

Tape 1, Side 2

CH This is an interview with Governor Atiyeh. This is Tape 1, Side 2.

As you were saying?

VA She was always dressed well herself, and she was a - of course, we as children, and this is your mother, and I thought she was nice looking, but people have described her many times, friends, as a very beautiful woman. And she always dressed well, very well, and nice clothes, and she just liked to dress us kids up.

I'll jump a little because this is a funny story. In later years, as I was politicking and, of course, I was going to schools, and particularly as governor I'd go in to a lot of schools, which I happened to like, and, you know, you see these kids today, they pay money for clothes that have holes in them. The knees have got to be out or the seat's got to have a patch or - they go buy those things. Well, I think back to the story I'm about to tell you. One day after school when we were in grade school, my brother Ed and I just rode our bikes up to school to see if there was anything going on. Nothing was doing, and we started to peddle our way back, and, just without saying anything, we started racing each other. The next thing I know, bang, I'm on the street. The way my brother said it, because I was crying, but it was sort of a - he thought I was laughing. I wasn't crying loud, I was kind of maybe hysterical. I don't know. But anyway, he thought I was laughing, and he went on home. Anyway, I laid on the lawn, and I was holding my arm, and - like this, just cradling my right arm with my left hand - walked home. I said to my mother, "I think I sprained my wrist." And I really thought I'd done more than that. She said, "Let me look." So I took my hand away. Now, all I remember is that my left hand was bloody. What I really had was a compound fracture of my arm. Well, I can remember being in the kitchen, and in

those days you went down to the doctor's office for an x-ray and then you went to the hospital. So here I am, with a compound fracture of my arm. Apparently, when I had fallen off the bike, I had torn my pants pocket. Mother made me change my pants before we went downtown. I'm standing in the kitchen with a compound fracture of the arm, and now I think of these kids that pay money for that sort of thing [laughter]. So when you ask me about Mother dressing us, she was pretty particular.

CH Well, do you recall some of the activities as a child that you were involved in, or hobbies that you had and things like that?

VA Yeah, I remember quite a bit, because - I guess if you could say those were the good old days, they were. We'd play out on the street corner. You know, there weren't an awful lot of automobiles. Roller skating, we'd play hockey - we'd get some sticks, but we'd do it on roller skates - play a lot of ball. And it's really interesting. You watch kids today, they've got uniforms at a teeny age, and they're using real good balls. We would get a baseball, meaning not just my brothers and myself, my pals, you know, and we'd use it and use it and use it, and pretty soon the cover would come off, and then we'd get some electrician's tape and we'd wrap it so it's black now instead of white. But we had a lot of fun playing. I do remember playing kick the can up there, and those kind of games. And there were plenty of places to play. We'd play football. I didn't play much basketball; I wasn't very big. All this was just sandlot kind of thing. The guys would get together, and we'd play ball.

CH Where did you go to primary school?

VA The Holladay School.

CH And what was that experience like for you? Did you enjoy

primary school?

VA Pleasant. I don't really know what it meant, except that ours was what they call a demonstration school, so I think if they had some ideas in mind, they sort of practice it on us, although I never felt uncomfortable or that I was losing, and I don't even know what they were demonstrating, what they were trying to do. The Portland School District office was right across the street from Holladay school. And in terms of education, I got through it quite well, actually skipped a grade, which brought me within a half a year of my brothers instead of a full year.

CH Did they have people divided by half grades at that point?

VA Yeah. Actually - I'm trying to remember about grade school. I do know in high school there was a January class and there was a June class. My brothers graduated in January of 1941, and I graduated in June of 1941, and Dolores, she graduated in January of 1942. So you had classes that were half-year classes. Somehow - I'm trying to think about grade school, I haven't thought about it before, but there's some split. I jumped half a grade, whatever that - I'm not quite sure about it. But school was relatively easy. I didn't work real hard, I had good grades, you know, I had Es and - or whatever. And I still have some cards. I've looked back at them - Mom kept them - and my brothers and I did okay.

CH Was there a point, as you were growing up, where you had sort of an awakening to the sense of there being a larger world and being here in Portland, it's sort of off in the provinces. Was there some...?

VA I think that's true as you grow up. You get a little - you just broaden your horizons. Obviously, they're very tiny, it's

just the house, and pretty soon you're out of the house to school, and pretty soon you're going downtown, and, you know, you get a - and then, of course, you study in school, you get a little bit of history and you get a little more awareness, and that's why I told you the story about after I got a little bit older, and I remembered that little village and, then, Portland, Oregon, and then I began to say, hey, how come in 1900? So it just gradually happens.

CH What about the trip back to Syria when you were six years old? That must have been quite an experience for a six year old.

VA It was. My mother and my two brothers, myself, and my uncle, and we took a trip. I think his purpose was to go back there and also go to Kerman, Iran, where they started making rugs to their own rugs, Atiyeh Brothers' design, and I think that was his basic purpose. So he was with us, and my mother and my two brothers and myself, and we spent quite a bit of time - and I can't tell you what that meant - in and around Beirut, and we went to Aleih, which is apparently a summer place where people go, and spent time there, and then we drove - and I think it was a long trip, but again, just as a child, time is just difficult to figure - a car to Amar.

Incidentally, my father had a car shipped to Syria, and I've got the bill for the car and information about it. You know, he wanted it shipped to arrive at a certain time. That was 1929.

We spent quite a bit of time there. I've read a letter, a long letter, my uncle wrote. He was now on his way by car to Kerman, and he's talking about the conditions and all the rest. The one thing I remember, I was - I went to Iraq in 1989. That was after the Iran war and before the Kuwait war. I went to Iraq, and I've - now I've heard about Baghdad and I've heard about Babylon. So anyway, I went there, and then I remember this - after I got there and I was there a few days, I remembered the letter my uncle wrote - this would be 1929 - and he talked about

know.

CH What about other trips that you might have taken when you were a child, or when you were young while you were growing up?

VA We didn't really go anywhere. I keep hearing this idea about family vacationing and going places and traveling. Travel was not a thing we did. I think once, as a child, we went to California once as a family, but we did very little of that thing that - I have to tell you quickly, though, I never felt deprived or that I was neglected as a child or anything like that. We just didn't have the things that people think you're supposed to have today.

CH What kind of chores or jobs did you have as a kid?

VA Not a great deal. Of course, I remember mowing the lawn, which I hated to do, and maybe rake the yard. We didn't really have an awful lot in terms of doing something like washing dishes or anything like that, or help clean the house. It was a good-size house, and we had help, Mom had help, and so we didn't.

CH Outside jobs, outside chores?

VA Oh, as we got older, yeah.

CH You had a newspaper route, didn't you?

VA Yeah. I would say to you it - quite young. I can't tell you how old we were. When we got old enough, however, we would come to the store once every third week, because there were three of us, and Dad would pay us out of his pocket five dollars, when he'd think about it. Now, Richard always got his five dollars; I didn't always get my five dollars. But anyway, then it got to be during the summertime we'd work, and then it got to be after

school and the summertime, and, you know, that's the way we gradually worked into the business. And we always worked down in the basement. That's where - you'd help the salesman, then you'd wash rugs - we used to wash them by hands, and we can talk about that. But I always wanted to do something else, knowing, you know, that I could always work at the store if I wanted to work at the store. But I got this paper route, the News Telegram, which was in competition with the Journal. I had sixty-one customers, and my route was from Burnside to Stark and from Seventh to the river. And that's over there - there were a lot of apartments at that time, and some commercial establishments, so they were all my customers. Some homes; not a great number of homes. I had a lot of apartments. Times were tough. This was in the thirties. People would move from an apartment house, and I would know it, finally, when about two or three papers accumulated at the door. Then I'd go to the manager. "They've left." "Where did they go?" The manager didn't care as long as they were paid. So it was tough, and people would - I'd have to really work at collecting for my paper route. And the News Telegram was a smaller paper. It was beginning to go out, although I didn't know it at the time, and the Journal was, obviously, beating them, because I can remember getting all my papers rolled and in the front bag, and the kids - we'd roll the Journal up at the same place, right near Washington High School, and they'd take two bags for the same thing. But anyway, I do remember that they, the News Telegram, said, Now, we've got extras. We'll pay for the extras, and you knock on doors and tell people if they will take it, you'll give it to them free for one month if they will guarantee to pay for it the second month. So I'm knocking on doors and I'm knocking on doors and I'm knocking on doors, and I remember finally getting one guy. I think he wanted to get me off the porch. Then I got to thinking, you know, if I can't give this paper away, there's got to be something wrong. That's why I quit [laughter].

I worked part time at what is now the Galleria, but then

was Olds, Wortman and King. It was a part-time job. And this was fascinating, because we were learning to work. The first job they gave me was taking inventory of their yardage goods. That meant opening every bolt and measuring it. So I went cracking at it, and I think it was about three days, and I finished the job. They were expecting that to ~~last~~<sup>last</sup> for a month. But, you know, we were used to working, so we just unrolled it and - and then I began to learn some things. They put me in - helping the guy who was doing the displays for the window. He would make things for the windows, for the window displays. One Saturday - I worked all day Saturday, he worked half-day Saturday. Just before he was getting ready to leave, some of the fellows from the store brought a table, a small table. He wanted it painted all white. He wanted it all painted. The guy says, "I'm leaving. I'm through for the day." "Really, I need it. I want it on Monday." "Sorry, I can't help you." So I said, because I'm going to be there all day, "Well, I'll paint it." And this guy tells me, "Don't you touch that table. You're not a union member." So I'm sitting there all afternoon looking at this table, which I can't paint because I'm not a union member. So you begin to learn things. Later on, they had me - this is when I quit. Along Park Street they had a canopy overhang, and it was glass, and it had that chicken wire in it and panels of glass all the way down. They wanted to wash it, have it washed. I first said - and I was a pretty big boy by then. I played football at 215 pounds in high school. I said, "I'm going to crack this glass up there." "No, you won't. You just straddle on these metal beams in between." Well, it was really tough, because the water - we had to go down to the sidewalk and then go down into the building, get our bucket of water - two buckets; one for washing and one for rinsing - and then ladder up to there, and this is a whole block long. So I'm working at it, and every once in a while I would crack it, the glass. So somebody came - I guess the guy that was supervising me - just to check, so I stepped forward to tell him I'm cracking the glass, and all of a sudden, I go down.

My leg's on one side, the bucket's down the other side, and I'm straddled on that bar. It makes a lot of noise, and glass crashes to the pavement. But this - I can remember - Pendleton was the manager, and the guy that's supervising me said, "Don't worry. Mr. Pendleton won't be mad because you broke the glass." I'm saying, He won't be mad because I broke - I didn't tell him this. He's not going to be mad because I broke the glass. I could have killed myself, and he won't be mad because I broke the glass [laughter]. So then I decided I never wanted to work for a department store. So you asked about different things, and you learn.

CH Were there any particular influential associations as you were growing up? People that you greatly admired or had an influence on how you turned out or what you thought about, aside from your immediate family?

VA Not aside from the immediate family. There was nothing - Mom was the disciplinarian in the house. I think I can recall Dad spanking me just once. Mom was the one that did the job, and she would - she had a very unique system. If we did something wrong, she would have us go get the hairbrush - that was the tool - and we had to go get it. And I've told people I've never run into anyone like it since. She didn't really need to spank us. She had a look that would just drill right through a wall. I mean, if we did something wrong, she would look at us, her eyes would open, and you'd just wilt. It was bad news. Mom was - she kept pretty close track of us. I think in that sense we grew up and grew up right. Dad was around, and Dad was proper, but he wasn't the one that did the discipline in the house. I think the general atmosphere, it wasn't a matter of, well, this happened and that happened and we formalized it this way and that way. No, we didn't do that. We always sat down as a family for dinner, in the dining room, and we'd have some discussions from time to time, but boys being what we are, we - Mom would work all



day in the kitchen, and we'd go dispatch it in five minutes, you know. Gone. But it was happy.

CH You had mentioned that going over to Syria, you went over there in 1929, and of course the big event, in terms of this country, was the crash of the stock market and the beginning of the Depression. Do you recall the crash of the stock market? I know you were very young, but do you recall when that happened?

VA No, not that event. It was tough. I know Dad worried, and maybe some of the arguments would have been with my mother about we shouldn't have bought this, that, or something else. I'm sure that was some of the arguments. Certainly, I was aware of it. We grew up there by what's known as Sullivan's Gulch, which now is the I-84 freeway, and all that was going there was the train that was going up through the gulch, and there was people living in cardboard houses underneath the bridges, and things of that kind, and quite often people were knocking on our door for a little food. They always said they would work, want to do a little work and get a little food, so we were aware of that situation. But I don't recall the crash or any trauma at home that day or anything of that kind.

CH What was the Depression like for you and for your family and for your family's business and the community?

VA It was tough on the business - and I learned all of this later - because there was very, very, very tough competition. There was quite a few in the rug business at that time. And I mean it was really tough. It got mean, as a matter of fact.

CH How was the business evolving? How had the business evolved since your - and how did it grow since your uncle came here, and your father, in 1900?

VA Well, Atiyeh Brothers really identified themselves with great respect, and I know that because when my father died - and this, incidentally, did have an effect on me that I can report to you - there was an editorial about him and the fact that he was a good businessman and a good citizen and all the rest. The name was well considered in the business world, and - so the reputation was a good one, but it was very - you know, not too many people had money, certainly not to spend for expensive items like Oriental rugs. The few customers - there was four or five rug dealers, and you can imagine the competition was extremely difficult. Dad made friends and they bought from him, but it was - he kept it going, and sales were made, and we stayed in our house, and we had good food, and, you know, we weren't in hunger. So it wasn't - it wasn't an unpleasant period of time. We were growing up as kids, and our interest was playing ball and doing what kids do. So if there was anything that was really severe, we were shielded from it, by and large.

CH You had mentioned that it actually had gotten vicious at one point. What do you mean by that?

VA Well, one of our salesmen waylaid one of the owners of another store and beat him up.

CH For what reason, do you know?

VA Well, I do know the guy that did the beating was a short-tempered guy. He worked for us. He started his own business - a rather volatile man - and it was very successful. He left and started his own business in later years. I don't know what triggered it. I just remember the reports about it and the discussion that went on. I wasn't there when it happened. I mean, I was a kid in the store at that time. So, that's pretty vicious. And then they would all kind of - we were all pretty close to one another, so if you're going to get in your car to go

drive somewhere, then they'd follow you and see where you were going. You know, these are all old country folks, and they're dealing in an old country way [laughter].

CH Well, what was Portland like during that time? Maybe you could give me sort of an image of what Portland looked like to you as you were growing up in the twenties, thirties, and early forties. What kind of a town was it?

Did you come downtown very often?

VA Not very often. We did come downtown. There was Third and Burnside, which is Third and Burnside today - no, it really isn't. It was more Third and Burnside. I was trying to think about it in relation to today. I would say to you that it was tough, there were people that were down at Third and Burnside. There always has been the winos, if you will. That's no different than today. I would say, however, that the folks that were down on their luck then still retained a lot of pride and still tried to find some way to get a meal by working, as they did knocking at our door. Today I think there's more what I would call voluntarily poor - they just decided to be poor - that we're taking care of. The difficulty of that kind of thing is - and I know they're there - how do you separate who's voluntarily poor and who isn't. So you help everybody so you make sure you don't drop those that really do need it. But I would say that - well, Portland was tough, but the stores, Meier & Frank kept going; Lipman, Wolfe; Olds, Wortman and King, as it was known. There were a lot of people trying very hard to keep things going along and moving along. And Portland, as I'm just kind of doing by memory, they kept their houses up and the lawns mowed and just did the best they could and hung on as best they could. That doesn't mean some people didn't suffer, because I'm sure they did, and people lost a lot of money, and I'm sure they did. I think there was a different atmosphere. There was a "This is something I'm going to have to go for myself" versus "This is

something the government has to do for me," which is today.

But Portland was very nice, and I can remember as a kid, particularly as a Boy Scout, we - Boy Scouts, you know, march in parades, which we did. We, I guess, carried signs or whatever we did do, but we'd always end up at the Auditorium, so I'd walk home. I loved it, walking down Third Street and looking in all the hock shops and all these - I remember this: the gold pocket watches. Some of my buddies, they had grandpas that gave them their old pocket watch. Oh, I thought that was the greatest thing in the world. I don't have a grandpa to give me an old pocket watch, so I'd look in the window at the pocket watches and walk home, and I enjoyed that. There wasn't as much...

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]