

The story, it took a while to piece together, because often with my grandfather and grandmother they didn't talk a lot about Lebanon. My father and his siblings didn't hear a lot about the old countries when they were growing up because they were assimilating and becoming more American, so it became the third generation, my generation, that they began to share more, and ask more questions, so I feel like the story got pieced together through myself asking and several cousins, like Paula who goes back to Lebanon every summer with her husband [inaudible] who is from Lebanon, so I feel like the story has gotten revived and pieced together. My father's family is from Lebanon. My great-grandmother Francina came over by boat and brought her son Thomas, my grandfather when he was about 17 or 18 and they settled in Lowell, Massachusetts and started working in the textile mills which was very common at the time for Syrian and Lebanese immigrants. They saved enough money to start a neighborhood market, where they had a lot of ingredients to make traditional Lebanese and Syrian food. They owned that store for about 30 years. My grandfather Thomas worked 7 days a week, pretty much in the store, the children all did. And when he was in his late 20s he wasn't excited about getting married, but Francina decided that it was time so she sent word to the village where they were from [inaudible], which is on the Syrian border, asked for a cousin to be sent over and marry or otherwise known as Jenny. And she was about 16 at the time and she brought over grape vine clipping and she tied them over in a cloth, and she brought them on the boat with her. When they got married they settled into a house on Adams street, and she planted the vine in the front yard. They raised five children, my father Raymond was the youngest of five. Most of the children worked in the mills for a time, as well as helped out in the market. My father remembers the grape vine growing so big that he was able to pick leaves right through the kitchen window to help his mother or my grandmother when she was making stuffed grape leaves and my cousin Tom, my uncle Frank's oldest son, remembers playing with toy soldiers. He use to set them up right under the grape vine in front of the house and hide under the grape vine and play with the toy soldiers. So the grape vine had a large presences at the house on Adams street and the memory of the grape vine and the taste of grape leaves is really carried down through my family. So my father's sister, Aunt, Julie, created on the tradition of making the grape leaves when they sold the Adams street house, they transformed the grape vine to [inaudible], Massachusetts where she was living with my Uncle George. My grandmother and my grandfather had died at that point, so she carried on the tradition. So I grew up going to their house on Sundays and eating stuffed grape leaves and Kibbi and other Lebanese dishes. Then when my aunt and uncle and grandfather passed away, my cousin John, one of my uncle Frank's other sons dug up the grape vine and brought it to his house in New Hampshire, shared some of the clips with Tom, the little boy with the Toy soldiers, and they both started growing the grape vine in their back yards and also picking the leaves and making the stuffed grape leaves. For some reason the grape vine never produces grapes, it only produces the

leaves but every year, everyone says, it never fails, it produces just these perfect leaves, just perfect for making the stuffed grape leaves. And my cousin Tom feels like it's aunt Julie's spirit living in the grape vine and that connected to our grandmother and then our great-grandmother, etc. She, my aunt Julie, she would make the stuffed grape leaves in cabbage leaves and when we came to the house on Sundays they would be in a big pot just simmer and again that scent, that smell is very potent for me also. He calls the grape vine now aunt Julie's vine and feels her spirit is sort of watching over his house now that he is keeping the vine. Well food is such a cultural carrier, and in my family food means love as it does in many cultures, so that was always out expression of love. You know, not all that verbal about love, but very much about sharing food, coming together for meals, taking food home with you, too much food, putting food in your car as you went home. That was also how I felt the expression of love that I felt for my family.