

Parsegh and Haigo Armenian

Parsegh and Haigo Armenian, father, and daughter, are second and third-generation survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Their family relocated to Lebanon after the Armenian Genocide, and they were then forced to immigrate to the United States due to the Lebanese Civil War.

The Armenian family, like so many other families from the area, were greatly affected by the genocide against the Armenian people. Parsegh, and Haigo both lost multiple family members due to the atrocities against the Armenian people. Prior to the start of the genocide Parsegh's family were successful businessmen, and owned land in the town of Nakhichevan, today the town is a part of an exclave of Azerbaijan. Parsegeh specifically mentioned losing some of his uncles to the genocide, as men were the primary target. Parsegh also shared how members of his family walked across the desert (Syrian Desert) to obtain safety, in Lebanon and Syria, after the genocide. In the desert he stated that his family witnessed more atrocities against the Armenian refugees.

Haigo first came to the United States after college, and her parents followed shortly after. Parsegh and Haigo are both naturalized American citizens and have been citizens for about 30 years.

In the United States, the Armenian family moved to the Central New Jersey area, settling in East Brunswick. Parsegh worked as a businessman until retirement. He and his wife have been married for 67 years and have two children and two grandchildren. Haigo is also married, and she mentioned being married at St. Vartan Armenian Church in New York City.

Both Parsegh and Haigo have a strong connection to the Armenian community here in the United States, with family spread throughout the country, California, and Washington D.C. Parsegh emphasizes the importance of cultural, spiritual, and historical education for the next generation of Armenian Americans. Parsegh also has a strong connection to persecuted communities, as he understands the pain and suffering they have gone through as his people have experienced that as well. Parsegh, at 101 years old, is still very passionate about his people's history, culture, beliefs, and family stories.

Parsegh and Haigo Armenian

Image courtesy of Haigo Armenian



Left (Parsegh Armenian) Middle (Mrs. Armenian) Right (Haigo Armenian)

Sound Bytes:

08:16-9:15

“The Armenians in Turkey, in those areas, were good businessmen, they were educated, and they had a good position, in Turkey, in business, in positions and they wanted to get them out so in the future they don’t ask about their lands, like the lands that they owned, the Turkish government did not want the Armenians to demand those lands. Or its kinda like the Holocaust when Jews had a good position and stuff, the German government did the same thing, they wanted to get them out.”

24:17-25:15

“The thing my dad said, he said he is happy that Biden recognized the Armenian genocide, and a lot of things are that countries are recognizing, but a lot of the country that are not recognizing they have political allies stuff with Turkey, and that is one of the things, we were talking about it early, that prevents them, they don’t want to make Turkey angry, or because Turkey has an American base, and stuff like that, so they want to be friends with Turkey... And then plus, the lands, if Turkey recognizes the genocide, they also have to accept that the lands are too the Armenians, certain lands, then they have to compensate them.”

25:21-25:57

“He said, unfortunately, that a lot of churches in Turkey, Armenian Churches have been changed to stables, and stuff like that, so they are kinda trying to destroy, and that’s like proof. Also, there is a lot of like Hagia Sophia, that were changed into a mosque, a church has change to a mosque, certain things the outside world should know.”

Interview with Parsegh, and Haigo Armenian

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Zoom, 1:00 pm

Interviewer: Courtney Strauch, intern at Mercer County Community College Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Center, in West Windsor NJ

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Interview Transcription

Interviewer:	Courtney Strauch here with Mr. Parsegh Armenian and Ms. Haigo Armenian on April 5, 2022, so welcome. So I guess we can start off with, where are you from here in the United States?
Haigo:	Where, in the United States, or before the United States?
Interviewer:	United States, like what town you live in?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	I am going to translate for him, Courtney if possible. *In Armenian
Parsegh:	East Brunswick, New Jersey
Haigo:	East Brunswick
Interviewer:	Interviewer: East Brunswick, okay perfect. And what is your ages?
Haigo:	What's your age?
Parsegh:	101
Interviewer:	101 alright
Haigo:	I am 66, you don't need my age Courtney right?
Interviewer:	If you want to share it you are welcome too, you don't have to
Haigo:	No its okay
Interviewer:	Are you married?
Haigo:	Are you married, dad?
Parsegh:	Yes
Haigo:	Yes
Interviewer:	And for how long have you been married for?
Haigo:	How about 67 years
Parsegh:	67 years
Interviewer:	Wow *laughs* and then, next question is do you have any children?
Haigo:	Do you have any children?
Parsegh:	Yes two
Interviewer:	Two, okay. And do you have any grandchildren?
Haigo:	Do you have any grandchildren, dad?
Parsegh:	Yeah two
Interviewer:	Interviewer: okay perfect. And then what did you do for a living?
Haigo:	What did you do for a living? He was merchant. Merchant, right?
Parsegh:	Yeah
Haigo:	He imported materials.
Parsegh:	Businessman

Interviewer:	Okay perfect, so now we will get into the questions about your family history. So when did your family come to the United States?
Haigo:	Okay, Courtney, I have a quick question.
Interviewer:	Yes
Haigo:	I came first, in '77, became a citizen. And then they [parents] came in '87.
Interviewer:	Okay perfect. Okay so you just explained how your family came to the United States, and they obviously had support from you. Why did you family particularly choose to immigrate to New Jersey?
Haigo:	Why did you come?
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	The Lebanese Civil War
Interviewer:	Okay. And you lived in Lebanon before coming to the US?
Haigo:	Yes
Interviewer:	Where do other members of your family live? Do they live in the US, do they live in Lebanon still?
Haigo:	US, Geneva Switzerland, all over, California, mainly US
Interviewer:	Okay. Do you know the region or area where your family was from in Armenia?
Haigo:	Dad, do you know where your family was from in Armenia?
Parsegh:	Nakhichevan
Haigo:	It's called Nakhichevan
Interviewer:	When did you first learn about the atrocities committed against the Armenian people?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He said as a kid they were constantly talking about at home...
Parsegh:	In the family
Haigo:	...in the family, his uncles were murdered...
Interviewer:	Okay
Haigo:	...to the genocide
Interviewer:	Okay, and can you actually go back and spell the town where your family is from?
Haigo:	Yes, let me write it down NA KH ICH EVAN
Interviewer:	Okay perfect, so you mentioned that as a child you heard a lot about what happened, specifically other than your uncles being murdered, what else do you remember hearing or learning? Any stories?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	What he heard from the family because he was a kid, he heard that the Turkish government General Pasha decided to erase the Armenians from Turkey
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Interviewer:	Did your family ever discuss life pre-genocide? If so, what did they share with you?
Haigo:	*In Armenian

Parsegh	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He said that his dad and uncle use to work together in manufacturing tissues, like blotting tissues and stuff, but they were well to-do, and they had a good business, and then the family and everyone around.
Interviewer:	And then. For what reason did the Turkish government want Armenians erased from society?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	The Armenians in Turkey, in those areas, were good businessmen, they were educated, and they had a good positions, in Turkey, in business, in positions and they wanted to get them out so in the future they don't ask about their lands, like the lands that they owned, the Turkish government did not want the Armenians to demand those lands. Or its kinda like the Holocaust when Jews had a good position and stuff, the German government did the same thing, they wanted to get them out.
Interviewer:	So, my next questions are related to culture, have the atrocities to your ancestors influence any of your families acts, beliefs, language, culture any of that sense?
Haigo:	*In Armenian, can you repeat that again?
Interviewer:	Yes, so how has the atrocities to your ancestors, like the genocide, influences, your families acts, beliefs, religion?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He says that any time he sees that any genocide in any country it makes him upset and reminds him of the Armenian genocide, that it has been unfair
Interviewer:	Do you know how long your family live in Turkey before the genocide? And then after?
Haigo:	*In Armenian, how long did your family live in Turkey before the genocide?
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	200 years
Interviewer:	200 years, okay. Do you have any family heirlooms, or objects that connect to your family's story that survived the genocide?
Haigo:	My dad doesn't, I had to write the stuff her, but I have a cousin, who Margret knows as well, my cousin has stuff that leads to the heritage.
Interviewer:	Okay. Do you know what any of those items are?
Haigo:	Most probably in Washington, Washington D.C., because he lives in Washington. It's his [Parsegh] nephew, his oldest nephew.
Interviewer:	So, the cousin in Washington has the items, do you know what the items are?
Haigo:	Most probably books, what does Garro have? What does Garro your nephew have? In Washington from your parents and grandparents? *In Armenian*
Parsegh:	*In Armenian*
Haigo:	Books
Interviewer:	Books. Does your family have any food or recipes that relate to your heritage?

Haigo:	Yes. His [Parsegh] mom was a very good cook. So, I never knew my grandmother, she passed away way before I was born, but yes definitely.
Interviewer:	What were some of those foods, recipes? You don't have to give me the actual recipe just the name of them is fine.
Haigo:	The name?
Interviewer:	Interviewer: Yes
Haigo:	It's called souborek it's with pastries, his mom was very good at baking pastries, and stuff like that.
Parsegh:	Mante
Haigo:	Mante
Parsegh:	Baklava
Haigo:	Baklava
Interviewer:	Can you spell the items for me?
Haigo:	Yes, MANTE, SUBOREK, wait SOUBOREK, CHIAUFTE, there's more stuff, as we do it, his mom was very educated
Interviewer:	So his mom was a big baker and cooker
Haigo:	Yup
Interviewer:	Do you have specific occasion, holidays, where you serve these dishes?
Haigo:	Yes, Easter, Lent, Christmas, yup
Interviewer:	Okay and does your family have any traditions that connect to your heritage?
Haigo:	Yes, like on certain holidays we do certain things, bake certain things, go to church, eat with the family, and the families get together, and there's certain foods.
Interviewer	Do you have any stories that have been passed down, from Haigo your grandparents, or great grandparents, and such?
Haigo:	Do you have any stories from your grandparents dad, or parents, that have been passed down?
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	On my mom's side, mom has a lot of stories, my mom's uncle was on the line to be killed, and a Turkish soldier, because he had blue eyes and blonde hair and because he was very handsome, he was eight years old, said "I want this kid to be spared, I want to adopt him" and took to my grandmother, and her husband was murdered as well, so my grandmother said "I cannot, my husband is gone, I cannot give you my child." So, on my mom's side we have more stories than my dad's side.
Interviewer:	Do you have your uncles name?
Haigo:	Yes, Bartan, BARTAN, and his last name is BARSOUMIAN. His name also, because after the genocide, he said "I am going to go to the United States," he was very young when he came here, his name became George Barsoumain, and he lived in California. That was my grandfathers, on my mom's side, brother.
Interviewer:	But you really don't have any stories from your dad's side?
Haigo:	No
Interviewer:	The next question I have is, does your family have a strong connection to the Armenian community in either the United States or New Jersey?

Haigo:	In the United State, most of our Armenian family, since they are in California and Washington, they are very active with the community. We were because of my dad age we don't as much, I am usually pretty active. My dad he goes to church and events, but he is not as active as he used to be.
Interviewer:	What did he use to do when he was younger?
Haigo:	Like, work wise?
Interviewer:	No, like how he was active in the community?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He was very active with in the school system, in the board, and athletic stuff, and any community that need help he would offer without thinking
Interviewer:	What was your motivation to stay connected with the community?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He says the Armenian blood.
Interviewer:	Do you wish the community connection was stronger, or do you think it is good where it is at?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He always wants to have it better
Interviewer:	And then to you, what does Armenian blood mean?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He said our history is 5000 years old that what he meant by continuing the history, the language
Other Person:	The faith
Haigo:	The faith, it was Armenia, it think, well I don't think, was the first nation to accept Christianity
Interviewer:	Thinking back on that, yeah that is correct, as far as I remember I am a history major
Haigo:	Good
Interviewer:	As the child of a survivor, do you have any particular thoughts on how educators should teach the Armenian Genocide and other genocides to future generation?
Haigo:	As the child of a genocide survivor, dad, how do you, hold on...
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He says he doesn't want the same things to happen again, genocide, Holocaust
Interviewer:	He doesn't have any particular methods that he would want to be taught, he just wants them prevents?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He said at my age, no he can't do anything, but we were talking earlier, but he wants the history, to taught in the schools and different events so it won't be forgotten.

Interviewer:	My next questions are related to activism that you either do now, or use to do. So do you believe yourself to be an activist for the Armenian community?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	Yes, and he very proud of it
Interviewer:	As he should be, what causes did he particularly take up?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He said he wants the new generation, to have very good education and culture
Interviewer:	Interviewer: What are your thoughts on the Armenian genocide not being recognized by many nations including the US?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	The thing my dad said, he said he is happy that Biden recognized the Armenian genocide, and a lot of things are that countries are recognizing, but a lot of the country that are not recognizing they have political allies stuff with Turkey, and that is one of the things, we were talking about it early, that prevents them, they don't want to make Turkey angry, or because Turkey has an American base, and stuff like that, so they want to be friends with Turkey.
Other Person:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	And then plus, the lands, if Turkey recognizes the genocide, they also have to accept that the lands are too the Armenians, certain lands, then they have to compensate them.
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He said, unfortunately, that a lot of churches in Turkey, Armenian Churches have been changed to stables, and stuff like that, so they are kinda trying to destroy, and that's like proof. Also, there is a lot of like Hagia Sophia, that were changed to a mosque, a church has change to a mosque, certain things the outside world should know.
Interviewer:	How does that lack of recognition and the constant destruction of Armenian culture, lands, and history, make you feel?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	Yeah, he gets very upset
Interviewer:	Then my next question is, do you find yourself often supporting other persecuted communities?
Haigo:	I spoke to him about it, and yes, he said any persecuted community he feels for them because he has gone through it too
Other Person:	[in audible]
Haigo:	He feels it on his skin
Interviewer:	Is there any community in particular that he feels especially connected too?
Haigo:	*In Armenian

Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	Everyone is the same for him, as long as they are persecuted, it is the same
Interviewer:	My last question is, is there anything you would like to share, stories, any other thoughts?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He says he does have any in my mind
Interviewer:	Does he have any other thoughts he would liked to share?
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He says we are very grateful to the United States, that it a safe haven for us
Other Person:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	Mom says it has given us opportunity to grow, I came here after college and I wasn't born here, I was in my twenties. You know you work, you make a living and try your best to be a good citizen, so they are very proud to be US citizens.
Interviewer:	How long have they been US citizens for?
Haigo:	From 1980? From 90, they came in 1987, so 92
Parsegh:	Because of [Lebanese] Civil War
Interviewer:	Well, I don't have any more questions, Professor Krasner is there anything else you want me to ask?
Interviewer 2:	I am just wondering how the genocide shaped the family, how the legacy shaped what you do, how you live your lives?
Haigo:	How did the genocide shape your family? *In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	Them going from the good life, then people killed in the genocide has made them stronger in their beliefs, and then also giving more attention to new generation for studies to become good citizen and be very active, by education getting to higher places. I have talk to him about it earlier and said it made us stronger, in our beliefs in that the next generation must go forward and have good education and good morals, and honesty and stuff like that
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	And he says we are also grateful for Lebanon and Syria at that time, that they were able to take those immigrants, or people from genocide into their countries, giving them spaces and opportunity to grow
Interviewer 2:	Can you talk about that a bit more, like how your family went to Lebanon and ended up in Lebanon
Haigo:	Most of them walked through the desert from Turkey to Syria, on their way there, these are the stories I hear from my dad, on their way there a lot of people died because of hunger, thirst, and stuff like that, and who ever made it, who ever made it got to Syria, from Syria some people went to Lebanon depending on where the family was moving to. But they have seen, I know my grandfather's generation on my mom's side, they have seen people being butchered, women being raped, and stuff like that on their way from Syria from Turkey.

Interviewer 2:	What do you tell your own family members about the genocide?
Haigo:	Mainly, that there are books, we tell them to read certain books, whoever is still alive and has a vivid memory of course from 1915 hardly anybody is here, but whatever they pass to the next generation they tell the story not to forget, but to move forward with their lives and be good citizens. And my dad has something to say
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	*In Armenian
Parsegh:	*In Armenian
Haigo:	He says that there is a church in New York, St Vartan Armenian Church, that they have a good library, and there is a lot of books about genocide, that's what he kinda suggest people to go and read. And of course stories pass from family to family, and generation to generation
Interviewer:	Could you just repeat the name of the church in New York?
Haigo:	St. Vartan, ST. VARTAN
Parsegh	*In Armenian
Haigo:	Yes, they have [books] in English and in Armenian, April 24 th Commemoration Day of the Armenian genocide, but ever year in New York they have a gathering, and a lot of politicians are there, like Pallone, Schumer, from different communities. That's something that use to be very strong, they use to talk about the genocide, it's in Times Square, this year I don't know when they are going to do it, most probably on a Saturday, or Sunday.
Interviewer:	And has your family attended that gathering before?
Haigo:	I have, yeah because you have to be on your feet, and my parents at their age they can not
Interviewer:	Has anyone in your family visited that church in New York?
Haigo:	Yes, I got married there
Interviewer:	Oh, you got married there, oh okay
Interviewer:	I don't think I have any more questions, I don't if Professor Krasner does?
Interviewer 2:	No, I'm good
Interviewer:	Okay you're good. Okay, well thank you both for taking the time
Haigo:	Oh, thank you, thank you
Interviewer:	For taking the time to sit down and talking to me, I really appreciate it
Haigo:	Courtney, I have a question, did your grandmother live in Iselin, I had, years ago, I use to have a client, I use to work in a bank, and she had the same last name, very nice couple, older couple.
Interviewer:	What was her first name?
Haigo:	I cannot remember
Interviewer:	Okay because I do have family that is from that area, but I am not sure if it is my grandma, my grandmas name was Carol
Haigo:	No
Interviewer:	It could have been my great grandma, I think her name was Agnes, was it?
Haigo:	Very nice older couple, grandpa died earlier, than grandmother started having issues

Interviewer:	It might be my great grandparents, I am not sure, I'd have to ask my dad, I am from Middletown.
Haigo:	Oh okay
Interviewer:	But thank you both so much for your time, I really appreciate it, it was so wonderful to hear your family's story and everything. If you have any questions for me, feel free, you have my phone number and email, so feel free to reach out
Haigo	Absolutely
Interviewer:	Since we recorded this, we will be transcribing it, and having a video, and once that's available I can send it to you.
Haigo:	Thank you so much
Interviewer:	Of course, have a nice rest of your day
Haigo:	You to, thank you
Interviewer	Bye
Haigo:	Bye
END	