

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Pontish Yeramyan

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Pontish Yeramyan conducted by Frances Garrett Connell on May 4, 2015. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project

Interviewee: Pontish Yeramyan

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Interviewer: Frances Garrett Connell

Date: May 4, 2015

00:00:01 Q: Okay, this is an interview taking place with Pontish Yeramyan—

00:00:10 Q: It's taking place at the Sofitel Hotel in Philadelphia, on May 4, 2015, and the interviewer is Frances Connell. Okay, we will begin. Thank you for letting us do this. So what I'd like to do is start really with your earliest memories, if you can tell me a little bit about your family, and where you were born, and those kinds of things.

Yeramyan: I was born in Istanbul, in Turkey, and I was the first child of two. I have a sister, and my parents were Armenian background. They were Turkish citizens but Armenian background. My father only had his mother because we had the genocide, his father was a victim of genocide, so was my mother's father. So anyway, I don't know what you want to know about my childhood.
[Laughs]

00:01:16 Q: Just whatever you can remember. Where you lived, what kind of situation where you lived.

Yeramyan: We lived, yes, we lived in a pretty good situation. My father had was a self-made man, and had become actually a very well-known business person in the community, in Turkey, in Istanbul. He was quite well-known, and he also was part of many, many philanthropic

establishments like the Armenian hospital in Turkey. He was the treasurer. And he was also the treasurer and kind of almost built the seminary for Armenians. That was not so much about the seminary, but that was a way at the time to bring most Armenian people from the Anatolia and so basically to keep them in their own place. So he was involved in that. And so I grew up with my father visiting, raising money, and high level clergy, archbishops and so on, you know, in a very informal setting, since I was a little kid when that was happening, seven-eight-nine-year old kid, like that. And it was very fascinating. Different people visited our house, and my mother would cook the major dinners, and people helping her and so on and so forth.

So, then I went to an Armenian school as a primary school, and I went to an English school, It was called high school, but it was really at the time a middle school, which was quite hard to get in but somehow I got through. And I went till I was in eighth grade there, but really I had two more years to learn English, so it's really more than that. Then I came to the U.S. I was going to study in England because I had gone to an English school, but then I had an aunt in Connecticut, and other people. My father's sister was a scientist in Connecticut, so my parents and I agreed that I'd go to the U.S. I had no idea what that was like. They helped pick some private schools, so I ended up at Emma Willard School in the Northeast. It's an all-girls school. I had no idea.

00:03:49 Q: Emma Willard?

Yeramyan: Emma Willard. Yes, it's an all-girls kind of a high school. And when I came, because of all this grade confusion, I had really tenth grade kind of work. But it's called eighth grade

because I had to have two years studying English and other things, like the British system, metrics, whatever was our change, the pounds and all those things. So when I came to the U.S. they were confused as to where to put me, so they started at tenth grade, but then two months later, we moved to 11th grade. I lost my friends, and it was really difficult—difficult to connect, reconnect with new friends, and especially at the eleventh grade, they already had friends. So I had a hard time in that school. I spent weekends in the infirmary, because there was nurse that I liked, so she kind of like took care of me. I was a very shy girl.

00:04:54 Q: You must have been homesick too.

Yeramyán: Yes, but it wasn't actually just like homesick, it was more—I was like sick a lot. I was not feeling—actually sick. I wasn't pretending to be sick, but I wasn't feeling well, but that was a way of, yes, being homesick and disconnected, and culture shock, and I gained a lot of weight.

00:05:15 Q: Were there girls from other countries there?

Yeramyán: There were some. Jane Fonda had gone there. There were different people, governess children, but some of them were really disconnected from their parents. And I grew up—in our culture at the time you know you were always connected to your parents. And in the U.S. I learned that you can be disconnected from your parents. At least you could act out more, maybe. [Laughs] So there was more permission to be that way. So it was a difficult time. I had met somebody, a Puerto Rican girl, and we were close friends, and I met somebody from

Afghanistan, who was the old regime, Prime Minister's daughter, but they were all ousted because of the change in government, with a Greek mother, so I had some friends, but it was not an easy time in my life. But I learned a lot, and spent two years there, and then I went to Barnard [College].

00:06:16 Q: Two years, you were there—?

Yeramyian: Eleventh and twelfth year, because I skipped tenth. I was put into tenth, because of my age. And some schools when I applied to college could not understand what happened to my grades, and it looked like there was mischief, but there wasn't. Anyway, I had a *very* strong intention to go to Barnard. I liked New York City. It was like Istanbul. And I liked Barnard for some reason. I don't know why I liked it at the time. Maybe because I didn't have to write a composition, [Laughs] I had five questions and I loved it. Everybody else I had to write something, and I didn't think I was that great in writing, and Barnard was in the city. And my aunt had gone to Columbia and was part of Columbia. Yes, my aunt had gotten her PhD in Columbia. So anyway, I ended up in Barnard, and I had a really great, great three and a half years. I graduated early. So a great three and a half years.

Q: Gung-ho. Oh, my goodness.

Yeramyian: Yes, I got married, so I had wanted to rush out.

00:07:29 Q: Okay, let's go back, how about a little about your mother? You said your father was very educated and a leader and philanthropic projects—

Yeramyan: He wasn't particularly educated. He was a self-made man with a baccalaureate. But my mother didn't have parents. Her mother was around but not her father, and she was raised by her uncle. She recently passed away, at 96. Yes, she was a very amazing woman. She stood behind my dad, very strong, very bright. To date when she was in her nineties, she was a championship bridge player. She would run over just about anybody, I mean it was amazing.

00:08:16 Q: An amazing mind.

Yeramyan: Amazing mind, yes, amazing mind. I mean that's not the kind of mind I have. She could like remember all the cards. She was just amazing. Before she got married, she was working at a bank, and everybody *loved* her there, even though she was Armenian at the time, and wasn't supposed to be in a Turkish bank, all those political things. But she was very successful, so they kept her in spite of her background. And she was just an eager beaver. She would learn German on the side, or do this, would do that. That was my model really. Both my parents were very hard-working, and both were good students, so when I got a good grade, it was expected so it was no big deal. Nobody made any fanfare about anything. That's how we grew up. My mother was quite talented. I mean, whatever she did, she did it very well. She didn't know how to cook, so she took some cooking classes for the American school she has gone to. They had cooking classes. She went there and learned, and then she was an amazing cook—

the food, and desserts, and all these flowers, and all kinds of things. If she made a tablecloth like a needlework, it would be amazing. She was like that.

00:09:45 Q: Multi-gifted.

Yeramyán: Yes, multi-gifted, and great at everything she did. That's the background, so that was normal.

00:09:54 Q: That was normal.

Yeramyán: Yes.

00:09:56 Q: So could you talk a little bit about being Armenian, and in Istanbul at that time, was it—did you feel apart from others?

Yeramyán: No, no, no, no, I was very good with friends. I grew up in an Armenian school, but we had Turkish, classes as well. I did very well, and was good at reciting poetry and things like that, was in plays. At the time, it was not cool to speak the language outside. You had to keep it to yourself. And you never knew because of the past how the future would be; that's one of the reasons I think we decided that I would come to the U.S. My sister did later. I had made another name so if any important people ask my name I would say Selma just to get by so I wouldn't be known as Armenian. My Turkish was perfect at the time, no accent. Most other ethnic people had

some kind of an accent, but I had made sure I had no accent. Then I went to an English school. It was all Turkish friends, and we're still very close to date. There was no separation to date.

Q: Discrimination.

Yeramyan: Yes, we have our fiftieth Anniversary coming up. I can't go. It's at the end of May. But we are all connected and love each other. Of the closest I have to date, from school, are those people. After that I don't have that many close friends from Barnard, or from high school, and other.

00:11:49 Q: So what does your name actually mean? Is it an Armenian name?

Yeramyan: Pontish, it doesn't mean anything, my mother made that up.

00:11:54 Q: Pontish is a not a—?

Yeramyan: No, my mother made that up out of nowhere. My original name is Agavni and that means “dove” in Armenian, and that was her mother's name so she didn't want to have the same. Whatever it was she started calling me Pontish.

00:12:13 Q: Is it a real Armenian word?

Yeramyán: No, it's nothing.

00:12:17 Q: Just a sound. [Laughs]

Yeramyán: A sound. And so in some schools I'm known as Agavni and in some schools I'm known as Pontish, and I don't even know right now which is which, where I'm known as. In Turkish school I was known as Agavni. But I think it—in Barnard I think it was Pontish. So it just varied, yes.

00:12:47 Q: And you said that your father was involved with the church.

Yeramyán: In building one, so that Armenians would—

00:12:54 Q: Have a place to worship.

Yeramyán: Not to worship at much. Not that he was against worship. His intention—it wasn't the church; it was a seminary. And that was because in the time of the “law” at the time, from the Ataturk, the minorities could keep their faith, and they couldn't expand it.

00:13:23 Q: Like proselytize, try to convert—

Yeramyan: Yes, or they kept this culture; but they couldn't expand it. Or they couldn't make *more* of it. My father just worked on it so that people would come and get educated. Not everybody became a priest or anything. Some people just finished, and they're here in the U.S., mainly run businesses, and jewelry guys, and lawyers; you know it's a variety of things they've done here. So that was a way of creating priests as a possibility, but that was also a school for educating people, so he had to raise funds especially for people who couldn't afford it.

00:14:07 Q: So it sounds like it was a way of preserving Armenian culture.

Yeramyan: It is preserving Armenian culture and heritage, right.

00:14:12 Q: And it still exists, you said?

Yeramyan: Yes, it does; I don't know what they do now, but it does in some way.

00:14:20 Q: Well, politics change every year.

Yeramyan: I think it's a regular school. I don't know what it is right now. But politics have changed. Things have changed now, so in some ways a lot more freedom exists. I don't know what the rules are.

00:14:33 Q: Sure, sure, okay. How about socially, when you were in high school, was there any dating, or was that not related—?

Yeramyian: No, I mean you didn't date, really. You're not supposed to date where I grew up. But I had a blind date for a prom, maybe one time, I think. In Turkey some people had boyfriends, but I didn't. In fact I made up a non-existent boyfriend. I used to talk about him like he existed – an imaginary, fictitious boyfriend I had. In Turkey I used to talk to my friends as if he existed, but he didn't really. It was all nonsense. And then, high school, you know, they used to cart bus people to have parties. So, dances, dances at the time. It was very weird.

00:15:42 Q: Yes, well those schools. Goodness, yes. Where is it actually located?

Yeramyian: Troy, New York. That was very strange. Because I was running around in Turkey, by myself, at fifteen-sixteen, all my life. Here they had to be chaperoned to go downtown. It was like really weird. [Laughs] That's why I had to go to the city, and to Barnard, yes.

00:16:07 Q: Yes, that's culture shock.

Yeramyian: Yes. [Laughs]

00:16:18 Q: What about some of the political and world events that were occurring when you were young? Were there things that you particularly remember? Even while you were still in—

Yeramyán: The assassination of the Prime Minister in Turkey. They hung him, and they all ousted the Democratic Party at the time. There was a revolution of some sort.

00:16:35 Q: That was in the early sixties or—?

Yeramyán: In '60, yes.

00:16:38 Q: And it was because he—I don't know the politics.

Yeramyán: 1960, I don't know that much, but there was a particular party, and then the military brought them down, and isolated a lot of the government. And the Prime Minister and some other people got hung.

00:16:50 Q: Oh! Was it publicly?

Yeramyán: No, it was done somewhere, but you know I don't particularly remember anything else. I remember the *past* stories of my grandparents and all that, from my grandmother, my grandparents.

00:17:10 Q: So they talked about the genocide?

Yeramyán: Some, but it was the “way it was” kind of thing. You know, when I came to the U.S. it was much more pronounced, because people didn't have permission and didn't live it. They used to talk about it, but to explain a circumstance. It wasn't like, 'You should know this happened,' kind of thing. And it was nowhere public. I think that it's nowhere in history books. It was all different.

00:17:47 Q: In the history books where you studied, yes.

Yeramyán: Yes, the Turkish history you memorized, it was all edited books. But of course we knew. We didn't have any men. There were a lot of women and not that many men.

00:18:05 Q: So these were your grandparents that were—you lost—

Yeramyán: Yes, my grandfathers.

00:18:11 Q: Grandfathers that you lost, yes, that's very close.

Yeramyán: Yes, but I didn't know from it. And my mother didn't know from hers. When my mother was born, I think her father was already gone. Like her mother was already pregnant, something like that. My father is the same way. My mother and father were a year apart. They were distant cousins. But, yes, I grew up with stories of how they were escaping from Anatolia to Uli Kirchler to Istanbul. And how they helped the grandfather escape, in bundles and things, and

they were checking with swords out—all kinds of stories I grew up with. But it wasn't like bitter, you know what I mean, because as I grew up, I loved, as today that I'm Turkish, I'm multi-national [Laughs]. I think that it's the time and the government happened. I don't have a grudge against people because people had nothing to do with it.

00:19:19 Q: How much information were you getting about the outside world, I mean you know we're very ethno-centric.

Yeramyian: Not much, yes.

00:19:26 Q: I mean we had assassinations and other—

Yeramyian: Yes, [at the time] I didn't know from—Martin Luther King, Jr., when did that happen?

00:19:34 Q: He was assassinated in '68.

Yeramyian: Oh, yes, that was '68, I came in '65 to the U.S. So that was already afterwards. [John F.] Kennedy, we knew about Kennedy, oh, yes. Because there was like he had a stardom, I used to read things, like what's that magazine now, *People Magazine* kind of things, or *Life*, and the Turkish version of *Life*, and other things. And the Shah. My father was at a dinner with the Shah of Iran, you know as a representative. And my mother. At the time of the Shah of Iran they were involved in that, and the palaces and it was a major event.

00:20:17 Q: And what was the reason for that, why was he invited?

Yeramyán: To represent the Armenian community.

00:20:23 Q: Oh, to represent—okay, which there's a large group in Iran as well, or—?

Yeramyán: Yes. I don't know exactly, but I think that was the reason, or maybe it was an important matter. I don't know, but I think it could have been both. But I remember that. I've never been that politically inclined. With the civil rights, I was just getting into it. I had no idea about civil rights. And it was a major conversation at the time. I got into it a little, but I didn't know. I mean in Turkey, the way you get history, or newspapers, you saw what they want you to read. Most places are a bit like that. The history books are all one version, and everybody studies that book. There's only one version of things. And that's how I grew up. It may not be that way now. So I didn't know much. And I didn't know America was that different from England. I had more of an English culture I grew up in in school. By the time I got to Barnard I was good, I was fine.

00:21:36 Q: You felt comfortable.

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Yeramyán: I felt comfortable. Yes, I was fine.

00:21:44 Q: Okay, do you remember an especially memorable moment, between your parents, something that, 'Oh, these are my mom and dad.'

Yeramyán: What do you mean?

00:21:54 Q: Just something, I don't know. I guess I'm asking something that you witnessed between the two of them that really impressed you, made an impression on you.

Yeramyán: They were together.

00:22:08 Q: On everything?

Yeramyán: On many things, yes. And you know, they say behind a powerful man there's a powerful woman; it was definitely that way. And she'd go to the trips in Europe and the [United] States. My mother would go with my dad and translate; she knew more languages, or better English and stuff. So in my memory they were very aligned in many ways. So I didn't feel any non-alignment in them.

00:22:47 Q: Now when you were here, when you came over, did they visit you?

Yeramyán: Yes. And I went back myself many years. Some summers I studied in France or something else, when I was at Barnard, but, yes.

00:23:04 Q: And did your brother end up coming over as well?

Yeramyán: My sister, yes my sister came.

Q: Excuse me, sister?

Yeramyán: Yes, she came. It was later. She went to England first and then came. Yes, we had different routines, but, yes. And then they wanted to come but it was hard because my father had a lot of things—

Q: Business.

Yeramyán: Yes. Then he passed away, at the age of sixty-two. He passed unfortunately in a very sudden way. So then my mother had to wrap things up, and a lot of injustice happened, and people took advantage of her, and she didn't understand. So a lot of bad things happened at the time. It took a while to get things in order.

00:23:50 Q: And then did she stay in Istanbul?

Yeramyan: No, she came here. I don't know when, maybe twenty-five or thirty years ago she came. And then she lived for a while by herself, and then the last ten years or so she lived together with us, maybe fifteen years, till she passed away. So [Sighs].

00:24:15 Q: Can you remember a particular day or event that just really changed your life, where you went from one thing to something totally different? I think maybe coming to school must have had that effect.

Yeramyan: I don't know if it changed in my mind, my life. I don't know about that, but—I mean there were shocking things that happened like the Columbia riots. I wasn't politically involved at all, but then I was getting myself politically involved. I think I met my husband the end of the junior year. Because we got married in the middle, and I never came to graduation or anything. The riots were kind of a shock. It didn't change my life, but it gave I guess a different perspective. I think it was a shocking thing for a lot of us, policemen and horses. I was getting involved in the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], and my now husband said, “You're kidding, you can't participate, you don't even have a passport, you're an import, and you're not an American? That's very dangerous.”

00:26:10 Q: Can you talk a little more about that? There's a whole section where we talk about the strikes.

Yeramyan: Yes, I don't have much—

00:26:17 Q: But you, you felt, tell me when you first found about the strikes.

Yeramyian: Well, when it happened, I don't know if somebody got killed, or what, maybe beating up students or something, and the Low Library was taken over.

00:26:37 Q: And what drew you to think you could be part of SDS.

Yeramyian: I don't know. Maybe the friends? I wasn't that extreme or anything, but I don't like war, so I think that was what drew me, because it was against war. I didn't even understand the war. Vietnam was far away, I mean, I really didn't understand what was going on, had no idea of the political situation. I just didn't like war. So I think that's what got me into it.

00:27:18 Q: Did you actually stay in one of the buildings, or—?

Yeramyian: No, first year I did, as a dorm. We got in Hewitt Hall or something. And then after that—I think maybe the first two years. After that I moved to 116, across from Barnard. The back door of Barnard was down there, and I think I was on the street or down the hall. The cafeteria was right out there. I'd just go home across the street, it was right there. So I had an apartment. You know, makeshift apartments that were bigger apartments made into small bits and pieces, so we had a lot of those. I think Columbia might have bought them, because my daughter went to Barnard, and she was in one of those apartments, in much better shape. But anyway, we lived

there, and I lived there with a roommate. I mean, the classes were canceled; I had to write papers instead of taking any exams, we made good on whatever at the time.

00:28:28 Q: But you said you remember the violence, the police on horseback—

Yeramyan: I didn't see it; yes I remember that—I couldn't imagine students being threatened to be beat up, or were beat up, and then the whole thing about riots and sitting in, those things were just very, very foreign. I mean now they're not. Then it was just like a shock.

00:29:00 Q: Okay. We'll go back to that in just a minute. In your course of getting to Barnard, and then maybe during your years at Barnard, do you remember a particular obstacle, something that was there that you thought, "I can't get past this?"

Yeramyan: No. I really enjoyed my life at Barnard. I really did. Intellectually I felt like I fit in. There was freedom to do what I wanted to do. I made my own thing sometimes. So, no I don't have anything that I didn't think I could do. I did many things at the same time, so I took more courses in three and a half years than I needed in four. And I was working at the library there, and my spare time I was dating. I was doing a lot of things.

00:29:56 Q: And you said you majored in Psychology?

Yeramyan: I started with Linguistics, but then I don't know how it happened. Oh, I took Psych as a science, then I decided I could major in it. Then I needed to take another course, so I took Biochemistry or something crazy in a summer course. I was tortured, I was almost close to [saying], "I couldn't do this." [Laughs]

00:30:28 Q: It's not an easy choice.

Yeramyan: It was Junior year, but I had to get it. It's the only way I could graduate. Of course I'd just met my husband or I was engaged, whatever it was. It was the *only* way I could get it all to happen. So I made myself take this crazy course that I didn't have any background. I didn't have the prerequisites, but I just jumped in. And it was crazy, but I mean, I got a B-Minus, and that was the prerequisite to get it have it count, and I did, so I'm thrilled to be alive.

00:31:06 Q: Yes, you didn't have the background.

Yeramyan: I didn't have the background. But I decided to major in Psych later, and then I'd get this other science. You had to have another science, because that didn't count. I loved Linguistics from the beginning. I don't even know. I had no idea what I was doing, you know, there was no career in mind. At the time people just took courses, I don't know how it is now. It's more career-oriented a bit.

00:31:32 Q: I think so, yes.

Yeramyán: I don't think we had a Computer Science class at the time. Now it's all about Computer Science class. In fact the Linguistics was closed. I loved Columbia, I took courses there. New York City, I loved it. You could go anywhere.

00:31:59 Q: What do you think you most wanted out of life when you were a student? What were you really looking for in terms of going to college at that point?

Yeramyán: I wasn't looking for anything out of college, but my life has been about making a difference. I mean, the central theme of my life has been about that. I used to want to help and do those kinds of things.

But I went to college because that was what was next to do. I didn't have any big thing. Like I didn't want to be a doctor. That was the thing to do, of course I was going to go to college. It was just not a question in my mind, and I don't even know why, it was just everybody did that in Emma Willard. I mean, I don't think anybody didn't go to college.

00:32:49 Q: Yes, if you had the option.

Yeramyán: What?

Q: If you had that option people did it, I guess, it was expected of them.

Yeramyan: It was expected, yes, I had no real qualm in my mind. It's the next thing. But what I focused on was when I got out was I got married, and went to Michigan State, because my husband was getting his doctorate there. I was going to get into [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] MIT. And I was just about to apply, and then I don't think I did. But—because I was Chomsky, mainly I was really liking Chomsky in Linguistics, yes, I was going to go there, and my professor definitely thought I should go there. Now I would go to do that, and be married, or even go to Ann Arbor, and be married. My husband was very open-minded; he would have done that. I just didn't.

00:33:59 Q: And when you went to graduate school you started Linguistics?

Yeramyan: Yes. And then I taught English as a Second Language because I was there as an assistantship.

00:34:09 Q: So how many languages do you know and what are they?

Yeramyan: I grew up bi-lingual: Turkish and Armenian. Then I started French. Then I went to study English. Then in college I took like a year of Spanish, summer school, two semesters, a year's worth of Spanish. That was fine because it was easy. Oh, I took three years of Russian at Barnard. I was a minor in French, but I took three years of Russian, but I was cocky about language at the time because of that AP in French, and obviously I spoke English and all that. I

didn't study much, I thought I could just do it. And I was floundering because I wasn't studying, but then I wanted to continue. I don't like to quit things so I had to continue. But I was in a bad foundation. I didn't ace my first year, and in language you have to have a good foundation [or when] you keep building it just topples. The second year and third year I would cut classes. I had a terrible teacher and had no motivation to go, but I kept it. At the time I was reading the *The Cherry Orchard*, and you know Dostoyevsky, and other things. But I *totally* lost it. I have maybe five words in Russian, really, it's bizarre what's happened to it. Something that I studied *three full years*. *Have you ever done that?*

00:35:59 Q: I came to Barnard majoring in Chinese, because I had done like an institute.

Yeramyán: Yes, it's gone.

00:36:06 Q: It's gone, yes. [Laughs]

Yeramyán: And you read the Chinese characters, and I can read Russian some, difficulty, I get, “Oh that was B and that was B. Oh, okay, that's the M. That's a T.” But—

00:36:24 Q: If you don't use it you lose it.

Yeramyian: If you don't use it you lose it; it's like music or something. It's just like really hard. So—but that's what happens. But the Linguistics was not a function of the language. I thought that was easy. I did things that I liked.

00:36:43 Q: Was it a good department, was it strong?

Yeramyian: The Linguistics? It was strong at the time. I loved the Chair. But he helped me later. I think he wrote a recommendation. Whatever he was petitioning for it didn't happen. He wanted me to do something there as an alumni. But—wish I could remember his name. He was a good guy. I don't know if it was a good department; I liked it. And I just liked the problem solving aspect. I wrote a couple of papers. He said it should be published but never did.

00:37:33 Q: So you said that you didn't have a career in mind when you came to college, but you knew you wanted to do something to change—

Yeramyian: Yes, I mean, I wasn't as aware or conscious about that. But make a difference is a baby boomers kind of thing, a lot of us have been about doing something for the world. In high school I picked a quote, I think it's Emily Dickinson. I don't remember the quote all the way, but, “If I can help one life—” it was like about saving, like touching your life, and that was a poem, like a couple of verses I picked. And I saw that later about me. I didn't know that that well. But it was about teaching. I was into teaching.

Q: About what?

Yeramyian: I was into teaching.

Q: Oh, teaching.

Yeramyian: Then I was going to study Psychology. And I was a good teacher. I made sure people learned and demanded of them to show up and learn. That was one way of making a difference. And later I think—I got disillusioned with academia in a way because I thought it was pure and business was not so pure, and I saw it was all so political. I got disillusioned, so I started my own thing. My husband was saying, “You're so good at management. You should do something. Really think about buying a McDonalds, or something and managing it” that kind of thing, anything. So, and I got into cross-cultural programs for international—the embassies, because at the time—the Arabs were sending these boat-loads of people to learn English. Oh, before that, I was at Temple University, that's where I was for teaching English as a Second Language. And I was the academic director for a while.

00:39:46 Q: So you came back to Philadelphia for—

Yeramyian: Yes, well earlier I left Michigan. We went to North Carolina for a while. And then my husband was getting his Post-Doc in Chemistry, and I was there, and I was studying different things. And then I was in a sexuality teaching-coaching program: Peer Sexuality. So we would

make a difference there with people who had issues, in the campus. I got trained. I passed some class to be accepted in it, and then I got more training for problem pregnancies. Abortions were illegal, and people were harming themselves to try to get rid of the baby. And then in Washington it became legal. I started going to Washington DC to check abortion clinics at the time. I mean I'm like in my twenties. [Laughing] And then I was counseling people in sexuality, as a volunteer.

And then I was also learning the stock market, different things I was doing—

Q: I'm sure you were doing lots.

Yeramyian: And my husband was studying, and I didn't have a job for a while. Then I did get some jobs, odds and ends things, but I was also participating this way. I mean I would get a lot out of supporting people and making a difference to people. So then he got a job in Philadelphia, that's why we came to Philadelphia. With DuPont.

00:41:23 Q: So when did you begin your organization?

Yeramyian: That was after I started working at Temple. I worked at Temple University for five years. And then I got disillusioned. Another story gets patched in. I got disillusioned and then I left to do my own thing. Which was about teaching students. Teaching students in understanding where they would fit best when they were coming. It's so idealistic. [Laughs]. These Arabs and

all the different students were there. They were just shuffled and “You go to be an electrical engineer” but “You go over to do this.” Some were just pushed into whatever. So I had this idealistic idea that I could take the test and so on, all kinds of tests that I put together, and cross-cultural adaptation, and they come, get adapted to the culture, and also would choose what was best for them, kind of thing. Because as I was teaching English at Temple, I saw that younger students who adapt, adapted, were learning faster. I've also always been fascinated by extraordinary performance, how you perform better.

So I created this program that would accelerate people's learning, or where they went to college and make their choices available to them, so on and so forth, all these grandiose ideas. But other than that at the embassies nothing happened. [Laughs]. You know you go to embassies, they say, “Yes, yes, yes,” and then after a while you run out of embassies. [Laughing].

So I started to work with business people, and—I mean I had no idea about business. I had no idea what I was doing.

00:43:18 Q: But your husband said you were a good manager.

Yeramyian: A manager yes, but how to get people? Once I had somebody I would do a good job, but I didn't know marketing. I said, “Marketing? Marketing, what's marketing?” [Laughs] I was working out of my home. I had my children. And looking back it was the biggest joke.

00:43:42 Q: It was a learning experience.

Yeramyian: It was a learning experience, yes. So, then I had somebody who would come and help me. They said, “Oh, I’ll help you,” and then we started doing things. The Scott Paper Company was my first client, I think. It was cross-cultural and we were working with the husband and wife, the couples who were going—the expats, and teaching them adaptation in their countries. I created this. I’d bring people from different countries. Like for Wharton School I would pick some people who were foreign students and I would bring them along, and I had my program, and I would work with them and all that.

But that was a Monday and Tuesday kind of thing, and then I did some consulting with relationships and couples because I had the background in North Carolina, and I was doing that. I was dabbling in all kinds of things to find my way. And I was doing all kinds of learning things, you know taking courses, and OD courses, self-development, self-awareness, everything under the sun. And one of these programs I met somebody from the Wharton School, and he said, “Oh, why don’t you come to the Wharton School. You have cross-cultural experience, and we are doing something, and we’re also doing family business, so maybe you can come and help as a kind of consultant.” So, sure, I was saying yes to anything, so I said, “Yes,” so I started working with them, and we would work with family-held businesses, so I got some business experience working at the Wharton School. I brought my relational communication kind of background, coaching, counseling kind of background to the Wharton business piece, so we used to work

with family held businesses, and do a lot of communication, and the family members and so on and so forth.

00:45:37 Q: And you helped businesses.

Yeramyian: Yes, I helped businesses, and that got me more into the business world directly - big businesses rather than just a couple or something. So then it changed to other places, somebody else heard about me from Digital Corporation then [that doesn't still exist] so we got into that, started working with people. “Oh, we have a team that doesn't produce results, maybe you can help.” “Sure.” So I made it up—some we made our three days and next thing we know their program, their thing took off; and their product made marketing, and they took off, and then we became, “Oh, can you do this,” and we were all over.

00:46:16 Q: So when did your husband start working with you?

Yeramyian: Oh, that's way later; he was at DuPont, he worked for DuPont for twenty years.

00:46:23 Q: Oh, for twenty years, okay, so you were doing this pretty much on your own.

Yeramyian: Yes, with other people that I have gathered, who came to even volunteer to be with me, to create this, and then as we created and made some money then we would work it together.

00:46:38 Q: What was the organization called?

Yeramyán: Gap International.

00:46:41 Q: Oh, yes, so this is Gap International still.

Yeramyán: Yes, yes, it was always; I've never changed.

00:46:45 Q: So you built that over thirty years.

Yeramyán: It started in '79. But for the first five years there was a lot of shakiness there, all kinds of things. [Laughs]. But it's been pretty breakthrough, and I have gone down and up, whatever, but, yes.

00:47:12 Q: So how large is your group now?

Yeramyán: We have over two-hundred people.

00:47:14 Q: Over two hundred. And are they in different countries or different states?

Yeramyán: No, no, they're all in Philadelphia, mostly; there are a couple here and there, but because we work with businesses globally, and it doesn't matter where we go, you never know

where you're going to be. It depends on the needs of a particular business, and we had an office in London for a while, but we don't have offices anywhere really now other than Philadelphia. So we travel everywhere.

00:47:43 Q: So I'm just a little confused, you focus more on cross-cultural or personal benefits?

Yeramyian: It's moved—cross-cultural stopped at the Wharton School, migrated into Family Health Corporations, then I got some backbone in there about working in businesses. Then it migrated into performance communication, and then through that, the other performance and breakthrough goals and so on and so on. It migrated.

00:48:13 Q: Yes, it's grown. It's developed

Yeramyian: Yes, now it's about breakthrough outcomes. I think about outcomes through really growing people, growing companies through growing the people. So we work with people, and also help companies to grow, and also create a purpose and connect to a higher level of possibility then just create and channel the value, which has them produce even better results.

00:48:46 Q: And what do you think nurtured that—the ability to adapt to—?

Yeramyian: I think because I was not giving up; I was not giving up.

00:48:54 Q: Oh, cause you're persistent.

Yeramyam: I was persistent. I mean at one point really I was doing nothing in the first five years or so, three or four, I don't know how many years. And my husband said, "Okay, if you don't get something happening, a business by August, we're just going to close it." Because he saw us being miserable. And then I got business; I got something. [Laughs] So, at last, we had a three hundred dollar project or something. It doesn't matter; we got something. But I think the reason was, in my idea of impacting through either the cross-cultural, you know whatever it was, making a big impact, and believing that if I hung in there one way or another it's going to happen. We call it a "stand" now, "taking a stand," and really believing in it.

00:49:53 Q: And you had made yourself go through Biochemistry and Russian.

Yeramyam: Yes, exactly, exactly.

00:49:57 Q: You honed your skills

Yeramyam: Exactly. Yes, exactly. I didn't quit Russian. I can't believe now that I tortured myself to half-assed classes and just didn't finish it. I mean wouldn't stop, wouldn't quit. I was insane. So, but I think that was the persistence, my stand for, "I'm going to do this; it shall be," kind of thing. Even now, you know, when hard times come, that's what's in my space. And we are a very purposeful company now. Our purpose is transforming organizations, transforming the world.

We think that we can transform the world through the change that happens, and the thinking that happens between the organizations, and that they could make a big difference in the world, and their alignment with others can make a big difference across cultures and countries.

00:51:03 Q: Does this involve a kind of corporate responsibility or—

Yeramyian: No, but it does involve people—because I have seen now over the last thirty-plus years that we're working in corporations and other places—that everyone really wants to make a difference. They're not as in touch to that, but if they could they would. And most people wait till they're gray or they are retired, so they can actually make a difference, and we would like to tap into that piece now, especially CEOs, and create a difference that they can make, the corporation can make. Not because it's the right thing to do at this moment, politically, like social responsibility tends to be that way, but really, really get from how they can contribute to the bigger world around them. And that sense of purpose also contributes to a bigger thing, and people like to do things more than just creating shareholder value, so it inspires. It's not the only thing we do; we do many other things, but that's one of the ways that we do that.

00:52:11 Q: It's interesting. Okay, let's go back then to when you first arrived at Barnard. What are your memories of maybe the first days, the first weeks of what you thought, what you saw, and assuming you had been to New York before that, from your school.

Yeramyán: Yes, just a sidebar but now parents take their kids everywhere, you know unpack them. I didn't do any of that. I had to ship my trunk, and then I showed up. I've always done my own thing. But I went to my dorm.

00:52:55 Q: Did you know your roommate?

Yeramyán: No, I had nobody, I had no roommates.

00:52:57 Q: You had a single, okay.

Yeramyán: I was single, but I was in a dorm, Hewitt, I think it was Hewitt. Maybe it was something else.

Q: Yes, I think so.

Yeramyán: So I had a nice room. I was happy to have a single room, and with a sink [laughs] in those days. I don't know I just started getting things together and creating my room—as my first Barnard room.

But I wasn't worried, I wasn't like anything. I just showed up and went to classes. I just did that and made friends in the hallway, in the halls, from other people, so there was nothing in the way, it kind of flowed.

00:53:57 Q: Can you see the connection between the years you spent at Barnard and what you eventually did in terms of career—

Yeramyán: I did, actually. I've shared this, I mean with my mom before, that when things were tough I used to say, "Well, I went to Barnard, I could do this." And I've been at other schools, but particularly it gave me confidence that I went to Barnard. Yes, I think that's how it's been very meaningful for me in that way.

00:54:31 Q: Did you have any mentors? Any professors who you felt understood you and really nurtured you at all?

Yeramyán: No. Not really. Ultimately I wasn't very social. And I didn't have any particular professor. My Linguistics professor empowered me, and he would say, "You should get published," so that's why I think I just went through that direction. And I was getting A's. I had people, at the language lab. There was a lady there. Mrs. Britting was the wife of the French Head of the department, a professor, so I got to know them. But no, I didn't have any mentors, there, no.

00:55:19 Q: I think we're all a bit shy that way.

Yeramyán: Yes.

Q: And we lost that opportunity.

Yeramyán: We did, because now I'm so different, especially now. In my children's time it wasn't that different, but now especially it's almost like college is high school. [Laughs] Parents' Day? I don't remember Parents Day and things like that. It's unbelievable, but anyway it's just how it is now. I'm very happy to have gone to Barnard.

00:55:50 Q: So who would you say was the most influential person in your life when you were younger and now.

Yeramyán: Different people. My parents were very influential in my life. I did the [Erhard Seminars Training, Inc.] est training.

00:56:22 Q: You did the what?

Yeramyán: Est training.

00:56:27 Q: Oh, est, I'm sorry yes.

Yeramyán: Yes, it's a self-help kind of thing, and that changed my life. I forgot that when you asked about changing my life. And the leader of that, Werner Erhard, I think he was a major

influence at the time. But it also brought out my intent to make a difference, to contribute, and I understood about my contribution. Now it's under Landmark Education. So that made a difference in my life, a major difference in my life. I woke up to the possibility of what life could be, what I could do, and people's—*my* wanting to make a difference. So that brought it out of me, so that was a major thing for many years, participating in different ways, the different programs. Now different people, different business people I get, and so on mentor me. But, mainly my parents and maybe my aunt somewhat here, but my parents, and Werner Erhard est Training, those are the pieces that have really changed my perspective.

My parents gave me the perspective. And always going to the top and being the best. Those were the kinds of things I learned. And from the est Training I learned to give more, to volunteer, because I volunteered a lot. To express myself, to open up; it did a lot of things for my own expression to come out, for freedom of my expression, which wasn't there before. So those are the kinds of things that I really grew and expanded in. Finding ways to express myself, not necessarily the way other people did. I found my way and still do. That's why I could do this amazing thing about working with people I used to be scared to death of, big business people or so called “humma hummas”. And now I coach them, but that's because of my self-expression coming out, and myself being relentless about that, my own freedom. That has made a big difference in my life.

00:58:55 Q: Okay, good. So you said—we're going back again and looking at '68, and then we had other interruptions in our education because of other protests over the years, '70 again after

Kent State, you said that your—what became—who became your future husband had said,
“Don't get involved in SDS.”

Yeramyán: Well, because of my nationality.

00:59:15 Q: Because of your—now was he politically involved?

Yeramyán: No. He was a scientist. [Laughs]

00:59:23 Q: That explains everything. Okay. Did you have friends who were involved in like
occupying the buildings, or—?

Yeramyán: No.

00:59:33 Q: Not really? So this was really on your own, you were just kind of—

Yeramyán: Yes, I don't know, there were some people I guess I was friends with, but I don't
remember. I was just going for it kind of thing. He was a—what was the other party, the very
conservative party? My first blind date that I met in a dance, my first so-called boyfriend, was
not a Mormon, but was from Utah.

01:00:03 Q: Oh, that's a cultural shock too.

Yeramyán: It's a culture shock, yes. And he was the other party, when I first met him. [Majority Coalition].

01:00:11 Q: I don't know what they called themselves. [Majority Coalition].

Yeramyán: No, no, there was something, there was something really conservative, so he was very conservative, a good boy, whatever, but we broke off. But, yes, I didn't even know what the SDS was—it was just that some movement, to stopping war. I think it was the stopping war piece. I wasn't into these kinds of things.

01:00:36 Q: How about protests against the Vietnam War? Did you actually go to any of the marches, or—?

Yeramyán: I might have done something. That's why I think my now husband got freaked out, and I would be caught in a picture or somewhere and they would just send me back. That was his fear.

01:00:54 Q: And was he also Armenian?

Yeramyán: He was Armenian from Istanbul originally, yes.

01:01:00 Q: Oh, okay, but you hadn't known him before?

Yeramyán: No, no, no. Somebody actually introduced us who knew us both in Istanbul, as a setup.

01:01:06 Q: Oh, okay.

Yeramyán: Yes, and we both did not want to be introduced that way, but I liked him a lot, and because he was a rebel, you know, in a certain way.

01:01:16 Q: Are you still married?

Yeramyán: Yes.

01:01:17 Q: Okay, that's a long time.

Yeramyán: Yes, it's a long time. And when I met him he had a big beard, and later on he had Jesus hair, kind of long hair.

01:01:26 Q: A little hippie?

Yeramyán: A little hippie, he had his long hair like this.

01:01:29 Q: Yes, you had long hair too.

Yeramyán: Yes. Yes. I had short hair; then it became long. However, when I first went to Barnard I had short hair, I think, and then it became long, or maybe I just never had it cut, and then I had it cut. There was a time I used to go to a hairdresser, and when I was at Barnard I didn't have my hair cut. And I remember going to the hairdresser, so I don't know what happened, it was long, and it was short, and I guess long again, maybe. Then for a while I had it long.

01:02:00 Q: Well it was the style, and it's come back now.

Yeramyán: Yes, it's coming back.

01:02:05 Q: So it was a really—it was a politically and racially-charged time.

Yeramyán: I didn't know black people.

01:02:14 Q: You didn't what?

Yeramyán: No, I didn't know black people. Where I grew up black were pitch-black men who would sometimes show up in some country, and that would be a good luck symbol. So for me, like African, blacks from Africa, were real African, yes, they'd show up, and that was like good

luck, so I had *no* sense. I wasn't even much historically involved the slavery or anything like that, so when I first came upon Civil Rights, I mean I knew about it, but it was a concept far away, and I was all of sudden in the middle of it. And Emma Willard didn't have that many black people, but there were some people who were involved in it, the words and so on and so forth, yes. Still I'm very inappropriate because I have nothing going on. I can say all kinds of words that are [Q Laughs] taboo and all that. But I don't usually get into trouble because I really don't have anything going on. It's a bizarre thing.

01:03:22 Q: Was there ever a time during your years at Barnard when you did something or thought something that was like, "This is not something I should be doing," like, "This is not me," when you thought you were pulled into an experience that really wasn't honest?

Yeramyán: Pot; I just didn't connect to pot, and I tried it later on too.

Q: Pot, sorry, connect to what?

Yeramyán: Pot. Pot. Marijuana.

01:03:42 Q: Oh, pot, yes, sorry. [Laughs]

Yeramyán: Marijuana, I mean people were doing it—I didn't connect to it.

01:03:51 Q: So you tried it, and it was—didn't do anything to you.

Yeramyán: Yes, I tried it, under duress, because everybody was passing. I didn't even know if I should or I shouldn't but, everybody was doing it. It wasn't right but I was trying it because it didn't do anything—you looked good with everybody else. Didn't do anything, I tried it later when we were in North Carolina, I did it, you know, we'd blow it into each other and all kinds of things, but it didn't do anything even when I was high for a little bit. But I don't get addicted to many things like that.

01:04:28 Q: What about the whole sexual revolution, was that something experimented with?

Yeramyán: I liked it. I don't know what you mean by experiment.

01:04:35 Q: Or, I mean you were aware of it.

Yeramyán: I was aware of it. I was actually into sexuality counseling. I was into counseling gay people and this and that.

01:04:44 Q: Doing what?

Yeramyán: Gays counseling, coaching them. In the school in North Carolina, remember I was involved for a little bit, volunteering. So I was into that, I was much into the freedom of women,

and—then I didn't get into it. There was a professor, an English professor who was much into it at Barnard.

01:05:04 Q: Kate Millet Or Kate Simpson.

Yeramyán: Simpson.

01:05:09 Q: Simpson, yes.

Yeramyán: Yes, she was gay, I think. Anyway she was really into it. All these were new things for me, but I was very much part of it. My husband and I used to talk about open marriages at the time. You know we were—“Our Bodies, Ourselves,” it was this thing you know, about women, and being free with themselves, and my sexuality training, and getting into things. So I was very much in part of that space.

01:05:47 Q: Oh, okay. Where do you think all that openness came from?

Yeramyán: I don't know; I was curious.

01:05:53 Q: You were just curious, yes.

Yeramyán: Yes, and we were *so* not open when I grew up.

Q: Yes

Yeramyan: Yes, I mean you didn't have sex, unless you were married, and it was something you don't talk about. It was all about making a difference at all that. I didn't know it then but looking back I was committed to my expression—because I was kind of shut down.

[Interruption]

01:06:45 Q: So was there ever any pressure from your family, your aunt, your parents, like, “You're being a bad girl,” or whatever?

Yeramyan: I was a bad girl because I dated a Jewish guy from Turkey.

01:06:54 Q: [Laughs] Who was this?

Yeramyan: Not my husband, my first real boyfriend.

01:07:00 Q: Oh, okay, a Jewish guy from Turkey.

Yeramyan: Yes, I met him at Columbia Business School. And I shouldn't be dating somebody. I should be dating an Armenian. I was in Armenian groups and so on, but there wasn't anybody.

There was one guy, I think, wanted me. I didn't know it then, but later on it showed up. But, I was a bad girl that way.

01:07:28 Q: Okay, so it was—your parents stepped in there when they knew about that.

Yeramyán: They didn't.

01:07:31 Q: No, but you knew you were.

Yeramyán: I knew I was, yes. And then my aunt told my mom. I didn't say anything. But by that time he went back to Turkey, and I kind of ended it in a way. He had a two-year Fulbright Scholarship; he was going to Columbia MBA. But he had to go back, and I decided it was not going to work out. It was too much being a first child, whatever, it was guilt, and I just wasn't feeling good about it. And he had to go back. If he hadn't gone back, I don't know, but he had to go back.

01:08:09 Q: Right, so you ended it.

Yeramyán: Yes, so it kind of ended it, yes. I mean that was my first big love. I didn't know I was going to find anybody, so on and so forth. And then my husband came after that. So that's the major kind of rebellious thing, one of the rebellious things I've done.

01:08:32 Q: So you said you were never that politically conscious or aware and involved. Do you remember how you felt like during the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and then Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, and the riots that ensued?

Yeramyian: Robert F. Kennedy was before that. Wasn't Robert F. Kennedy before I came?

01:08:47 Q: No, Robert F. Kennedy is the same year, '68, that summer.

Yeramyian: Okay, I was very upset about Robert because we were idolizing Kennedy, the Kennedy's in Turkey.

01:08:57 Q: Yes, the brother, John F. Kennedy, who was President.

Yeramyian: That's who it was.

01:08:59 Q: That's who you think of, yes, but then his brother also ran for president, and was killed in '68.

Yeramyian: John F. Kennedy was a major big deal when he was assassinated. The Shah of Iran was a big deal when he got—came out, I mean that was later. Then Martin Luther King Jr. I did not know well enough; it was just a bad thing, but I wasn't emotionally engaged at the time. I'm

more engaged after that, because we used the speeches and so on as part of our taking a stand kind of thing, so, I memorized almost all his speeches.

01:09:28 Q: You memorized his speeches?

Yeramyian: Because I've heard it so much; we show it in our programs. So I know one of the speeches, you know the major march: *Free at Last. Free at Last.* That one. But I didn't appreciate him then.

01:09:54 Q: So was anyone you knew involved with the draft, trying to get out of the draft in Vietnam?

Yeramyian: That's another thing. I forgot about the draft. I was told but I couldn't imagine people just being drafted and having to go, although in Turkey everybody serves in the military. Well now they've changed, and your time, you know if you go to college they make it better, and you know you get to a higher level, like here, you get to an officer state, but now you can buy it in two months. You can do two months and pay a lot of money and get out of it, in Turkey. But at the time, this was like people really didn't want to; and they were going to be drafted to the war, and their minds, and it was just awful to me, just awful.

01:10:39 Q: Yes, it is.

Yeramyán: It's the whole combination of the draft conversations and the war, and I don't know; it seemed awful

01:10:52 Q: Do you remember ever being sort of frightened by it, cause they were having—they were burning up in Harlem, you know they were literally—

Yeramyán: Never frightened. I was always safe. I walked Manhattan, and from the beginning to the end. Yes, we used to walk, this boyfriend, my business school boyfriend, we used to walk a lot from beginning to end, and all kinds of ways. It took hours. On Saturday nights after dates and things, you know at the end. I don't know how I did that. [Laughs]. It's amazing.

01:11:32 Q: We were young. [Laughs] We were young.

Yeramyán: Yes.

01:11:37 Q: Okay, anything else you want to say about those four years at Barnard and how it might have affected you—

Yeramyán: I said it before, I have a sense of maximizing on things, that's the way I think, and I think I've used just about everything I've done, in every space. I have *very* good memories of Barnard. I appreciate Emma Willard, but I have not so much memories there, just because I was adjusting. It's nothing to do with them, particularly. And afterwards I went to Michigan State

because my husband was there, to get my Masters. Like my English high school I have very good memories, Barnard I have *very* good memories and I think it's made a big difference, and my daughter ended up going there.

01:12:38 Q: What did she major?

Yeramyán: She majored in Psych. She was a Pre-Med, then she decided she didn't want to be a doctor, so she majored in Psychology. She works in our company now.

01:12:47 Q: Oh, great, oh, good, good.

Yeramyán: So that's really what I have; I'm very proud of the fact that I went there, and of the college. And I love the connection with Columbia.

01:13:04 Q: So if you can go back and whisper something in the ear of your—when you first arrived, what would that be, based on what you've done in the life since.

Yeramyán: When I first arrived?

01:13:15 Q: I mean eighteen-nineteen-years-old what—

Yeramyán: Sixteen.

01:13:20 Q: Oh, you're sixteen,

Yeramyán: I went to high school

01:13:21 Q: So you skipped all those years. [Laughs] I forgot. You were young, oh, my gosh?

Yeramyán: Yes, I was. Well, first I would say there's such a thing as culture shock, and it helped me to understand that things may happen to me, and to remember they're all expat things.

01:13:45 Q: You built on that experience.

Yeramyán: Yes, I built on the experience, and I could understand and appreciate that it could be subtle, life could just happen to you. So that would be something I would whisper in my ear.

01:13:59 Q: That's an important one.

Yeramyán: Yes.

01:14:03 Q: How about in terms of your career, your volunteer work, or your family life, what was probably the most memorable day or experience, and kind of on the same vein, what would —what do you see as probably your greatest accomplishment?

Yeramyán: Well you asked too many questions, now. The first one is about memorable?

01:14:27 Q: Yes, most memorable, yes.

Yeramyán: This is a harder track, but I was always interested in understanding God. And when I was nine or ten years old, I was always with a girlfriend of mine. When I was in the British school I met her. I just talked to her yesterday, [Laughs] She's in Canada. I was always wondering, “Where is God? Is God in me? Is God outside? And if there's God why is this, why is that?” And, you know, so God was always, “Who am I”, and, “What am I,” and all those important questions. And I thought some amazing things would happen. I always had a sixth sense I'd say in those days about things that I didn't know why it happened, the way I knew things would happen.

01:15:22 Q: This is from an early age, huh?

Yeramyán: Yes, and when I did the est Training—in those days, I got the sense that I was connected to a bigger thing, and that I was the possibility of God on Earth. And I got that sense from myself that was very powerful. And I was connected to the larger universe in a more direct way. And that was very powerful. So that was it. I was very powerful. What was the question you asked me after that?

01:16:05 Q: Maybe what you consider your greatest accomplishment.

Yeramyán: My greatest accomplishment is having two great children that I'm very close to, and we are very close to the family.

01:16:18 Q: Have they been raised knowing your larger Armenian roots, has that been a big part of their life, as—?

Yeramyán: Yes, how they raise their kids now. They went to Armenian school. They both married to Americans. I mean, one got divorced, but they're raising their kids in Armenian context too. They have Armenian nannies. But I'm really mostly proud of our relationship. They're very connected, very open, very clean. So I'm very proud of that, and I'm very proud of what we have created, not just by myself, that I've created with a connection with others. Like there are people in there that we were together thirty-plus years in building the company, that I've allowed everyone to participate together and our intention is to make a big difference in the world, and maybe possibly transform it with other people. A lot of effort is going on in transforming even though a lot of bad things are going on. So, we're still standing and that can happen in this lifetime.

01:17:27 Q: That's very impressive.

Yeramyán: I mean, why not? We're standing for having the amazing happen, and we bring out the amazing in people. That's our intent, two different ways. So I'm proud that I was fortunate enough to be able to do that, with gathering people together, or people showing up in that space.

01:18:01 Q: I think some of our politicians could use a little counseling from you. [Laughs] If we're ever going to move forward in this world.

Yeramyán: Yes, I know, that's why I don't think the world is going to necessarily come together from politicians. I think the large businesses have much more economic influence on people's lives. And people come together from all kinds of countries who hate each other politically, but then when it comes to business they work together beautifully. There's a possibility of them and then their own—connected to their purpose—to make a difference. I mean they're all the large networks of people.

Q: Kind of a wave that generates—

Yeramyán: Yes, Coca-Cola or something, you know people pay more allegiance to the company they work for than sometimes in their country, because their livelihood is dependent on that. And so I see more possibility in that than politics. I mean it's important, but it's too political. [Laughs] I think that's what our intent is, and even that I had no idea about business I've taken that route because I think it has a possibility of something amazing. Who knows.

01:19:31 Q: Yes, no, it's quite exciting, you know you've kept this up for a long time, and you're continuing to.

Yeramyian: Yes, I still intend to keep growing.

01:19:44 Q: Okay, let's look at sort of class, race, gender experiences. Have you ever had a—do you feel you were discriminated against because you're a woman?

Yeramyian: I was discriminated in Turkey somewhat. But I never felt discriminated. There I might have been discriminated because I didn't get different jobs, and maybe for somebody all dressed up, a nice tall man or something, named, John something. I had a lot of things going against me: short little import with an accent.

01:20:21 Q: I've never heard anyone referred to as the “short little import.” [Laughs]

Yeramyian: With a weird name.

Q: Yes.

Yeramyian: Yes, I mean it's got so many pieces to it.

[Interruption]

Yeramyian: I didn't think that it was a problem for me to be able. , I mean, my aunt was a big successful chemist at the time, a PhD researcher. And my family was there, but I didn't have a handicap, myself, and I think a lot of people have already perhaps had a handicap. I had a handicap, and I didn't stop, I wouldn't be stopped. So if that one didn't like me too bad I had to go to the next one. I'd go to the next thing. I've not been much victimized in my life, let me put it that way. No, I don't have any bad experience being a woman. And I'm very much a stand for women. I'm in *Fortune's* Most Powerful Women's Conference, and I get their emails and other women networks that send things to me, but I very much stand that it's possible to have it all. There was a lot of controversy, when I went to my daughter's Barnard graduation, I think she was a very well-known important *New York Times* editor or something. She was giving a speech, the graduation speech. I almost closed my ears, I felt so depressed. She was saying, “Forget about it —If you are a women forget about it.”

Q: Oh, no!

Yeramyian: “If you want to go to a career forget about family, forget about marriage.” It was just awful. I don't feel that way.

Q: No.

Yeramyan: I think it's possible. It probably is harder than men, but that's just too bad. That's how it is. I'm not victimized by it, it's just how it is, so you gotta do what you gotta do. And there are prejudices perhaps about women, but I think it's, like it's, "So?" So I haven't had anything.

01:22:49 Q: Do you think that you've had that feeling, that sort of self-empowerment since you were young?

Yeramyan: My parents did it for me, I think. My father was a very open-minded man.

Yes, I felt like I could do or be anything, even though they never *said* it that way, but the only thing was that my father didn't get me a boat, a motorboat. I used to like motorboats. I liked to sit in the front and just go to the island where we used to go in the summers. He said if I had been a son I would get a motorboat. That's the only time I've been discriminated. [Laughter]

Q: Oh, well.

Yeramyan: Oh, well, right. But you know—if I weren't Armenian, I wouldn't have left the country so in that way, maybe, I would have run the business and so on and so forth, but they didn't see that future for me. So there are things like that, but I don't know. They're not significant for me.

01:23:54 Q: There'd never been obstacles.

Yeramyán: They've not been obstacles for me, no.

01:24:02 Q: Is there—looking at sort of a—intimate relationships, between men and women, who would you say or what would you say is a relationship that's been the most shaping in your life, I mean, your marriage, your husband?

Yeramyán: I don't understand the question.

01:24:20 Q: I guess I'm just asking a relationship that changed the way your life moved, meeting your husband, getting married young? Or was there some other—?

Yeramyán: Getting married did make a difference in my confidence in myself. Like I didn't have to worry about it.

01:24:38 Q: Oh, it was good for you?

Yeramyán: Yes, Yes, Yes. I was loved. And you know we were very intimate. My husband and I were very connected. And I felt secure to go out to the world, so I think it's made a very positive difference that I knew when I came home he'd be there for me, for my troubles or all kind of things, and hard days and whatever, bitching and moaning at the time. I felt good that I had

somebody who I could come home to. And also I didn't have to worry about having a relationship, and so I felt very fortunate to have a relationship.

01:25:19 Q: Did you have a romantic meeting once it was fixed up for the two of you to first get together.

Yeramyán: I mean we didn't fix any. We were introduced.

01:25:25 Q: Yes, you were introduced.

Yeramyán: From far away, but, I mean he just came to visit me. We talked for four hours straight. And I decided it was him. I decided it was it, Yes.

01:25:33 Q: That's wonderful.

Yeramyán: Even though he was a little older than me, quite a bit older. I mean he was eight and a half years older than me, and my limit was five. But he met just about every criteria. So, yes, I decided—he did not know that, but—[Laughter] I'm very fortunate.

01:25:58 Q: Did that pursuing a career and also raising your children—I mean you said you could have it all, but can you say a little more about that, was there ever a conflict there? Any particular years when you really had to struggle to—

Yeramyran: I felt guilty about working, and teaching at Temple, and working, or later on going away and working. But I was also participating [unclear] while volunteering a lot. So my kids would say, “You know others mommies would do this and that,” and I felt bad. I felt bad leaving weekends I would go away, I mean, I've done a lot of leaving, and I felt bad. Sometimes they would say, “Mommy, just don't leave, please,” and cry. And “You're always gone,” and this and that. But I have thought that if I gave up on that I wouldn't be the best mother to them. I mean my expression, my fulfillment was important for me to be a good mother, and I think that's what got me going. I can't say I didn't feel terrible at times, or guilty leaving. But later on they've been very proud of me. And you know my daughter, when she graduated high school she said, “Mom, I'm so proud of you,” and I didn't expect that. She was, “So proud of you, Mommy, because I know I can do anything.” And, you know, she was with friends, and they didn't have that future because for them the future was much smaller. So it wasn't easy coordinating all of them. My husband has a big part in having that all work. Yes, because we didn't have nannies and things. I mean, we worked quite hard. They went to school, but we worked quite hard to have it all happen.

01:27:56 Q: So he was able to help with the childcare as well.

Yeramyran: Yes.

Q: And he was very supportive of you.

Yeramyán: He was *very* supportive of me. I I was *very* fortunate, yes. I haven't done anything really by myself. That's how I look at it. I've always found people have shown up for me to contribute to me. So I had to keep opening myself to have people contribute to me. Yes, I do think that it's possible. I stand for that it's possible.

01:28:29 Q: Okay, you touched a little bit about when you were young, and your father's involvement in Armenian religion. How about your own religion, or spirituality? Do you remember raised with a particular faith?

Yeramyán: Oh, yes, Armenian faith, yes, Armenian Orthodox.

01:28:46 Q: It's Armenian Christian.

Yeramyán: Armenian Orthodox Christian, yes.

01:28:47 Q: So it's an Orthodox Christian. Very, very—

Yeramyán: We have our own Catholicos, our own thing.

01:28:53 Q: Your own saints and your own—

Yeramyán: Yes, saints, archbishops.

01:28:57 Q: And Archbishops and everything.

Yeramyán: Yes, Catholicos. They're equal to Pope. But Armenians in Turkey were not people who went to church every week. Went for the major holidays, but you always knew you were Christian in a Muslim country, and we celebrated Christmas. Santa came on New Year's, not at Christmas because Armenian Christmas was on the 6th of January, and we never celebrated the other Christmas at the time. But the big thing was a New Year, because the whole of Turkey celebrated New Year, and Santa came on New Year's, and then we had our Christmas, and Easter. We had eggs, you know, colored eggs and that kind of thing.

01:29:40 Q: Is it the same calendar as the Greek Orthodox?

Yeramyán: Not for Easter.

01:29:45 Q: Not for Easter, though.

Yeramyán: It's something. So, but then there are churches that we went to, and other churches too. There was a Catholic Church. My mother would go pray for a minute, light a candle, that kind of thing, but we're, except for major holidays we were not—it was more spiritual. And my father's involvement was definitely on making a difference in the domain. The religions of

people showed up when I came to the U.S. And to me all Christians were more Christians than anything, and Catholic/Protestant, you know that became very different, and became more significant when I came here. I studied them conceptually, and I had some Catholic friends, you know, but really no big deal. The whole Irish, and Ireland and Scotland, and those kinds of things they were just very, very bizarre. But, I'm more spiritual than religious, although I honor our religion. I go to church, but it's not so dogmatic as much as it is a connection to God.

01:31:05 Q: So has the est—has that ever conflicted with—not really?

Yeramyan: No, not really. Not really. I only take the best of things, I think. Yes, I used to learn a lot, experiment a lot, volunteered a lot, more about giving more. So you know I don't count hours, even with our clients or anybody I don't count things. But that's all learned. I mean my parents, my father was giving a lot too, and my mother in different ways, but also the volunteerism of our spirit I learned.

01:31:47 Q: Yes, well good. Okay, do you want to say anything more about your children?

Yeramyan: Other than I love them. [Laughs] No, I've been very fortunate, really, to have children who are connected and contribute.

01:32:09 Q: Just two daughters?

Yeramyán: I have two daughters, yes.

01:32:12 Q: And do they live nearby? You said one works with you.

Yeramyán: One of them lives a few minutes away; one of them lives in New York City. She's a fashion designer and has her own thing. She also supports our company through art work, as a creative designer in our company. She's head of creative, but she has her own fashion design company.

01:32:34 Q: Is she the one who went to Barnard?

Yeramyán: She went to Parsons.

01:32:38 Q: Oh, sure to get the design—

Yeramyán: She went to Parsons [the New School for Design]. The one who works with us went to Barnard, yes.

01:32:43 Q: Good, good, good. Okay, all right, well we're going to sort of move to the closing, so the next question is what do you look forward to, and what kind of dreams and hopes do you have for the future?

Yeramyán: I look forward to making a huge difference in this world.

01:32:59 Q: That's been a theme from the beginning, yes.

Yeramyán: To this planet. And finding ways, and connections, and knowing, changing, sometimes finding a different mindset to try to solve the issues.

01:33:20 Q: And in terms of your personal life? Are you hoping to continue with the company?

Yeramyán: Yes.

01:33:24 Q: For as long as you're—

Yeramyán: I would probably work till I don't. I know this is my kind of hobby as much as my work. I don't need to work. I mean, it's my passion, so I never call that work really.

01:33:39 Q: Because you love it.

Yeramyán: Yes, I love the difference it makes to people, and moving the world forward.

01:33:51 Q: Yes. Is there anything else about change you'd like to change? You'd like to say that I haven't covered?

Yeramyán: No.

01:33:59 Q: Okay, well thank you. Thank you for sharing all that.

Yeramyán: Thank you.

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