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Interview no. 769

Hana Farah

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Hana Farah
INTERVIEWER: Cynthia Farah
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 30, 1975
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
TAPE NO.: 769
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 769
TRANSCRIBER: Rebecca Craver

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born in Lebanon, immigrated to U.S. 1910, moved to El Paso 1916.
Her husband, Frank Farah, founded Farah Manufacturing Company.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Describes the founding of Farah Manufacturing Company and
discusses family members.

Length of Interview: 25 minutes Length of Transcript 11 pages

Hana Farah (1896-1978)
Interviewed by Cynthia Farah
January 30, 1975

H: I'm Hana Farah, no, Hana Abihider Farah. I was born in Baskinta, Lebanon, 1896.

C: Where's Baskinta located in Lebanon?

H: Oh, it's about the end of Lebanon, between the mountains.

C: What was it like growing up in Lebanon?

H: It was lovely. A beautiful, little town. We had four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter. And it was really beautiful.

C: What was the land like?

H: What do you mean by that?

C: Were there mountains or ...?

H: This was surrounded with mountain.

C: How did people make their living?

H: Well, some of them had little orchards and they raised corn and wheat. They didn't have much really.

C: How large was your family?

H: Oh, I came from a big family. [Chuckles]

C: [Chuckles] How big?

H: We were 16 children. Course only 10 of us lived. I was the second to the oldest.

C: And how many boys and how many girls?

H: We were 6 girls and uh, ...

C: 4 boys.

H: 4 boys.

C: What did your father do?

H: He was a priest. The people in Lawrence, Mass., some of them sent away

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for him to come to this country and serve as their priest.

C: This was in Massachusetts?

H: In Lawrence, Massachusetts. We lived there 5 years.

C: When did he come to the United States?

H: I guess it was 1910. You know I have very poor memory. Just my older brother, my father, and myself, we came first. Daddy thought maybe in another year or two after he get 'em established, build a church for 'em and everything, he'd go back. But instead, he brought the family back. We never did go back. You know, I was only I guess 14 years old, never left that little town, so for me it was quite experience coming and riding the buggy, horse ... [Laughs]

C: What do you remember about Massachusetts?

H: Oh, Massachusetts a lovely place. I remember it well because I was old enough when we got there. It was beautiful. Of course now it changed. When we came they used to have a lot of vacant lots you know and they have apples, pears, walnuts, chestnuts. We used to go and help ourselves. Really it was fun. It's not like that anymore. It's all buildings. That's what they call progress.

C: When did your family leave Massachusetts?

H: They never left Massachusetts.

C: When did you leave?

H: Myself, 1915, when I got married.

C: Tell me how you met your husband.

H: Well, he was in business in Las Cruces. Hay and dry goods business and he used to go to New York once a year to, I guess, buy for the store. So he met a couple of families, Syrian families. They knew my daddy. And he was looking for a wife, so [laughs] they told him to come and see my

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daddy. So of course he told 'em there were two or three of us girls. I was the oldest. I was about 19 [years old.] So it wasn't two or three weeks, and we were married. That was fast business. [Laughs]

C: Really? What do you first remember about him?

H: All I remember of him that he was a friend of the family from the same town where I was raised. And you know when you have company you always try to do nice things for them, so that's the way it went.

C: So then you went back with him to Las Cruces?

H: Yes. We got married and came to Las Cruces. That's where he lived.

C: And what year was that, again?

H: 1915. In June, the first of June we got married.

C: What were your first impressions of Las Cruces?

H: I liked it. I really liked this place.

C: What did it look like back then?

H: Well, you know the mountains. We came through here first. We stayed here a couple of nights before we went [to Las Cruces.]

C: In El Paso?

H: [Yes] I said, "This is like the old country." With all the mountains and everything. I really liked it.

C: What was the town of Las Cruces like?

H: It was very small town. It's beautiful now, but it was a very small town, 1915.

C: What did people do for a living then?

H: Well, most of them had business or profession. I don't remember that. All I know: Frank and his brother had a dry goods store and they were in the hay business. They had a big warehouse full of alfalfa. You know, they'd bale it. They buy it in the summer, when it's growing, you know,

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they contract it and bale it, and they store it and they sell it in the winter when they make money out of it.

C: What was the next major event in your life?

H: I guess when my Jimmy was born.

C: What year was that?

H: 1916. One year after we were married. One year and a few months.

C: Then when was Willie born?

H: 1919.

C: And they grew up in Las Cruces?

H: Yes. No, Willie was 16 months when we sold in Las Cruces and went to New York. He went to learn the shirt business. He went to school there in New York to learn all about making shirts. I went and stayed with my family for about a month I guess. Then we came back to Las Cruces. I stopped in Rincon in New Mexico. That's where his sister used to live, with her family. I stayed there to visit with them a week or so while he came to El Paso and bought a home on Yandell. Then he went for me and we came home. And this is it. And then he started shirts on San Francisco Street. It's a small place. We started to make shirts. [We had] four or five machines and of course, they had to have a buttonhole machine and one to sew the buttons. It's a small place. He built a balcony for his office. He could see everything and still he had room for his desk and little cabinets. A small office. I forgot how long we were there and then we moved to a place on Oregon Street, big room.

C: To live or to work?

H: Oh, no, to work. He bought a house and went back for me when I was in Rincon. So we moved the factory to Oregon Street. It was a big room and we were doing better every day. So one time we had 40 or 50 dozen shirts

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already made, to be shipped. Well, that night they made a hole in the wall and got away with all the shirts! All that order! There was a garage next door. They were in the garage and nobody watched them. You know, at night they made a big hole and got away with all that order. So that wasn't easy to face in the morning. But thank God, we didn't worry. We started to work again and made up for it.

C: Did the boys help around?

H: Honey, Jimmy was only 5 years old, and Willie was 18 months old when we came here.

C: So the business expanded and then did you move again or just get more business?

H: Sure. Got a little bigger. From Oregon we went to Leon Street. The Chamber of Commerce used to be on San Francisco Street. We were in back of the Chamber of Commerce, big room. There was a hotel above us. And there was, you know, those fire escapes ... They got on the fire escape, got in through the window and went down and made a big hole. So we lived through that too. [Laughs] We were there for a while and it started to get better and better. Then we moved to the Times Building, used to be the Times Building on San Francisco Street. We rented one room. The whole floor was divided into three rooms, three sections. We rented the corner room, and Mr. Farah had to pay to build stairway for our help, for us to go up because they only had elevators, and elevators were in the front of the building, and we were on the side. And we worked there, and it started to get better, and we hire more and more. Willie was getting a little smart over there, God bless him. [Laughs] He built a big shaft and put the machines there. One motor will run all of them. In the other place each machine was separate. Well, this one was - I don't know what

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you call it - straight line he made it. And it got better and better every day. So we rented the second room, the second section of that floor. Wasn't long they took the third section. After a while it wasn't enough. So we were on the third floor, we went on the fourth floor. Oh, a couple of years after that we lost Mr. Farah of course. And the boys were getting better every day. You know they took over very nicely. The Second World War came and Willie went to war. So we stopped all our work and worked for the government. Then Willie came back, thank goodness, after three and a half years. Of course, when he came he wanted to make it bigger. Jimmy was a very fine businessman, but he didn't care to split too much, but Willie did. [Laughs] So ...

C: So you did move again?

H: Yes. They build a place on Third Street. One floor. We had three or four floors on San Francisco and then they build one floor, the whole block and they moved everything from all those floors to one floor on Third Street. And they worked there for awhile, I don't know how many years. And then they built Paisano. Well, I thought this is it; we don't build anymore. Well, it wasn't a few years on Paisano and they bought ground on Gateway.

C: What year was that?

H: Well, I don't remember the years. I think '62 or '63, something like that. But Jimmy got sick and died.

C: Tell me about the work that you did at the factory. Did you work late?

H: Oh, boy, you ask about that? When Mr. Farah used to go out on the road and we couldn't afford to have a mechanic all the time, we couldn't afford to have a cutter all the time. He did that and we used to get, after work, from the other factories, they come in and want to make extra

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money. So I'd have to wait for them when Mr. Farah was out on the road. I'd have to wait so they could come and do the work. One night I was afraid. It started to rain after we got home. Mr. Farah and poor Jimmy were out on the road. It was summer vacation, and he wanted to go with his dad and so he did. His dad used to travel in a car. He went with him. I don't think he was more than 12 years old, something like that. Willie and I were at home. So we locked and left one evening, one afternoon after work. And I went to sleep. I woke up and it was raining. I said, "Oh, my goodness, I wonder if I closed the window. Oh, I did. No, I didn't." I couldn't sleep. I hated to go and leave Willie sleep by himself. I was afraid of fire or somebody get in or something. Then I woke him up. I hated to do it, but I woke him up. I said, "I'm sorry, sweetheart, but we have to go see if the windows are locked." Poor kid. He didn't say anything. Got up and got ready and went. We went on the streetcar. Mind you I didn't drive then. Well, we went there and opened the door and everything was fine. We locked again and came home, but I could sleep then. I felt at ease. We used to have streetcars then, no buses, streetcars.

C: What else did you do around the factory?

H: Oh, I used to see that the girls doing good workmanship and kept them supplied with work, because you know if you didn't watch, when they finish their bundle, they sit down. They don't care. [Laughs] That's all I did. Watch the workmanship and made sure they had enough to do.

C: Were you a good supervisor?

H: Oh, I don't know about that. They said I was, but I don't think so. [Laughs]

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Slight pause

H: Right after school, they were at the factory. And then Willie went to college and he used to come home right after work. I was kind of worried a little bit about him because he loved to go out and have a good time. A decent good time. He was a good boy. But poor Jimmy would come home, never goes anywhere hardly. Sometimes I felt depressed about that. I wanted him to get out. I wanted him to get out and have a good time. But thank God, they turned out to be very, very good boys like their daddy. [Mr. Frank Farah] used to go out on the road. He was the only salesman we had, and we had a lot of people came from our home town where he and I were born and raised. They had business in Arizona, in the valley you know in California. Those days the older folks, that's all they knew what to do, dry goods stores and things like that. Now of course all their children are well educated. They went for professions, lawyers and doctors and But not in my days. They were all storekeepers. [Chuckles] But they had good business. They educated their children and everything. You know his name is Mansour, but it's hard to pronounce. That's why they started to call him Frank, but his real name is Mansour Farah. Farah. Can you say that? That's in Arabic. And he used to travel in the car. And a couple of times he took Jimmy with him. There were a lot of people in Arizona, came from the same hometown we came from. They were in the dry goods business. That's all they know what to do. And when he used to go, and they would ask about me because they knew my father and mother, - they didn't know me much because I was a little girl there when they left - he used to tell 'em how happy he was I didn't make him drive every night after dinner. I wouldn't say, "Come

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on, let's go, Frank. Come on, let's go for a ride." [Laughter] He was thankful I didn't ask him to go because he didn't care to drive.

C: Where did he travel?

H: California, Arizona, New Mexico, and the Lower Valley. I don't remember. Well, anyway, around here.

C: When did you get your first salesman?

H: Oh, I think Eph Krupp was our first salesman. Maybe another guy was there before him. But Eph worked with us a long time, and then he became president of the salesmen. We had so many later, and he was the head of them. He was giving 'em instruction and, you know, telling them what to do. Willie and Betty got married and they really made a good couple. I'm so proud of both of them. Their first child was named Jimmy Clifton. He is the apple of my eye. And my Jimmy and Willie wanted to get me out of the factory. They said I should get out and enjoy my living. Of course I was enjoying my living there anyway. But when Betty had the first child, Jimmy Clifton, boy I walked out and went to the hospital and then I went downtown and I forgot to pay a nickel on the meter and it cost me a dollar. And I used to tell them, "Jimmy Clifton, the day you were born, it cost me a dollar." [Laughs] Anyway, I enjoyed him very much. And then we had Kenneth and later Robert and Haleen. And she is a doll. God bless her. She's the only girl in the Farah family. When they had that contest and she didn't win to be a queen, she was one of the attendants. I was so proud of her. The girls would say, before the election, "Oh, Mrs. Farah, she's gonna be queen. She's gonna be queen." I said, "Look, if she's gonna be queen, it's wonderful. But if she isn't, I don't care. She's our queen anyway. She's the only girl in the family."

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C: What was Jimmy like as a little boy?

H: Oh, he was a doll. He's still a big doll to me. I used to live on Mesa, and we had a big, beautiful pecan tree, way high. He was a little boy and had flowers. When he'd walk by the flowers, his head and the flowers were about the same, even you know. And he'd say, "Oh, Sitie, look at the pecans." Well, we'd found one or two on the ground. Then I picked 'em up when he's not looking at me and I'd throw 'em way up and they'd come down, "Oh, there're some more!" And then when he's not looking I pick them up and throw them up again and they'd fall and "Some more!" And we'd pick them up [Chuckles] again and they'd fall and "Some more!" And we'd pick them up [Chuckles] He was a doll.

C: Do you know any more Jimmy stories?

H: Oh, he is a good boy. He's a fine man now, too, but he's always been a good boy. I don't remember much, but I used to baby sit a lot for them, and boy, was it pleasure for me. And his other grandmother, too, used to babysit. [Laughs]

C: You never fell asleep, did you?

H: Oh, I did [a] few times, and that's when his father and mother didn't let me babysit anymore. Especially with Kenneth. Well, you know, the kids went to sleep and it was so quiet. I watch the TV a little bit, and then [makes snoring sound] I fell asleep. And they came and found me sound asleep. They say, "Uh oh. That's not the right babysitter for our children." And they never asked me to babysit anymore. [Laughs]

C: Did Jim ever sneak out of his room when you fell asleep?

H: One time. It was in the daytime. They have a hideaway bed or couch or whatever you call it, in his room. And Robert was a baby. He was crawling and so the baby was asleep, so I laid down and fell asleep.

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Jimmy Clifton came and took the baby. When I woke up, I didn't see the baby in his bed! I went to the living room. I said, "Is your daddy here?" "No." "Is your momma here?" "No." "Who got the baby then?" Jimmy Clifton said, "I did, Sitie." [Laughs] So they never let me babysit anymore after that, and I don't blame them. A babysitter shouldn't sleep. [Laughter] I used to babysit a lot for Jimmy Clifton. I used to bring him home while his mother goes shopping or something. And he was so sweet. Any little thing that happened, I'd say "arabic words ." That's St. George. It's a habit with me, I guess. So one time he tripped [a] little bit on the floor and he got up and said, "arabic words ." And that wasn't St. George. It was George's wife! I got the biggest kick out of that! [Laughs] I said that so many times, I guess they got tired of it. [Laughs]

I should have told you about Ferdinand [Fernando Perez]. You know, he's been with us over 35 years. He used to be my bundle boy. What I mean by my bundle boy, you know, then we had to carry bundles to each operator. So he would do that and clean the machines. Now he's way up in the cutting room, doing very well. So one day I saw him with a beautiful Cadillac. I said, "Ferdinand. You have to come to work in a Cadillac?" He said, "Mrs. Farah, when you work with Farah, you shouldn't drive anything less."

End of interview