harboring an Armenian will be jailed with a chain around his neck for five years!" Sometimes you could see this announcement on walls. If you hear this announcement or see it on the wall, you'd better search for a hole to hide like a mouse. Every time you have a little argument with any person, whether it's a Turkish boy, man, woman and whether you're working or walking

on the road, if you don't give in to their demands saying, "As you wish, Effendi" or "As you wish, Khanum" they will put you in jail. They were telling us that we are always going to be their slaves.

Here is a story. An Armenian man was walking with his wife and boasting, "No one will dare to hurt you when I'm with you". A Turkish horseman, who was passing by, heard their conversation and stopped the couple. He said to the Armenian man, "Hold my horse so that it doesn't run away". The Armenian man had no choice but to hold the horse. The Turk grabbed the man's wife and took her aside. He raped her and came back. Then he got on his horse and left. The woman turned to her husband angrily, "You were boasting and saying that no one can hurt me." The man was a slave but in order to show his "courage", he said, "Do you know what I did?". The woman asked, "What did you do?" The man replied, "He ordered me to hold the horse reins tightly but I was holding them very gently".

Back in those days we were told, "When Armenian boys grow up they will be ashamed of themselves."

Nothing has changed up to this day. They are disunited but they keep boasting all day long. 74 years have passed but there has never been a leader who would unite the Armenians.

### **Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Mr. Chitjian is going to tell a story about his father while he was digging outside. Start!

**Mr. Chitjian** – At the end of every April my father took me to the garden to dig it. You had to do that once a year. When we started digging the garden I noticed a grape vine with a very long spring. I helped my father to dig around the roots of the vines and clear away some rocks. We buried the new sprigs with the anticipation to have bigger crop of grapes next year. In the evening, when we were halfway home, and a frightened Armenian from Perri, running towards a nearby village, stopped to warn my father, "Mardiros agha, don't go to Perri. There are soldiers everywhere who are catching people and putting them in jail." My father told me, "Go straight home and wait for some time until you hear from me". When I reached home it turned out that all the men were already in jail. My father was not there. A week later we were informed that my father, not being a member of any political party, was not going to be arrested. That was a lie. My mother believed them and informed my father that he could come home as it would be safe for him. When my father came back

home, he was immediately arrested. One or two weeks later my father came home, all beaten up. He looked like a skeleton - his clothing splattered with dry blood. Without hesitating a moment, my father informed me and my brothers that he was going to take us somewhere. We asked, "Where are you taking us?" He replied, "To the Government. They are going to send me to America. I will let you know when that happens". Without saying a word, he gave us to the Turks and walked away – he didn't look back or give us a kiss.

**Interviewer** – Repeat the part where your father came come.

**Mr. Chitjian** – From jail?

**Interviewer** – Yes, the part where he was released from jail... tell that again.

**Mr. Chitjian** – OK. My father stayed in jail two weeks or more. We can understand from my brother's writing that when we took food to our father he didn't eat anything. He had been beaten for two weeks. His clothing was all covered with dry blood. A week later he came home and knocked on the door. He ordered his four sons, "Come here! I'm going to take you to the Government. They will send us to America. I will let you know when that happens." As we walked, my father did not utter a word. He could barely walk. He gave us to the Turks. We never saw him again. The same day all the Armenians living in the village were taken away. The orphans from the Turkish orphanage, 150-200 boys, were gathered in the Government building. No human being was left in the village. Everyone was taken away. We never saw anyone again. We were taken to the Protestant Church. They started teaching us their religion, their national songs. They Turkified us and changed our names.

**Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Now he's going to talk about my father. Start!

**Mr. Chitjian** – For a year or two, I was escaping from one Turk to another because if they found out I was Armenian, they would kill me. There are 300 villages in Kharpert. I moved to one village to another (I changed about 20-40 villages). The last time I stayed with the Kurds, I faced so many difficulties that I was unable to tolerate it any longer. One day a boy came to me and said that there were a lot of Armenians in the town of Kharpert. I went to Kharpert. My aunt Zarouhi lived here. She said she would take me to the doctor who might need my help. My aunt did the doctor's wash. She walked me to the doctor's house. I stood barefooted, dressed in dirty Kurdish clothing. Both the doctor and his wife came to see me. They didn't accept me. The next day Zarouhi and her nearby friends changed my clothing and helped me to bath. We returned to the doctor's house. This time he accepted me. It was so great there! I have never seen such a house in my entire life. Our house was not like that

either. They were very nice to me. The doctor had two children – Hagopig and his sister. They also had a little white sheep. I would graze the sheep and purchase fruit from the marketplace. Every day the doctor would accept at least 4, 5 or 6 Armenian patients. They were all poor. The doctor would take care of them, give them medications free of charge. If they didn't have any money with them, he would even give them a few ghoroosh.

In 1917-1918 famine was spread throughout the regions of Turkey. It was impossible to find bread. There was an Armenian baker Askiar from Kesserig. I would buy 10, 20 and sometimes 30 loaves of bread from him. I would cut each loaf into four quarters to distribute to the poor. One day I told one of my friends, whose name was Hagop (he was repairing shoes), to send his Armenian customers to me so that I could give them some bread. One day I heard two knocks on the door. I assumed there must be two people waiting, so I went to the door with two pieces of bread to hand out. I opened the door and saw Hagop standing with a little orphan. I handed a piece of bread to the orphan, but he refused to take it. So, I offered him both pieces, thinking he might have been very hungry, but he didn't accept them either. I asked Hagop why the little orphan wasn't accepting the bread. At that point Hagop told me to lift the boy's chin to see if I could recognize him. As I lifted the orphan's chin upward, I realized he was my brother. I hadn't seen him for three years. One week...Two weeks...No, he stayed with us for a month. Soon, the doctor was told that he could have only one slave so he had to throw one of us out. My brother was accepted by the American orphanage. Once in 10 or 15 days, the doctor's mother-in-law, whose name was Doodoo, prepared food for me to take it to my brother. Every time I went there, he would start crying. One day he asked me, "Brother, why are you returning to that beautiful house leaving me here alone?" I couldn't tolerate it any longer. I left the doctor's house, took my brother from the orphanage and started making a living by repairing old shoes among the Turks and Kurds.

**Interviewer** – What else can you tell us about my father?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The doctor helped not only the orphans but also the poor – both with food and money. Many times he released Armenian boys from jail. As I said you could be arrested for a very small fault such as not showing respect to a Turk or swearing at them. One day the doctor ordered me to go to the local jail and release an Armenian boy. That was a boy of ten or thirteen. He had been tortured in jail. The moment he was released he said "I no longer want to be an Armenian. I no longer want to be Christian. I just want to die. I no longer want to live." I took the boy to the doctor, but what happened next, I don't know. I don't know if he recovered or not. I stayed with the doctor for more than 1.5 years. He experienced a lot of difficulties too. The Government left him alive just because he was a doctor. I have never seen a man as faithful and helpful to the Armenians as the doctor was. Some of his patients barely walked, and they were very dirty - yet he still invited them in, gave them medications,

gave them food and helped them with anything he could. He was as kind as Jesus Christ. Nowadays people donate 100.000, 200.000 to help the Armenians. That's worth appreciation - but saving an orphan's life during those miserable and fearful times...I have never seen such a thing. He is the first person who did that. I'm always saying we need to call him "Rahvira".

The next person I would like to talk about is Deukmejian. I think he is a good Armenian leader – a very wise man, who never favors any particular party, who wants to be helpful to all Armenians. He became a Governor of California. He always supports Armenians. I hope we are united due to him and people like him. I wish I could see that before I die.

### **Next tape**

**Mr. Chitjian** – We went to dig the garden. When we were halfway home, someone stopped us warning, "Don't go to Perri. They are going to kill everyone. They have already started killing people in the street." That's exactly what happened. My father left me there and walked away. The Turkish Government made a decision to put everyone in jail. My father was put in jail too. A week later he was released. He came home and took his four sons to the Turks. We never saw him again. My father, mother, my three sisters and my father's sisters were all taken away. We never saw them again.

Later I met one of my brothers, Kaspar. We were twins. We had two other little brothers – one was nine, and the other one was six. We were all taken to the Turkish mektab. We were to be Turkified. They changed our names. They started teaching us their language.

*Yashasoon Hurriyet.*

*Ahdalat, Moosehfat.*

*Yashasoon meellat.*

We had to learn this and repeat. They started swearing at the Armenians. Then they began teaching us Turkish prayers.

There were 150-200 Armenian boys gathered in the Protestant Church. One day the Turks came and started separating us according to our age and size. They decided to kill the older boys as in their opinion they would never become Turks. They grouped me with the older boys and kept Kaspar, my twin, with the younger boys. I immediately yelled out, "I'm his twin, we are the same age. I'm tall but I am younger!" There was a boy standing next to me; his name was Mihran Mirakian. He told me, "What are you doing? Let him go, he might survive." I stopped yelling. They grouped me with the older boys and took us to another small room. We were about 10-12 boys grouped there. Mihran Mirakain had a pocket knife

with him. He managed to remove the bars from the window with that knife. Three or four boys jumped out of the window and then it was my turn to jump. I jumped out from the window and ran away. I met a Turk, blind in both eyes, who helped me a lot. He said that I was his son from that moment on and then he took me to his house. I stayed with him for a year. Soon the Kurds attacked the Turks. There were Armenians among them too. Our village was set on fire for five days. There was a river near our village. The Turks crossed the river and got to the other side of it. The Turks took me with them. The blind man took me to the other side of the river. I couldn't stay with the blind man any longer because I was starving and the soldiers were starving too. I ran away to Itchme and joined the Kurds. I have faced so many difficulties...I don't know which one to tell you about.

### **Next tape**

**Mr. Chitjian** - We can't blame only the Turks for that. Yes, they are guilty but that all happened because of our disunity. All the sufferings I have experienced in my life happened because of our disunity. Even in America where everyone is free we are facing another danger called "white massacre". This is even more dangerous, because in case of the "red massacre" you can still sprout and grow whereas in case of the "white massacre" you have no chance to do that.

**Interviewer** – Please continue your story. Where did you stop?

**Mr. Chitjian** – When the Kurds came, the blind man and I got to the other side of the river. We were starving. One day my neighbor, whose name was Hampartzoum, approached me and asked if I would like to join a Kurdish man. He said that would be better than staying with the Turks. I went to that Kurd's house. It turned out a couple of Turkish women had noticed I had left the blind man and moved in with the Kurd with another boy. They immediately told the blind man of my whereabouts. The blind man, accompanied with two Turkish soldiers, came and knocked on the door. At that time, I felt my life was on the line. My life has been on the line several times but this was the first time. The Kurd opened the door. When he saw the soldiers, he quickly hid me under the covers in his wife's bed. His wife had just given birth to a baby. The wife was there and the baby was there too. There was only one room there, and half of the room served as a stable. He assumed they wouldn't look there because his wife and baby would cry. The blind man took out his knife and said, "My son, if you come out voluntarily from wherever you are hiding I will not kill you. If you don't, I will cut you into small pieces." I had no other choice, so I got out under the covers. The baby was crying. The blind man spit at my face said, "Aren't you ashamed for getting next to a woman who has just given birth? I know you were starving and that's why you came here but we can't receive food from the Government every time. I forgive you. Let's go." We came back. One or two hours later, Hampartzoum approached me again. The

blind man couldn't see him. He beckoned me with his hand and said, "Come here". I told the blind man that I was going out to fetch him some water. He agreed. I left him carrying the jug. Hampartzoum took me to the Kurd's house. That Kurd took me somewhere near Itchme, a village called Akhoor. We walked all night long till it was already light. That Kurd had two wives – one was Armenian and the other one was Turkish. They treated me well. At least they gave me food so I was not starving. I used to graze their cattle (10-15 cows, sheep, all stolen from the Armenians).

One day boys told me that there was a village called Itchme which was 1-1,5 hour away from our village. As they said there were a lot of Armenians living there. I left the cattle right in the field and started walking towards that village. I don't know how I survived. God must have helped me. I was walking on a straight road where even ants wouldn't stay unnoticed. I could be easily noticed by someone. I reached Itchme. A man with the name of Youlash Effendi gave me a shelter. There were 21 Armenian women and boys living in that house. People used to sow wheat and barley in the field of Itchme...

#### **Next tape**

**Interviewer** – Now start please.

**Mr. Chitjian** - I had only one desire. I wished God granted me a chance to express my thoughts about a man who helped me during the massacre in Turkey.

My memories of the most appreciable man who can best be described as the First Rahvira.

A respectable Christian man - merciful and patriotic.

Dr. Michael Hagopian was like Jesus Christ, just tangible. In 1918 thanks to a woman I started working in Dr. Michael's house. Although I was a servant, I lived with them as a member of their family.

**Interviewer** – Talk about the jail...

**Mr. Chitjian** - It's not only me who the doctor saved. Every day he accepted 5-8 patients. His patients were waiting for him outside, sometimes even unable to speak because of hunger and thirst. He would invite them in, give them medications and money if they didn't have any. I'm sure that the Government didn't pay the doctor a lot of money but he always helped the sick people. Apart from helping people with money and medications...The best thing he did was releasing the Armenians from prison who were put there without any reason...just because they were Armenians. The doctor would give me a few ghoroosh saying something like this, "Take this money and go to the prison. Give the money to this or that person and tell them it's from Dr. Michael. They will know you have money with you.

Give the money and release the boys.” If only you could see the faces of those boys once they were released. They are all human beings, right? There was no single person in Kharpert who would not treat Dr. Michael as Jesus. All the things he did are appreciable. He never talked about the good things he did, he never boasted...He just did what he thought was right.

Today there are a people who build schools, churches, donate a lot of money. That’s also appreciable but they do that because they can afford it. With all these situations, I am sure the doctor gave more than he actually could afford. He did everything secretly from the Turks. He helped the people putting his life at risk. I want his name to be always remembered.

I think that’s all. I have already talked about others.

### **Next tape**

Luckily, Dr. Michael was at home. He asked what had happened. When he saw my condition he took me with him and helped me to lie down in bed. I spent about 30 minutes or 1 hour in lying. I felt a little better so I got up of bed.

**Interviewer-** OK.

### **Next tape (with books and writings)**

**Interviewer** – You can talk to yourself. Can you read that?

**Mr. Chitjian** – No, I can’t talk. I mean I can’t read. I wish I could read. If I could, I would read them all. This is a very old writing. I wish I could read it. If only I could read at least a few words.

**Interviewer** – Explain one more time. We will not say anything.

**Mr. Chitjian** – I went to Dr. Michael’s house. His house was on the road called Pahpooryoly. On the left side of their house, 3-4 miles away, there was an American hospital. He worked there. On the left side, there was a German orphanage. Dr. Michael’s garden was close to it. It was a very big garden.

**Interviewer** – Where was the garden?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The German orphanage was on the one side of the street and the garden was on the other side of the same street.

**Interviewer** – Was the garden large or small?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The garden was large. It was as big as the German orphanage – 200-300 feet in width and 300-500 feet in length.

**Interviewer** – What was there in the garden?

**Mr. Chitjian** – There were all kinds of berries in the garden. There were all types of vegetables there – mulberries, apples...

**Interviewer** – Now I will ask you the same question again. Say that there were a lot of mulberries there. Focus on the mulberries. So what was there in the garden?

**Mr. Chitjian** – There were mulberries in the garden. There were minimum 15-20 mulberry trees there. The mulberries were very large and white. There were red mulberries, white mulberries in the garden. I would harvest the mulberries and take them to the German orphanage.

**Interviewer** – Where did they get water?

**Mr. Chitjian** – There was a water well in the garden. They would water the garden with that. The water came from the Upper Mezreh.

**Interviewer** – Where was the water well?

**Mr. Chitjian** – The well was in the upper part of the garden.

**Interviewer** – There was a well in the upper part of the garden.

**Mr. Chitjian** - Yes, in the upper part.