

Narrator: Michael Malcolm Torosian

Interviewer: John W. Tedrick

Date and Place: November 15, 2001, at Mr. Torosian's home, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Mr. John W. Tedrick: I'm John W. Tedrick. This is the fifteenth of November 2001. I'm doing an interview with Mike Torosian in Edwardsville Illinois. Mr. Torosian, would you state your full name and spell it, please?

Mr. Michael Torosian: My full name is Malcolm Michael Torosian.

M I C H A E L, M A L C O L M, T O R O S I A N.

Mr. Tedrick: Thank You. Mr. Torosian, from previous contact, when we met a few weeks ago, I know that you lived in Lincoln Place, Granite City, could you tell me about living there, growing up there?

Mr. Torosian: My experience was, that it was the most wonderful childhood anyone could really have. The people were all friendly, we were all blue-collar neighborhood. Of all different, several different ethnic, first generation immigrants. I mean, we were the first generation of the immigrants that came in the 1900, 20's and 30's, for the most part. We had a nice neighborhood; neat, well kept and clean houses. Very proud people, and very thankful for an opportunity, are parents were. They had this opportunity to have a better life for ourselves and their, or their selves and their children. I don't know if I can expand on that, but it's generally, is that what...

Mr. Tedrick: Sure, those are the, those are the type things we're, we're looking for. Where did your parents immigrate from?

Mr. Torosian: My mother came from Ezerum Armenia, which is now in Turkey. My father come from, came from Enoch [a small village near Ezerum], which is now in present Turkey. My mother was a refugee and lost a brother in the genocide of the Armenians in 1915. My father came in 1913, and he... My mother came to Providence, Rhode Island, and my father came up through Ellis Island, and I have the papers of the ships they were on and their port of embarkation, and when they arrived in the United States. From there, they made their way to Granite City. Originally, my grandfather came in the late 1800's; there was a conflict at the time between the Young Turks and the Armenians. He must have gotten in trouble or something; anyway, he came to the United States in the late 1890's, and was living in East St. Louis when my father, who had lost his mother as a child, and his grandmother was taking care of him. He came, cause his father who lived in East St. Louis, wanted him to come to the United States. So he did, and he came in 1913. I tried to understand, I said, asked him once, I said, "How did you get to the port, pop." He said, "You walked," him and his cousin, and they walked from their city, which was in Enoch Armenia, to the coast, which was in Trabizond, Turkey [a distance of over 200 kilometers]. And caught a ship there, from there he went to Le Harve, France, and from Le Harve France to Ellis Island, and Ellis Island to East St. Louis, and didn't know one word of English. It kind of amazed me, but they always managed, you know, I guess there were interpreters at Ellis Island, or where ever. My mother was a refugee, they were all at home, and somebody just opened a door and told them that they had to be moved out; that they were going to be, told them that they were going to, I don't know what, I can't think of the word, but

anyway, they were to all move out. Fortunately, my grandmother, my step-grandmother had, they had money and they were able to obtain a wagon and a couple of oxen, and took a bunch of relatives with them. They went from Ezerum Armenia. The one whose brother was killed, was stabbed by, my mother said the guy was Kurdish, but they did that to several of the refugees. They just had a field day; they took their money and whatever. They ended up in Aleppo Syria. They lived in Syria for about four years. My mother says, we have to tell the truth. After being out there, they wrote to a friend of my grandmother's father, who was like a mayor or something, I don't know, and he did send them money, so it's not to say that all the Turks were bad. It was the regime of the time, but after four years, around 1919 or 1920, they went back to Istanbul, Turkey. My father, grandfather, who spoke four languages, had no problems. He spoke fluent Turkish, Armenian, Russian, and French. They were destitute, and they found an Armenian guy, who gave my grandfather some jarred goods, and my grandfather would put this over his shoulder and go down the street, and he would sell jarred goods. I mean, that's what...

Grandfather, grandmother, my uncle Harry, and my mother, Zabel. My step-grandmother had a daughter who had married an Armenian man, in Providence, Rhode Island, prior to the war; through advertising and sending mail and whatever, she found her in Providence and then later on, when he was able to, he sponsored them and paid their passage, even though it was steerage. They came to the United States; wait, I'm sorry there, my uncle Harry came first. He worked for about six months, saved everything he could, and they had a little money, and then my step-grandmother's daughter and husband sponsored my grandfather, grandmother, and my mother, and they came. This was about 19, late 1920's or early 1921, and my grandfather had a niece in Granite City. They had the grocery store, there was Vartan's Market, so what, my grandfather communicated with his niece and told them to come to Granite City. There was plenty of work,

and she could help them, so that's how they arrived in Granite City. To give you a little background, think I'm going to long.

Mr. Tedrick: Oh no, that's wonderful. You mentioned your father came through Ellis Island. Has he ever related any stories about the process of going through there?

Mr. Torosian: No, he didn't, you know. He says that he like had a tag on his lapel, you know, or whatever. He says, him and his cousin both came and he didn't say much about Ellis Island because he didn't know anything, you know. They probably had an, I would, I'm guessing when I say this, they probably had an interpreter there, who spoke Armenian. He was not on Ellis Island very long, I know that. He was there for a very short time, I don't know how long, and then whoever it was, took him to the train station, and put him, you know, on the train, they gave him visas. He had a little box lunch, and then I don't know. He arrived in St. Louis, and, I guess, some way or other, he had communicated with his father, and his father picked him up in St. Louis at the train station, and took him to East St. Louis, and that's 1913, there weren't any cars, hardly to speak of. I guess they used public transportation, probably had trolleys, I would guess. That's all I know about my father [and his immigration process].

Mr. Tedrick: With your mother coming in through Providence, did she relay any [information].

Mr. Torosian: Well what happened was, her ship came into New York to Ellis Island, the ship was quarantined. They sent the ship all the way back to Puce, Pyreus, Greece. They stayed there two weeks, and then came all the way back, and when they came back they brought them in

through Providence. She says she didn't care if she never saw another ship. They were in the boughs of those ships.

Mr. Tedrick: Long, hard ride in the ship. Some of the readings that I've done, looking up the processing through Ellis Island, they processed in the thousands through there per day. So I can understand, he would have went through very rapidly.

Mr. Torosian: Yes, I think their main concern was health, and I don't know what the immigration naturalization service and whether they had a quota at that time or not, I'm not sure. I think they did, but not for Europeans or any...

Mr. Tedrick: Moving back, you know, thinking towards living in Lincoln Place, how long did you live there? Were you born there?

Mr. Torosian: I was born there at 1725 Poplar Street. I was born to a midwife, by a midwife, and she was a Polish lady. I knew her name, I can't think of it right now. At any rate, I lived there all my life, the only time I was gone was the two years I was in the service. I mean, when I say, I should say Granite City. When I got married in 1965, it was one of the first times, the first time I left Lincoln Place, outside of the time I was in the service. Well, I lived there thirty-one years.

Mr. Tedrick: What's your date of birth, sir?

Mr. Torosian: 10/22/34

Mr. Tedrick: Going to school in Lincoln Place, what was that like?

Mr. Torosian: Oh, it was wonderful. Like I, you know, the whole neighborhood was ethnic, and when you got past West 20th Street; they were mostly, there was a lot of Tennesseans, who had come up from Stuart County, Tennessee to work in the, at Granite City Steel. At that time, when I was growing up, I didn't realize that there was a lot of iron ore and little iron factories down in Stuart County; I didn't learn that till later. Anyway, we went to Washington School, and, you know, those, some of those guys became very good friends. There was a little rivalry, you know. We called them hoosiers and they called us hunkies, you know. Which was alright, as very good friends. Then on to junior high school, you know, we stayed in our own neighborhoods, for the most part. Then, well, at the junior high school, we started mixing with the kids from the east side of Granite City. Then on to high school, the community high school; they came from the farms and everywhere else, to go to the community high school.

Mr. Tedrick: Now, before going to either grade school or junior high, the community center out there, I understand, had some form of school, what's your experience with that?

Mr. Torosian: I don't even, I don't recall going to a Kindergarten, but, as I got older, say eight or nine years old, I was there almost every night. Every evening, you know, during the winter and school year. We had a wonderful gymnasium. Mr. Howard paid for that. During the depression, a lot of, my father, included, worked at General Steel Castings. A lot of them were

out of work, and I understand that he bought the property, paid for the material, and paid the men to work there, and built that community center, which was a wonderful, wonderful thing. They had teachers there. The girls could learn sewing, and, I don't know, a lot of different things. They had little cradles there for like Kindergarten and young children; beautiful basketball gymnasium. And very caring people. [sound of phone ringing in background.]

Mr. Tedrick: We're stopping for a phone call. Before the stop, we were talking about the community center and the caring people there. Could you expand on that, sir?

Mr. Torosian: Sure. I don't remember Ms. Prather, I mean, she, I was young when she had the community center, but I can remember my mother going there to get her citizenship papers. She [Miss Prather] would teach classes, and help them to study for their, whatever the requirements were to get their US citizenship. After her, there was a Miss Wilson, who was a wonderful lady, and then there was Paul Gages and Mary Wagner, who were just super people. Then, Josephine Rezalie during my teen years, and she was a local, from Lincoln Place. I mean, she did everything for you; she had parties and she had, have dances for the teens. They had Sunday school at one time there. There was a Baptist mission on the corner, where I grew up, we weren't Baptists, but it was a church and that's all we cared. At any rate, had all kinds of things for us to do; we had organized basketball leagues, and our idols were the champions of the 1940, Illinois State Champions, Andy Phillip, Evon Parshegion, and Andy Hagopian. Several of them were Armenian, which made us very proud. There was all kinds of activities, we learned a lot, and I'm very thankful for that.

Mr. Tedrick: Seems like that facility, I was able, is really a central point of the community there. You see, I was able to be down there on a tour recently, a walking tour of it. And it's still used by people like that.

Mr. Torosian: Yes, and that's been there since, what, about 1935.

Mr. Tedrick: Something like that. What were some of the other things people did during either oh, grade school or high school for entertainment in that area?

Mr. Torosian: You know, we pretty much stayed in our community. Of course, my generation, I mean, I don't know, I was like; I say I was one of the younger ones. Kind of the last of the first generation. About that time, we were starting to get automobiles, so we were more mobile. I can't think of anything unusual, we had some, had a good fortune, good fortune of having a Catholic priest who became interested in Lincoln Place, Reverend Henry Mack. Became very good friends with him, and eventually I took Catechism with him, my cousin, Eddy Takmajian, and Ted Antoff and we became Catholic, and it's been a lifetime friendship. We just lost Father Mack here about three months ago up in Antioch, Illinois. He always kept in touch; he would write when we were in the service, and kept our spirits up. Sports was our, I guess our greatest activity. We played a lot of basketball. We used to play cork ball and also "gejos" [spelling?], which is a, hit the bottle cap with a broom stick, and we'd get all the bottle caps we wanted free.

Mr. Tedrick: Ok. I think it was Charles Merzian who mentioned gejos, or bottle caps, said it was played a lot outside Sim's I believe.

Mr. Torosian: Yes. Well by Sim's pool [room] is where we would play. The garage door was a backstop and the pool [room] was up there. If you wanted a soda, then, you could just walk fifty feet and get you a soda or an ice cream. He always, never complained about us playing there; it was since we got to throw bottle caps across the street. There weren't that many cars.

Mr. Tedrick: You mentioned sort of a rivalry between the Lincoln Park

Mr. Torosian: Lincoln Place

Mr. Tedrick: Lincoln Place, thank you, and the Western Granite. What are some of the type things that you remember about that?

Mr. Torosian: Oh, I don't know. They would call us names; we would call them names; real petty kid stuff. But you went in classroom with them and you became friends with them. That was the major rivalry. There used to be, at one time, next to the American Steel fence there on Maple Street; a big ball diamond. I just remember that vaguely, but it was, they had stands and, you know, for seating, and I think, probably held a lot of people, maybe two or three hundred. We would; baseball games and softball games would be a rivalry between the two, you

know. We didn't have shirts, or anything like that. There was no sponsors, there was just, they got a team together and we'd get a team together, and we'd just play ball.

Mr. Tedrick: Now I've heard that sports definitely are referred to occasionally as the great levelizer; come out and play and enjoy.

Mr. Torosian: Sure

Mr. Tedrick: Once you left high school, you mentioned the service, did you go directly into the service after high school or could you [expand on that]?

Mr. Torosian: Well, we had a vocational high school, so the idea was, for us; our aspirations weren't to go to college, so much, at that time. So, we tried to learn a skill, they had pattern shop, electric shop, machine shop, so I went into pattern making. That way you learned a little drafting. They had drafting shop too, I mean, which was a three-hour a day course, for the last two years of school. I ended up going to General Steel Castings with whatever job I could get; it was during the Korean War. They were manufacturing tank's hulls at that time. I got a job as a burner, and my cousin Eddy and Ted Antoff were both welders, so we all worked the same shift. Friday night would come and, you know we'd be out carousing. I worked there for a year and then I got laid off and I went to Swift and Company in National City, and worked at deep cutting for a year, which I really didn't like. Then I volunteered for the draft. When I came out of the service, I should have went to General Steel Casting; I thought I would still be laid off, anyway, I went to Swift again. Then I applied for a job in Union Electric. My cousin Eddy

Takmajian and Ted Antoff and I; we were just going to a show up in St. Louis, and we all hired on there. It was a stroke of luck for us, because I really enjoyed my career at Union Electric. It was a good place to work, and I got to spend most of my time with my two best friends.

Mr. Tedrick: How long were you, did you work at Union Electric?

Mr. Torosian: Thirty-four years.

Mr. Tedrick: Thirty-four years!

Mr. Torosian: My cousin Eddy Takmajian died when he was fifty-three; he had cancer. Ted died when he fifty-eight; he had a heart attack. I always thought that our harvest years would be a lot of fun, because we could all retire, but it didn't work out. Anyway, I was very, very fortunate to have those two guys as my mentors also, both of them.

Mr. Tedrick: You mentioned that there were a lot of different ethnic groups in Lincoln Place, how did that affect things there?

Mr. Torosian: I think it was terrific. I think their values, the Macedonians, Mexicans, Hungarians, and Armenians, which was the general population there, was very educational for us. We learned many things from them; they learned from us. The wonderful, sincere friendships that lasted sixty-seven years, that I know of. You know, different cultures have different ideas and values and environments. It seemed like I knew just about everyone in

Lincoln Place. I mean, the people who would wait over there by American Steel, which would have been the east side. I knew them pretty well. There was, on Chestnut Street there were some duplexes and they were, I'll call them Anglo-Saxons, there were about five or six duplexes on the east side of the street, and on the west side of the street... Anyway, there were some Hungarians, some Macedonians, a couple Hungarians; I knew their kids. I guess, that's how I got to know so many of them. My gosh, if I was walking on the street and I was thirsty, I would just go and knock on Mrs. Valencia's door, and say, "Mrs. Valencia can I have a glass of." [She'd say,] "Oh, come on in." You know, they treated you like you were, you were their own. It was, that was ninety percent of them. We had a couple, about three or four German families and one Greek family and I think one Italian family. The rest were all, like I say, Hungarian, Macedonian, Armenian, Mexican, there were a few Bulgarians, which were very similar to the Macedonians. I can't think of any other ethnic group that was, when I remember, there. I'm sure there wasn't.

Mr. Tedrick: It seems like that exposure to that different types of group, allows a person to change perspective a little bit and broaden things. Is that basically how it was there? Did you observe more about different cultures?

Mr. Torosian: I think so, you know, I've always like language and I always thought you learned something by learning another language. They'd think about something maybe a little differently than I would, out of my environment. Maybe, it gave me a different outlook on something, instead of being the standard, the way I saw things. I think, that's the way I feel about it.

Mr. Tedrick: That's not the first time I've heard that, that's before, when I was dealing with being exposed to other cultures; it gives you more perspective, lets you look at it from somebody else's point of view for a little bit. Did that impact you in your job for your thirty-four years of employment?

Mr. Torosian: You know, one thing I'm very proud of the Armenians is, our children, you know, the second generation, I'd have to really go by numbers to check it out, but I'm guessing that seventy-five to eighty percent of the second generation of Armenians went to college. We knew the value of education.

Mr. Tedrick: Ok.

Mr. Torosian: I think a lot of second-generation people from Lincoln Place went to college. Percentage-wise, I don't know, I just know more, you know, the Armenians. You know, I guess the exposure to all the different nationalities and learning the value of things probably helped encourage us for a higher education. I only have two years of college though.

Mr. Tedrick: There's a lot more than formal education though. There is.

Mr. Torosian: Oh sure, I agree with you.

Mr. Tedrick: Absolutely.

Mr. Torosian: I think it makes a more rounded person. All three of the boys went away to school, which I, I thought was better for them. Boys are a little different; they got that thing just to go to school and have a good time at that age. Also, to stress education, for them to become exposed to other people.

Mr. Tedrick: We've talked a bit about being exposed to other cultures and the Americanization process, primarily, probably for parents; involved in the schools a little bit more yourself. What type of things have you been involved in to kind of hang onto heritage, the Armenian background and such?

Mr. Torosian: Well, I've always been in an Armenian organization. I was in the, I went to Armenian school as a child. The Armenian Relief Society sponsored a school, which was the equivalent of the American Red Cross. I didn't really want to go, but my parents insisted. Another thing was, my mother was pretty smart. When I would speak to her in English, she wouldn't answer me, but when I spoke to her in Armenian, then she would answer. She did that to encourage, she knew I'd learn English, but she did that to encourage speaking our mother tongue. Then from there, at the Armenian Youth Federation, which I was a member and my brother and sisters were, and through the Armenian Federation I met, even in my early teens, because my brother and sisters were older, I became involved with Armenians from Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and then, when I got up into my upper teens, I would travel to New York to, they have an Armenian Olympics, you know, and they have an Armenian Convention. The whole idea was, I guess, because Armenia was surrounded by Muslim countries; our parents try

to keep us with the Armenians, so there wouldn't be any intermarriage, that way we'd keep the Christian religion. This is what I think, you know, I know they wanted us to marry Armenians; my mother would make the statement, "She could be blind, as long as she'd Armenian."

Mr. Tedrick: Ok

Mr. Torosian: You know, they, it's hard to interpret, it's something similar. At any rate, I've always been involved in the church, which was, my grandfather was a deacon way before we had a church, so when we'd have a visiting priest, my grandfather would escort him and carry his books or whatever. I got to tell you one interesting story; a new priest came and lived right across from my grandmother. When my grandmother passed away, he says, "I was just out of the seminary when I came to the United States," and he says, "I though I knew, pretty sharp, I'm just out of the seminary, I had my education. He says, "But, Nina Takmajan," which was my grandmother, "Knew more than I did." He was really impressed with her, so I asked my mother, I said, "Why is it that my grandmother knew so much, you know, the liturgy and everything." She said, "Well, when we were children, my grandfather had a little dry goods store, and in the summer time, we would go up to the mountains, they call it the "Vahn" [spelling?], that's where the monastery was. They would go there, and that's where they would spend the summer. My grandfather would go there on weekends. Well, their entertainment in the evening was singing religious songs and going through the eulo, [paused in thought], I mean, the, I'm at a loss for words here, the holy, do you mind liturgy?"

Mr. Tedrick: Liturgy, yes that would [work].

Mr. Torosian: Liturgy, and a so, I mean, that was their entertainment, you know.

Mr. Tedrick: It's surprising that most either high school courses in the United States or, I'm not sure about elsewhere; don't even mention that Armenia was the first Christian nation. The lack of publicity on that troubles me.

Mr. Torosian: Well, we're so proud of that fact, you know. My wife and I went to Armenia in 1972. We also went to Jerusalem and we went to where Saint Gregory The Illuminator was down in that cave. We were so proud when we got to Jerusalem because about one third, they owned a third of a lot of the holy shrines, The Church of The Holy Sepulcher. There were just so many, and then when we were in Armenia, we went to monasteries up in the mountains where they had carved the monastery out of the side of the mountain, you know, out of that stone. You know they had to have primitive tools. So Armenia has been a very religious Christian country for 1700 years. We're very, very proud of that. How they hung on to all those shrines, the properties in those shrines, the Greek Orthodox Church has many and so does the Catholic. Most all the shrines are one third owned by those three religions. How they hung on to them, you know, the history I know, is that when the crusaders came, the Armenians were the only Christians in the area.

Mr. Tedrick: Yes, sir

Mr. Torosian: So, under Frederick the Great, from my understanding is that Galicia [Galicia] became a great . . . , a small kingdom, under Frederick the Great of Germany. That's the story I here, I haven't read it in a book. I wish I could [confirm it], see if that's for sure. We've always been active in the church. Rose and I both served on the board of trustees. We're not as active as we were, but we still try to. See I get the Armenian newspaper. [We are viewing a copy of the Armenian newspaper.]

Mr. Tedrick: That's neat

Mr. Torosian: We contribute to a lot of things. The Armenian Church, and the AGBU, [Armenian Greater Benefit Union] and the AYPF [Armenian Youth Federation]. So we keep in tune. The Armenian music, things like that.

Mr. Tedrick: Are there any, thinking about that and heritage, are there any Armenian holidays that are different than

Mr. Torosian: Well, our Christmas is January, I think January the 5th, we celebrate like they do here.

Mr. Tedrick: Ok

Mr. Torosian: I forget the names of the calendars, the Gregorian, is it?

Mr. Tedrick: I believe so.

Mr. Torosian: I think that's the one that we go on. I mean, but we celebrate Christmas December 25th. Does it really matter, it doesn't really matter. They have Saints, different days for Saints. Easter is a very, very important holiday. All of our holidays are, WELL, then we have when the massacres, the genocide was started. It was 24th of April 1915, that's a big doings for us. Outside of the religious holidays. Armenia was independent for about three years, I think from about 1918 to about 1921. I just never could figure why we didn't at least have Independence Day. Maybe I'm wrong with the dates, I think April 24th was the day of the genocidal attempt, the start of it.

Mr. Tedrick: That's what I had heard. That's the date that I had seen.

Mr. Torosian: But we were independent for three years.

Mr. Tedrick: Following along that line of thought, the holocaust with the Jews is very well publicized. Do you have any thoughts on what are the factors that caused the Armenian genocide not to be publicized?

Mr. Torosian: Well let's see. At the time, one of the guys I worked with's father was a surgeon in the military, the United States Army; he was telling me that he remembers the phrase that, come in.

Mr. Tedrick: We're going to stop for a moment now. [Tape player off, interrupted by a person picking up an item] Interrupted by a package being picked up, we were speaking on the Armenian genocide, dated 24 April 1915, and discussing that issue.

Mr. Torosian: Yes, this friend of mine that I worked with from Lakemore, who was much older than I was, when I worked at Venice Power Plant. His father was a surgeon in the army during World War I and prior to that, and he remembers his father talking about, "Help the Starving Armenians." Apparently, he is about the third person who told me that. They can remember in the newspapers, "Help the Starving Armenians." That was, you know, during and after the genocide. The people have very little knowledge of what happened in the genocide. It was a small country. There were probably a million to a million and a half Armenians killed during the genocide, who starved or marched out to the desert of Dor El Zor, but it was such a small country, and they didn't make a lot of noise about it. It just didn't have the publicity, but they were mentioned in the United States about, "Help the Starving Armenians." The French took in a bunch of Armenians; they took them off of a mountain in Armenia. Some French ships got them off of the, the Va Musa Dagh it was, 40 Days On The Musa Dagh was written by a non-biased opinion; an author who was German, Franz Werfel, which I enjoy reading, cause it's from something other than Armenian and it's more believable. It's not biased.

Mr. Tedrick: I believe that there's a resolution brought forth in either the Senate or the House each year, to have the massacres acknowledged. What gets in the way of that?

Mr. Torosian: It's a very sore spot with me. The only time I've ever seen it mentioned to let the public really know what happened, was on a program called The Time Machine on the education channel, and it, it's mentioned as the forgotten genocide. It was a well-known commentator who was, had this program, and what happened was, I wanted to see it again. I called A&E to try to find out, "Are they going to show this again." Well, they told me that they didn't know, they didn't think it was going to be on again. I said, and I questioned them about it, and they didn't give me much [of the] things I wanted to here, give me anything concrete. About three months later, I was getting kind of mad about it, so I called them again and I gave them a hard time, and they told me if I called this number in California, they might be able to help me. What I did is I called them, and I told them, "Who's stopping this, the Turkish government." They said, "Well, they weren't at liberty to say." I said, "Is there any way I can get this tape." She said, "Yes, we'll send you one." I'm the only guy I know of that got that with, that it was not to be shown to the general public, which I thought was kind of unfair. Why would you send it to me? I'm going to show you a copy.

Mr. Tedrick: Sure, I'll go ahead and stop the tape for a second so we can take a look at this copy of videotape. The tape's back on now. I have a copy of Secret History Hidden Holocaust in my hand that was sent to Mr. Torosian. [The tape is] approximately sixty minutes long. Could you give me a brief run-down on this, sir?

Mr. Torosian: Well, it's pretty much of what happened during the genocide attempt in, from 1915. It has several people on survivors of the genocide. It tells about one of the survivors who was marched out to the desert in Dor El Zor and into a cave and then they poured gasoline

or something and burned them to death. A lot of people starved to death. It tells about the river that was right behind there, and the river shifted during this last seventy-five years. Now people are going out there and looking for artifacts, and they're finding bones piled on top of bones from victims of the holocaust. It has maybe four or five survivors and their stories; typical genocide type thing that were inhumane. I just can't imagine, living in a society like we live in, that people would do that, it's just unbelievable. It's hard to believe. Every time they try to pass the resolution, it's usually squashed right at the end. Under Reagan, he promised that this would go through, and right at the last minute, they stopped. They had enough votes in the Senate to pass it; enough votes in the House to pass it. The strong Turkish lobby, and American businesses, which Paul Simon states in there [in the tape], that it [American businesses] called him and asked him not to pass this resolution. [Businesses] like Pepsi Cola, Marlboro Cigarettes, different places like that, and the Turkish government sponsors it. The last one was with President Clinton, Hastert [Representative J. Dennis Hastert] the Speaker of the House, isn't he the Speaker, I think, Hastert, the Congressman from Illinois, Representative, was supposed to bring it before the House. The day before he brought it in he was called in by, this is, we had this all documented, called in by President Clinton and asked him not to do, and must have talked him out of it. So he didn't bring it before the House. Which was another loss and they had commitments from enough representatives to pass this. Senator Dole, who was a, injured in World War II, before, he was just out of the service or maybe still in, and had been badly injured in his arm. There was a Dr. Kilickian from Chicago, who was a friend of my wife's family, at any rate, Dr. Kilickian repaired his arm and hand to where he could get by with it and he became very interested in Armenians. Dr. Kilickian was an Armenian, and from what I hear a wonderful guy, he was very, if you had money or not it didn't matter, that type. Senator Dole kept his

friendship with him for years. Senator Dole knew a lot about the Armenians. At every opportunity he would do whatever he could for the Armenians. He's on this tape.

Tape 1 side 2

Mr. Tedrick: We are on tape one side two now. Go ahead sir.

Mr. Torosian: You know even when he ran for president, he said that he would do what ever he could for the Armenians and I believed him. Did we get the part on about Bill Clinton?

Mr. Tedrick: Yes sir.

Mr. Torosian: Now president Bush solicited the Armenians for their vote, and he got a big support from them. This resolution under Bush was going to be brought back and now he's made a hundred and eighty degree turn and doesn't acknowledge that. It's upsetting that he just, I think president Bush is doing an excellent job, but he committed himself to do something prior to the election. I

Think he ought to stay with it after the election. His integrity has slipped a little with me. That's the way I feel about it. Turkey is a very serious ally, you know, strategically where they are located was of a great value to us at one time, but to me it no longer is. We're not having any trouble with the Russians. But, we don't have that many friends in the Far East.

Mr. Tedrick: Possibly that's getting in the way of it, the political use. Going back towards Lincoln Place, it seems like the sense of community there, like I said before, was just amazing. You mentioned being there during the depression times.

Mr. Torosian: Well, that's when I was, I don't remember the depression really, because I was born in thirty four. We were poor, but everybody else was [too].

Mr. Tedrick: If you were to just try to sum up your thoughts about living in Lincoln Place, how would you do that?

Mr. Torosian: I think it was a wonderful experience; some of my best friends are still my best friends from childhood. I just called my buddy day before yesterday, Ray Becerra, a Mexican boy who grew up right across the street from me. I keep in touch with him; I call Chris Dineff, a nice Macedonian friend of mine. Childhood friends and we're still very close. Jake Varadian and Evon Parshegian, and Leo, Leo Manoogian is probably my best friend. We've been childhood friends. The only people that I didn't pal around with too much was the Hungarians. I had one exceptionally good Hungarian friend that was Ronald Vizer, who later on became police chief in Granite City. As a boyhood friend, I mean I don't see him anymore but, he was just a super friend to have. His father was a, worked for the state in the license division, and always helped everybody in Lincoln Place that he could. Helped them to get a job, or helped them if they had any problems, and they were Hungarians. The Greek family that lived in our neighborhood is up in Detroit and my brother and him were still very good friends, their older than I am. I think the Macedonians, Bulgarians, and the Armenians probably got along together

the best, and the Mexicans. The Hungarians, they had a Hungarian home in Lincoln Place, you know.

Mr. Tedrick: Ok

Mr. Torosian: That's where we would have all of our dances. There was another Hungarian building it was, Sepesi was their name, and they had a hall also. We would have dances there, activities. My best friends were, I'd have to say Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Mexicans. I still keep in touch with them. Always feel so good when I bump into one of them somewhere. I don't know what I can say except, gee wiz I had such a wonderful childhood. I know, I think most of us from there are the envy of a lot of people. Cause of the warm relationship we had with family and the community center, activities. No one ever locked their doors, I don't think. Crime was non-existent, practically. I mean, I might have stole eggs out of somebody's hen house or some dumb things like kids do, but. I did that once and a buddy of mine came behind me and taught me a lesson. I had two eggs in each one of my overall pockets and he came behind me and hit my pockets. [He] broke the eggs in my pockets. I don't think I ever stole another egg. I, you know, just kind of the dumb things that you do. Everybody respected each other. [Spoken with thought.]

Mr. Tedrick: That's, that's the thing that I keep hearing and getting a sense of, is the respect for the different ethnic groups and the relationships that were there based on that respect.

Mr. Torosian: They didn't envy the other, they just respected them, they respected you. You knew it was mutual. I think, without saying. The different cultures teach you different things. You know, the only similar thing is because the Turks were all the way up in the Balkans. They had Macedonians, Bulgarians, Greeks, and some of the words the Armenians use were Turkish. Same with the Macedonians and Bulgarians. Some of the food, it might have had just a little different accent on it, but they practically the same. That probably helped too. It's an entirely different language than Turkish, but after hundreds of years of rule you kind of pick-up some of its influence.

Mr. Tedrick: I sure appreciate your time. You've provided me with a wealth of information.

Mr. Torosian: Seems like I'm not saying enough about Lincoln Place, I just can't over do it. I just get a little bit carried away on some things, but it's. It was just a wonderful place to grow up. I wish my children could have grown up in the same environment to tell you the truth. I think the generation after our generation was not as warm and friendly with the neighbors as we were.

Mr. Tedrick: Maybe got too busy?

Mr. Torosian: Maybe, the wives started working, you know. My mother never worked, they managed very well. But, I don't know, I don't have the answers. I wish my children could have enjoyed the kind of environment I did there.

Mr. Tedrick: Boy, Thank you very much.

Mr. Torosian: It was my pleasure really. Thank you for asking me. I hope I've helped or added a little bit. I know if you get all of them [oral history interviews from the History 447 project] together, you can come up with a pretty solid idea of [Lincoln Place]. I think [that] everybody that grew up in Lincoln Place loved Lincoln Place.

Mr. Tedrick: It seems like it, it really does.

Mr. Torosian: It really, it really, I believe that.

Mr. Tedrick: Thank you sir.

Mr. Torosian: Well thank you for your time too.