

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Maronites in Youngstown

Personal Experiences

O. H. 381

NABIHA HAYEK

Interviewed

by

Marilyn Rudawsky

on

November 13, 1978

## INTRODUCTION

In order to preserve the knowledge of the origins and traditions of the Hayek family, this document will serve to explain the long heritage of this family to those who may become part of this parentage in the United States. Lest our valuable traditions, family pride and honored name be lost in this large sea of population, this document will be continued by those that will follow.

## PROLOGUE

During the 11th to 13th centuries the Crusades brought the noblest men of Europe to liberate their great Christian heritage in the Holy Land. Because of their love for this great land, many of them remained and established their permanent homes. Here they remained for 175 years.

In 1270 the 8th Crusade was led by Louis IX. As the town of Palestine fell to the Arab powers, Louis IX fell in front of Tunis. The Crusader families then fled and took refuge in Lebanon. One of these families was called Bit El-Sahyouny after the name of the region in Palestine from whence they came. They then settled in northern Lebanon near Tripoli, changing their name to Daher.

In 1741 Abde El-Rehman Bacha, moslem governor of Tripoli, decreed a punishment of death on Kannan Daher because of his refusal to profess the moslem faith. Kannan's cousin, Nemer Daher, fearing the same fate fled Tripoli. His flight led him to the banks of Sidon in the south of Lebanon. Changing his name to Namour he married a girl from this area and his family flourished.

One of his grandchildren settled near a town named Bit Chebab in a region called P'herdok. This place is still marked today by the ruins of a small chapel named Saint George of P'herdok: It is located at the entrance to Bit Chebab. After settling he took up the trade of weaving. In Arabic the word weaver is stated as "hayek." The result is the adoption of the family name El-Hayek, meaning "the weaver."

The means of living in this village (Bit Chebab) depended mainly upon small industry: Trades such as weaving, pottery and a bell foundry. Because of the success of these industries, the seemingly small town was able to maintain a large and dense population. Working together the people of Bit Chebab have demonstrated thrift and ambition. Their industry has brought them a great deal of success in life. Due to their ambitious nature the confinement of the village became unsuitable for many. The result was a wide distribution of the members of this village throughout Lebanon, and eventually throughout the

world.

At the beginning of the 19th century two brothers of the Hayek family, both of them stone cutters, moved to the village of Bejji in central Lebanon. Their names were Michel and Joseph. Using their trade as masons they constructed the largest and proudest house in this village. In the village of Bejji the brothers were given the name Bit Chebaby attributed to the village from which they came.

NABIHA ROUHANA HAYEK

Nabiha Rouhana Hayek was born on January 1, 1906, in the village of Bijji, Lebanon. She was the daughter of Joseph and Anna Rouhana.

As a girl, Mrs. Hayek was educated for several years at a Catholic convent school in the mountains of Lebanon. While there, she was taught needlework, music, and French, among other subjects.

On February 4, 1934, Nabiha Rouhana became the bride of Benjamin Hayek. Following the traditional two week wedding celebration, Mr. and Mrs. Hayek left Lebanon for the United States.

In 1935, Mr. and Mrs. Hayek had their first child, Nadia, who was followed in 1940 by Elias and in 1946 by Benjamin.

Mr. Hayek is a long time member of St. Maron Church and the St. Tobias Society.

Marilyn Rudawsky

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INTERVIEWEE: NABIHA HAYEK

INTERVIEWER: Marilyn Rudawsky

SUBJECT: Lebanese Culture, Depression, St. Maron Church

DATE: November 13, 1978

R: This is an interview with Mrs. Benjamin Hayek for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program being conducted at 1225 Elm Street, Youngstown, Ohio, on Monday, November 13, 1978, at 12:45 p.m.

For the record, Mrs. Hayek, could you tell me your name, your maiden name?

H: Nabiha Rouhana.

R: Where in Lebanon were you born, what was the village?

H: Bijji.

R: Mr. Hayek was saying earlier that you were married in Lebanon. Can you tell me about your wedding, something about that?

H: It took place in the village. The wedding stayed for one week. There were songs and dance and eating and drinking. The week of the Sunday after the wedding--we got married Saturday--was the last celebration. They had a big dinner and a lot of people and all that stuff.

R: What type of food did you have at the wedding?

H: Lebanese food. Some of it is Arak, it is made out of grapes.

R: It's like wine?

H: No, it's white, like water, wine too. This is all made in our Rouhana home tree. We made the Arak and the wine from the vine.

R: I noticed in the wedding picture you had the white dress and the veil and all that. Did your mother make that?

H: No, this was ready-made.

R: You bought it then?

H: Yes.

R: You had four or five years of convent school?

H: Yes, five years. One year was like Ursuline here.

R: Like a high school?

H: Not like high school. I mean you go to school and you come home. After four years, boarding school. We came home for Christmas and Easter.

R: Only those days?

H: Yes.

R: How would you celebrate Christmas and Easter, were they big celebrations?

H: Yes, we celebrated. We don't have much like they do here. It is more of a religious celebration than a business celebration here. Here it is too commercialized, the holidays. Over there it is a religious holiday, not a commercialized holiday.

R: Do people decorate their homes for this?

H: They have to have their homes cleaned. They have to offer the guests a drink when they come for celebration. It is not elaborate like here. The only celebration is a religious celebration more than anything, more than showing off or stuff like that like they do here. Christ was born, that's it. They don't give gifts for Christmas, they give it for the New Year. Our gifts are for the New Year, not for Christmas. When the wise men came and brought Christ gifts it was a week after he was born, so our exchange of gifts are on the first of the year, the way they gave Christ gifts.

R: It's much more in tune with the religion than anything else then?

H: That's right. When I first came here they gave Christmas gifts, and we don't do that. Like the king and queen, they come and bring presents to Christ. That's our position; we give gifts at the same time they gave to

Christ after he was born. This was our tradition there.

R: You were saying that the school was very strict and things and they wouldn't let anybody come to see you.

H: Except mother and father and brother and sister. Like I said, you have to come through three doors to come inside the convent.

R: The sisters at that time, they were wearing the black habits?

H: Yes, the black habits, long rope. I don't know if they changed now, I couldn't say.

R: Do you think your parents were as strict with you as the nuns were, you couldn't go out and date?

H: No dating, there was no dating whatsoever. Like I said to you before, when they came to pick up this bride and their car broke down, they couldn't come in the convent; they had to wait outside until eight o'clock the next day to take the bride. In Lebanon, in Beirut, they're not conservative like the villages. If you see a girl walking with a young man on the sidewalk and she is not wearing an engagement ring, they call her a tramp.

R: Back then did they give engagement rings, is that common or is that today?

H: No, they always did that.

R: Was it with a diamond or was it just a ring?

H: It depends on how wealthy they were. It depended on how much they could afford. A diamond over there is fantastic.

R: What type of thing would commonly be given then?

H: Just like this.

R: Just a band, a pretty gold band?

H: Yes.

R: How long were you engaged?

H: I knew him before he went to Africa and I waited for him seven years.

R: There was an understanding then, all this time?



H: Yes, we corresponded.

R: Is this typical, do people usually know each other a very long time before they get married?

H: It's not typical, but they don't get married quickly like here. They know each other for five or six months and get married and in five or six months they get a divorce. Divorce is out of the question in my country. We have no divorce in our country. Of course, the other religions, the nonChristian religions, you can marry more than once. In Christian religions we had no divorce in my time. Of course, I can't say now, but in my time we never heard of it. Now, like I said, everything is changed.

R: What major changes did you see, you were last back there in the early 1970's?

H: I went back in 1963 and 1967. They have all the conveniences we never had in my time. The women there are very sophisticated; they gamble.

R: Do they wear western dress?

H: The styles start from over there. The American women follow Paris, right? Paris styles get to Lebanon before they get here. The women smoke. You wouldn't think they touched anything in their life, their hair is perfect. They gamble in the casinos. The casino club is more modern than Monte Carlo. I've never been in Monte Carlo to find out, but my daughter-in-law has been traveling a lot. When they went to Lebanon and they went to the casinos they said they never saw anything like it, even Monte Carlo. The floor show came from Paris. The gamblers are all millionaires and oil people, it's unbelievable. Now, it's a very sad situation in Lebanon.

R: Most people have their homes changed do you think, the type of homes they have?

H: Yes. In our village they used to have the old-fashioned homes, all one room and there may be silkworm stuff. You see the beautiful buildings, all stone buildings, all good designs. The ceiling is twice as high as my two floors.

R: It would be two story?

H: No, just one story but the ceiling would be as high as two stories. Most of the houses are one story, but they have high ceilings. They have basements and they have beautiful buildings. Now they call us when they come

from Lebanon because they can't believe they see these frame buildings, these frame houses. In my time, outside of the village they had refugees; they call them shacks, these frame buildings. In each month the government has to tear them down. Frame buildings don't exist.

R: They don't have this type of building?

H: No frame buildings whatsoever. You don't see one frame building in the whole country. They are either stone or cement block. They paint the cement blocks white, but the stone is beautiful.

R: Most of their furnishings are brought in from Europe?

H: No. Didn't you read that Muhammed Ali bought furniture from Lebanon?

R: No, I didn't see that.

H: They sell to other countries. The best art and furniture is made in Lebanon; you can't find it anyplace in the world. It is all handmade. We don't import anything.

R: Well, exporting furniture then would be a good business.

H: It's expensive. Just somebody who is wealthy can afford to buy their furniture from there because it's all handmade. It's not all plywood like here. Of course, they have to import the wood from Scandinavian countries, the lumber. They do the work in Lebanon. Fabric, they have that weaved in Damascus. It's very, very good. It's all by hand, not machinery.

R: No wonder it's expensive then.

H: Yes.

R: Do the workers get paid a lot, do you think?

H: Not then, but like I said, everything has changed. It is more now, of course. Before we used to get a maid for \$20 or \$30 a month; now it's very expensive to get servants. But over there you don't have to be wealthy to have maids. Some of them are not wealthy at all, but they have maids.

You can't go downtown in my country and carry your packages; it's a disgrace. You have to have somebody carry them for you.

R: Then you have to pay this person?

H: Yes, to carry them. I remember we used to have a

woman. We used to live on the first floor, and she lived on the second floor. Her husband was a policeman. He earned 35 lira, Lebanese money, a month. She didn't go to the store on the next block to buy her meat; she called the store man to send her meat. It was a disgrace to go and buy it. There was a French woman who went and did her own shopping. But the Lebanese woman, she wouldn't do it because it's a disgrace. The beautiful French woman, she used to walk in the heat in Beirut, and she had to carry two handbags because she lived up on a hill in a big mansion. She carried her two bags and walked. She had a cook, the servant, and a man in the door, but she went and did her own shopping.

R: They're different cultures. What do you remember most about the Maronite community in your early years here?

H: My brother-in-law was here. He was in Cleveland when the woman came to church in Cleveland with blood on her cuffs, and he was upset.

R: Did the women wear hats and mantillas and things to church? Did you have to wear something on your head?

H: I felt I couldn't go to church without it. They misunderstood the woman who didn't wear anything on her head. I feel very uncomfortable to go to church without anything on my head.

It disturbed my brother-in-law when he saw a woman with a lot of makeup on and a sleeveless dress on. Even our own children, they are more advanced than we are because of the language of English. It bothered my brother-in-law too when the younger generation lied. He said they lie; they steal; they do wrong things and they come and say they're sorry; that's just not enough; they have to correct themselves.

R: Things seemed a lot more lax to your brother-in-law than among young people.

H: This is a fallacy, the young see so many that came before we came. They came from Lebanon and were from poverty. They are not educated. They worked so hard, the old people; they used to work for \$1.50 on the railroad, twelve hours. Now their children think that they don't know anything. Their children think they are smarter than their parents. They aren't acceptable to us. My children couldn't say that because we were educated in our own languages.

R: How did your parents feel about you leaving Lebanon?

H: My father was here.

R: Your father was here?

H: Yes. I have to follow my husband. We were better off there, but the reason he came was his brother. The tragedy after two years that we were here was his brother died. He had a cerebral hemorrhage when he was about 58 years old.

R: Did other Lebanese people live in the same community that you lived in?

H: Here?

R: Here, right.

H: Yes.

R: Did you have a close-knit community?

H: Yes. We lived on the east side when we came here. Our church, the Maronite church, was on Wilson Avenue. We lived a couple of doors below the church. My family was here on Shehy Street. The rest of our family lived near the church also.

R: Did you get together for recreation?

H: Yes, we had card parties at church and meetings.

R: Do you think the young people still feel close to their Lebanese community? For instance, I imagine when you were married, when you were first married, it would not have been a good idea to marry someone who was not Lebanese or wasn't a Maronite Catholic. Do you think that has changed today? Do you think people accept that a lot more, or is it still frowned upon?

H: Still we would rather see our children marry their own kind. We don't have problems without mixed marriages. Very few marry nonChristians, but all the Christian communities come close. It is not as strict as it used to be.

R: Do you think the young people, say eighteen years old or younger, still feel strong communication with their church or with their heritage? Do you think that a good number of them have been back to Lebanon?

H: I don't understand.

R: They're young, their parents have been here many years, do they feel Lebanese? Do they feel Maronite?

- H: The majority, yes, not all, but the majority. Even if they were born here, they still have the heritage. You find a few who are not Americanized.
- R: Do you remember about anything from the Depression? Your brother was saying that he came here and he felt that things were so much better here than in Lebanon.
- H: When I came here it was the end of the Depression. We felt the Depression ourselves because we lost our money here. We didn't have anything left, so we felt it. On top of all that, we lost my brother-in-law. We had very hard times.
- R: Did the church try to help people in the area during the Depression? Did it collect food or did it collect clothing and try to helpout?
- H: These days the church doesn't have anything. When my brother-in-law was pastor there, when they had card parties once a month or in two weeks, they collected ten from the whole party. The people didn't have anything. Nobody had anything.
- R: They didn't have it to give?
- H: That's right. Whenever he had a couple of dollars, he stuck a couple of dollars under the tablecloth to give to the people he knew didn't have anything. He died poor. One time he told us, "When I wear this robe I give myself to Christ. I want to live like Christ did. I want to live poor and die poor. After I'm gone you'll find out that I'm poor."
- R: He gave to those who had nothing?
- H: Yes. He died poor. I have a cousin who's in Paris now who is a priest. He doesn't carry any money; whatever he has he gives to nuns or convents that need it. He came to visit in the states. We tried to give him some money. He said, "Christ said you can't get in to heaven carrying money." Heaven's door is narrow, you can't get in it.
- R: That's a lot of dedication. The changes that have come about in the church recently, say in church liturgy, they used to have the mass in Syriac.
- H: This is Christ's language.
- R: Now they only do the consecration, right?
- H: Yes. I don't know if they changed the language of the mass, I couldn't tell you.

R: Here anyway, there is English in it. Do you think that is good, or did you like the old?

H: If we are strong, Catholic Christians, we have to follow our leader, but on the inside we don't like it. Whatever the church says we have to follow. The priest and the pope and the bishops are not the church. The head of the church is Christ. If we don't like what the priest or bishop does, it doesn't mean anything to us; we follow Christ's teaching. We are Catholic, not for the priest, not for the bishop. You hear many people saying, I don't like the priest, I don't like what they are doing. The priest is not Christ. We have to do what Christ says. Our religion is so clear. It is Christ's church, not the priest's. In other words, we listen to what is said; if they do something we don't follow the wrong thing, we follow the right thing.

R: You follow what you believe to be the teachings and your conscience.

H: That's right. Christ is not here to tell the priests what to do. We believe in him and no matter what, whatever they change, we still believe in the true teaching.

R: So the actual changes in the church don't have a lot of significance?

H: That's right. Our religion is so strong that we don't do the changes if we don't like it, but we're still Catholics, still Christians.

R: I noticed yesterday they had some guitar music, which is a little more modern. Do you think they're doing that to attract the young people in the church?

H: We don't like it.

R: You don't like it?

H: No, we don't like it, but we still go to church and we follow Christ's teachings.

R: Do you think the younger people like it?

H: Yes, they said they like it. Do you like it?

R: I do.

H: We are from the old school.

R: The church has the Maronite Center here. They rent that out for use. Does the church have anything to do with organizing the things that go on there? Do the ladies'

organizations cook the meals?

H: I have nothing to praise, I have nothing to condone because I'm not involved in any . . . I belong to the ladies' charity.

R: What does the ladies' charity do?

H: They do a very good job. They do so much. They give up their time for work; they go visit the county home. They do a marvelous job. I'm an active member.

R: What else do you belong to?

H: I belong to the Third Order of St. Dominic. They do a good job too; they go and visit the sick. I wasn't able to go lately. I'm involved here and I go with the Legion of Mary. I go to church, that is about all. If something doesn't please you, you keep quiet.

R: Is there anything else you would like to add, anything else you want to tell me about, about your family, maybe, about your father or brothers?

H: My family, I have two brothers; one of them we see and one used to work for the French government. He was a young man when he died in 1968. He had no children. I have nobody except my brother and sister-in-law. My mother died when she was 88 years old.

R: Did your mother come here?

H: No.

R: Do you think World War II had any effect on the community?

H: No.

R: Is there anything else about the church around here, about how life has changed maybe for you since you've come here? What differences have you seen in the Maronite community in the past forty years?

H: It's more modern now than it was forty years ago. Like I said, it annoyed my brother-in-law when he saw a woman not dressed properly who came to church. When the young generation lies, he cannot stand lying. He really worked so hard, and I think he gave up his life for his church and for his people. Like I said, he was a poor man; the money didn't effect him whatsoever. He always told us, "I promise I want to live poor and die poor when I wear that robe."

R: What other priests do you remember? He was very

outstanding and I've heard an awful lot of good things about Father Ashcar; people really think an awful lot of him.

H: He's fantastic; he has really followed in my brother-in-law's steps. He really is a wonderful man.

R: Do you remember any other priests?

H: Yes. Monsignor Eid was a fine man too. He was there for approximately thirty years. He has followed my brother-in-law's teachings, and he didn't know my brother-in-law. He came from Akron from a parish. He has been told what my brother-in-law did and he follows everything my brother-in-law did.

R: He's unselfish?

H: Yes. My brother-in-law has been dead since 1939. Monsignor Eid comes every January 20th and says mass for him since he died. Even on St. Elias Day in July he comes and says mass. He came twice a year for forty years. He says, "I don't know him, but I know the job he did and as long as I'm living I want to say mass for him." He did this until the day he died.

R: Yesterday after mass they had a luncheon and someone told me that one of the parish member's sister died and this was forty days after her death. What is the significance of this?

H: This is a tradition. After a person dies, in forty days they have a mass for him and some of them have lunch.

R: Why forty days?

H: This is tradition. After forty days they say mass and have lunch for their friends who come.

R: The lady who died and who this mass was for was in Lebanon. I don't believe that she has ever come to the United States. Is that typical to even give masses for those who don't live in the United States?

H: Yes. Their family here is known among the parish, so that's the tradition. They do it anyway. Even if they died in Lebanon, if they have relatives here, they do it anyway. That's for respect. The people go to the mass to respect Lebanon. The people here don't know the woman, but for the respect of her brother here they go.

R: And a closeness then, it's still the old village?



H: That's right.

R: Well, that's about all I have. Is there anything else you want to add to this?

H: I talk too much, I think.

R: No. Thank you very much.

H: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW