

Interviewer: John W. Tedrick

### INTERVIEW AND TAPE SUMMARY

Name: Charles Merzian

Date and Place of Birth: October 12 1928, Lincoln Place (Granite City)

Address: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Telephone Number: [REDACTED]

Interview Date, Time, and Place:

November 1, 2001 5:00 p.m. [REDACTED]

Interview Summary (attach additional sheets, as needed):

Mr. Charles Merzian is a second generation American. His father emigrated from Armenia in 1910 and his mother emigrated from Armenia shortly later. They were married in 1925 and became naturalized American citizens in 1945 and 1946 respectively. They had two children, Charles (born in 1928) and Nell (born in 1933). Both Charles and Nell were born in their family home on Chestnut Street in Lincoln Place. Charles lived in Lincoln place until he graduated from high school and entered the army in 1946. He was the president of his senior class and twice state wrestling champion (1945 and 46). After one and a half years in the Army, stationed in Japan, he entered the University of Illinois as a business/accounting student. During our interview, Mr. Merzian described life while growing up in Lincoln Place. Throughout the interview one gains the strong sense of community that existed in Lincoln Place. Mr. Merzian described two primary locations for socialization. The community center (the club house) and Sim's place (latter honored as Sim's college due to its impact in teaching social skills) impacted the lives of virtually all in Lincoln Place. The community center was multi functional and included citizenship classes, sports, and non-denominational Sunday school. Sim's place, primarily for older boys (teenagers and up) served as a gathering place where appropriate mental and physical grooming took place. Mr. Merzian stressed that the multi-ethnic relationships established when growing up were a definite asset in preparing him for his working career.

Note any special circumstances involving the interview:

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Lincoln Place Oral History Project  
Dept. of Historical Studies, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Biographical Information and Family History

Current Information

Full Name: MERZIAN Charles  
Last First Middle

Maiden Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address: 7370 Timberpoint Ct.  
Fairview Heights, Il. 62208

Telephone Number: (home) 618-628-0611 (work) —

Best time/way to reach: ANYTIME

Family History

Years/dates lived in Lincoln Place: 20 yrs.

Address(es) in Lincoln Place: 1721 Chestnut St.

Date and Place of Birth: 10-12-27 @ Chestnut St.

Current Marital Status:

single [ ] married ☒ divorced [ ] widowed [ ]

Spouse's name and place of birth: MARY MERZIAN, RACINE WIS.

Mother's name and place of birth (if known): ESTHER MARKARIAN Istanbul

Father's name and place of birth (if known): BEKROS MERZIAN TURKEY.  
VAN, ARMENIA, TURKEY

Children's names:

BEKROS (Peter) HAROUTUNE (HARRY)

## Biographical Profile

Mr. Charles Merzian

In today's busy world, it becomes far too easy to rely on rumors and preconceived notions about certain places and people. We seldom ever question which side of the track is the other side. Breaking out of the perception trap and expanding one's reality is a time consuming, but extremely worthwhile endeavor. A walking tour of Lincoln Place in Granite City proved to be one viable step in this breaking out process. The ethnic diversity within this community created a strength that is still evident. A second step in this process involved an interview with one of Lincoln Place's previous residents, Mr. Charles Merzian.

Mr. Merzian was born October 12, 1928 at their family home on Chestnut Street in Lincoln Place. He lived in Lincoln Place until he graduated from high school and entered the army in 1946. He was the family's first child. His sister Nell was born some five years later. Both Charles and Nell are first generation Americans.

His father immigrated from Armenia in January of 1910. Mr. Merzian noted that he thinks his father intended to work in America for several years and then return to Armenia to provide a better life for his family. The Turkish genocide of the Armenians changed his plans. He now had nothing to return to. So he remained in America. Mr. Merzian's mother immigrated from Armenia some time later and they married in 1925.

According to Mr. Merzian, growing up in Lincoln Place was great. His early memories include a strong sense of community, a sense of belonging. For example, his mother regularly helped with the citizenship classes held in the community center. As an interpreter she was able



to help the citizenship teacher, Mrs. Pauline Cox, provide training to a variety of ethnic groups. Mrs. Cox spoke only English. Mrs. Merzian's fluency in Greek, Armenian, Turkish, French, Spanish, and English, coupled with her desire to help others impacted many lives. Education, in some form or another, was a major part of the Merzian family's life.

Since Charles entered the army and moved away shortly after graduation, most of his memories of Lincoln Place are of an educational nature. He was state wrestling champion both his junior and senior year. He was among the first group to be inducted into the Granite City sports hall of fame. He was also president of his senior class. High school seemed to be more comfortable for Charles than earlier years in school. In his earlier years, when teachers would ask for a show of hands of those who spoke more than one language, he often felt on display. In retrospect, the teacher's reactions may have been amazement that these young people could speak multiple languages. Additionally, when he and a friend were tasked with doing a skit in Armenian, although it was fun, he wondered what was behind it. At that time, the goal was to be American, not to talk about or display previous heritage. That shy or awkward feeling went away when he entered junior high or high school.

Another establishment of an educational nature that impacted Mr. Merizian's life was Sim's Place. Sim's Place, later called Sim's College, was a neighborhood gathering place for the male teenagers. The educational factor at Sim's Place was the strict enforcement of a code of ethics and decorum. One was expected to behave as a gentleman. Charles often assisted other young men tie their ties to ensure they looked acceptable. Accountability for behavior was stressed. To be banned from Sim's Place would literally bring tears to one's eyes. Even a temporary banishment meant that you were no longer accepted as part of the group/community.

Helping others seems to have been a quality important to develop in the Merzian household. If one considers that Charles was born in 1928, one year before the stock market crash and subsequent depression, the Merzian's philosophy of take care of one another takes on an even more impressive significance.

While talking with one individual is by no means a large step in breaking through perception to reality, it is a step. Additionally, it's a step that anyone can take. The multi cultural/multi ethnic nature of Lincoln Place provided a training ground from which one could develop and thrive in our multi cultural world.