

THE NEW NORMAL: GENERATIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE AFTERMATH OF
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 AND TODAY

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Introduction

There is no question that the United States has undergone significant changes since September 11, 2001. In the years following the attacks, the United States has become involved with conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and others, has stricter immigration policies, has witnessed a rise in xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia, has had their first Black president, and currently has a divisive real estate developer-turned-reality television host as president. Two of the aforementioned moments, September 11 and the election of Donald J. Trump as the President of the United States in 2016, have resulted in increases of anti-Muslim organizations¹ and spikes of hate crimes fueled by vitriol and Islamophobia². Unfortunately, this trend is increasing and as of 2017, hate crimes against Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Arab, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Americans have surpassed the spike after September 11³. With the Middle East and Islam under the scrutinizing eyes of the government and the media, Arabs, Muslims, and others belonging to groups that are also mistaken as perpetrators of violence against the United States, have been caught in a certifiable mess of confusion and frustration. The notion that whole country had their eyes opened to such trauma and

¹ Lopez, German. "A New FBI Report Says Hate Crimes — Especially against Muslims — Went up in 2016." November 13, 2017. Accessed December 13, 2018.

<https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/11/13/16643448/fbi-hate-crimes-2016>.

² Buncombe, Andrew. "Number of Anti-Muslim Groups in US Increased Three-fold since Trump Launched His Presidential Campaign, Say Experts." January 23, 2018. Accessed December 13, 2018.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-presidential-campaign-anti-muslim-groups-islamophobia-racism-white-house-a8174486.html>.

³ South Asian Americans Leading Together. "New FBI Hate Crimes Statistics Show Disturbing Surge in Hate Crimes." November 13, 2018. Accessed December 13, 2018. <http://saalt.org/new-fbi-hate-crimes-statistics-show-disturbing-surge-in-hate-crimes/>.

violence on September 11 is not the case for the many who came to the United States escaping violence. The individual and collective traumas experienced on different scales during and following the attacks were caused by different reasons, all stemming directly or indirectly from the attacks themselves.

This thesis only begins to scratch the surface of the similar and contrasting feelings and experiences of Muslims, Arabs, or people of Middle Eastern or South Asian heritage in the United States. There are days of media footage and hours of interviews with witnesses documenting what happened and what New Yorkers saw on September 11, 2001 and the months after, as well as several oral history projects that allowed witnesses, survivors, family members, response and recovery people, and others directly affected by the attacks to process them in a way that was not necessarily designed for media use and wide broadcasting. Discrimination, detentions and deportations by the government, and non-fatal hate crimes or violence associated with September 11, xenophobia, or Islamophobia did not achieve mainstream media news coverage when it was happening under our noses. There are several social science and oral history sources that directly address these abuses and human and civil rights violations. An example is *Detained without Cause: Muslims' Stories of Detention and Deportation in America after 9/11* by Irum Shiekh, in which Muslim immigrants share their experiences of being indefinitely detained and mistreated in the wake of September 11. Another is *Patriot Acts: Narratives of Post-9/11 Injustice*, edited by Alia Malek and published by Voice of

Witness⁴, which includes the narratives of eighteen men and women who recount their experiences of harassment, surveillance, discrimination, and human and civil rights abuses. These books in particular helped broaden my own understanding of the aftermath of September 11 and the egregious actions of the United States on several different levels of authority and power and shed light on those who were directly affected in the aftermath.

Much of the existing oral history interviews and content regarding September 11 are with people who have a clear connection to the event or its aftermath, whereas with the interviews that I conducted, I am more concerned with people who have a less clear, seemingly nonexistent connection to September 11 but still have to navigate a world with ongoing racial tensions that are colored by the attacks. Furthermore, I wanted to highlight how memories and events are remembered by family members and how familial connections are affected by the attacks and in the aftermath. What is repeated, what is bound to repeat, and why?

My parents, Rupal and Piyush Patel, moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1992 from Gujarat, India. I was born there a year later, the first natural-born U.S. citizen in our family. In 1996 we relocated to Lakeland, Florida, a town of roughly 100,000 people nestled between Tampa and Orlando. According to the 2010 census, around two-thirds of Lakeland's population was white⁵, give or take a few percentage points if you include

⁴ Voice of Witness is a non-profit publisher that creates oral history interview-based books about people who have been adversely impacted by injustice (e.g. undocumented immigrants, survivors of Hurricane Katrina, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, those living under repressive regimes like in Burma, etc.).

⁵ United States Census Bureau. QuickFacts Lakeland, Florida; UNITED STATES. July 1, 2017. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lakelandcityflorida,US/PST045217>.

white people with Latinx or Hispanic heritage and if you also consider some people of North African or Middle Eastern descent to be white⁶. Around twenty percent are Black or African American, less than one percent is Native American, Alaskan, Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander, and less than two percent are Asian of any background. Lakeland is the type of sprawling suburban city that is large enough where one could easily consciously construct or unknowingly default to a social bubble dictated by class, race, politics, and/or education.

My personal stake in this thesis comes from my own experiences of isolation and confusion regarding the aftermath and the current divisive political climate in the United States. As a teenager I felt that I had to educate myself on certain issues (the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, immigration policy and history, the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan) because most of the sources of information around me at school or at home felt biased or gave me unsatisfactory answers. Regularly being in conservative, predominantly white areas (especially school) impacted my understanding of what the United States was doing at home and overseas from 2004 to 2011. For example, in high school I would ask my peers about Iraq and why invading was necessary, and no one could provide a clear answer as to why other than “well, if terrorists want to bomb your country then why don’t you bomb them first?” Teachers either wouldn’t say anything about politics or would say things teetering on xenophobia.

⁶ United States Census Bureau. “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010.” March 2011. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.

Most of us struggle with misinformation on varying levels, but to better understand the current news with Trump's shifting immigration and foreign policies, airstrikes in Syria, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, ISIS, and other geopolitical topics, one must be familiar with the tensions and events that happened before September 11, 2001 as well as the tensions and events stemming from it. I was interviewed by Mary Marshall Clark, and parts of my interview will be included in a couple chapters in order to convey more completely and frankly my experiences that have led me to pursue this endeavor. Part of it is to confirm if what I have felt and experienced is real and felt by others too, because after being in the dark for so long about spikes in xenophobia and Islamophobia via the media it was hard to look at my experiences with these phobias and thinking that they were of importance in some way.

Many of the narrators I interviewed were people who I know personally, family members, or people I met through these connections who were not in Lower Manhattan during the attacks. Furthermore, several narrators are from the Patel family and some are from the Harb family. Three interviews conducted by the Columbia Center for Oral History, for their September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project are included. Two of the narrators, Zaheer and Salmaan Jaffery, are a Pakistani American father and son. Family and geography are important lenses through which to understand the narratives included in this thesis; the former because of the similarities and differences in a close-knit unit, the latter because the attacks did affect South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern communities in varying degrees all over the United States, not exclusively New York City. Most oral history content regarding September

11, 2001 is based around New York City and the people in other directly affected areas, and this thesis is not entirely constructed of those narrators and their experiences on that day in particular. The only accounts of September 11, 2001 are of those who weren't in Lower Manhattan, even though some narrators were around or even inside the World Trade Center. Those interviews and the parts regarding their experiences on that day have been published in part in academic essays and in the book that came from the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project, *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001 and the Years that Follow*.

This thesis does not try to exactly follow up on the same interviews that were conducted in the past, but rather continue the conversation about September 11, Islamophobia, xenophobia, confusion, and understanding in relation to what is happening now in the United States and how we have all processed this punctuated moments differently.

The September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project co-founded by Mary Marshall Clark and Peter Bearman is the most expansive collection of interviews regarding the September 11 attacks. Because following a tragedy, an

“official public interpretation of the meaning of September 11 was generated soon after the events occurred. This dominant account portrayed a nation unified in grief; it allowed government officials to claim that there is a public consensus that September 11 was a turning point in the nation's history that has clear implications for national and foreign policy. It is important to remember that this consensus was constructed not by those who lived through the terrorist attacks

and their aftermath, but by those who observed it and had political reasons to interpret it as they did.”⁷

The thirty interviewers who worked on this project (which branched into smaller projects about 9/11 and public health, response and recovery, etc.) interviewed people on the street and other public places around New York City, and then approached people through community groups, religious groups, small businesses, etc. to spread the word about the project. They recorded over a thousand hours of testimony from people with varying proximity and connection to the attacks.

Some interviews I used in this thesis came from the oral history department of the 9/11 Tribute Center. Their interviews are primarily conducted for use in museum programming, exhibits, and other promotional and educational materials and were not conducted in the immediate aftermath (the museum opened in September 2006). Despite the museum’s goal of using these interviews for a specific purpose, they too offered a wealth of knowledge that was equally fascinating and heartbreaking as the Narrative and Memory Oral History Project. The interviews conducted by Meriam Lobel for the Tribute Center were done specifically with people who either survived or lost a loved one, experienced discrimination in the aftermath, or who were involved in the rescue and recovery operations in the months that followed.

Because generational differences and memory are central to this thesis, one cannot overlook the wealth of ideas, concepts, and information stemming from memory

⁷ Clark, Mary Marshall. "The September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project: A First Report." *The Journal of American History, History and September 11: A Special Issue*, 89, no. 2 (September 2002): 596-79. Accessed December 13, 2018. Organization of American Historians.

studies and Holocaust studies. In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch introduces the central concept of postmemory. This term describes “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up,” and is “a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience.”⁸ My focus is more on the aftermath’s effects, but the focus of chapter two on September 11, 2001 is about how memory fails, how memory is constructed, and how memory is shared in the context of a national tragedy, but with less urgency due to distance. Finding this balance between distance and identity is a central theme to the younger generation in this thesis (or “post-generation” according to Hirsch).

Taking a generational approach to understanding the aftermath and its impact on the narrators is important because despite being in the same location or family as another narrator, each narrator has his or her own experiences, explanations, and predictions that are unique and can be affected by how old he or she was on September 11, 2001. Howard Schuman and Amy Corning have studied generational memory and how world events shape what memories are more important, depending on one’s age and when the event happened. One of their goals in conducting this generational survey study was to address the question: “If generational experience points to the impact of particular events on

⁸ Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012.

memory, are there implications for other actions and attitudes?”⁹ They offer some background on the nature of collective memory and generations:

“Distinctive patterns are produced by the nature of generational transition and would not occur if a cohort lived forever without replacement. Since in real life, cohort replacement occurs regularly, new cultural developments are accomplished by new cohorts that have ‘fresh contact’ with the past cultural accumulation. This leads to some loss of older cultural content, in addition to assessments of entirely new events... Although older and younger cohorts may experience the same new event (for example, victory in a war or the hardships of an economic crisis), they do so differently because ‘first experiences’ are not the same as those superimposed upon other early impressions. This unique influence can be referred to as a *primacy effect*.”

The attacks’ aftermath has created a ripple effect, its concentric waves reaching different stopping points only to bounce back towards the center and outwards again and to continue until the surface is quiet. As with any tragedy on a large scale, the public remembers until generations are distanced from the trauma, tragedy, and visceral memories (at the hands of geography and time) until the tragedy sits on oblivion’s horizon, threatening to be cast almost completely in the dark. Italian oral historian Luisa Passerini writes at length about silence, memory, and oblivion in oral history in her work *Memory and Utopia*, and offers a useful lens through which to understand my point:

“Silence and oblivion are often confused when memory is analyzed as narration, be it oral or written: What is not said may be such either because it has been repressed—by trauma, contrast with the present, conflicts of individual and collective nature—or because the conditions for its expression no longer/do not yet exist. Sometimes a change in these conditions may break the silence and allow memories to be expressed, while at other times silence can last so long that it effaces memory and induces oblivion. At the same time, however, it can also

⁹ Schuman, Howard and Amy Corning. “Generational Memory and the Critical Period: Evidence for National and World Events.” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (Spring 2012), p. 1-31.

nourish a story which is patiently stored away in periods of darkness, until it is able to come to light in a new and enriched form.”¹⁰

The connection between collective/generational memory, oblivion, and my thesis is that the current generation of people in the United States who were younger than ten in 2001 or were born around 2001 have grown up in a nation with policies and sentiments that complicate their very existence while not being aware of certain events as they were happening. What will happen when future generations look back at this moment in history? Is September 11, 2001 more or less of a flashpoint than the election of Donald Trump and his resulting changes in immigration and foreign policy? Will people care about remembering September 11 in the future as much as they do now? What does the future look like for Muslims? Arabs? Non-Muslims of color? How are we all implicated by aftermath of events that we did not directly witness, commit, or experience? How is it remembered by those who did not live it?

The scope of this work is narrow in the sense that it will never reflect the wealth of opinions and experiences of the billions of people descended from the Middle East and South Asia, but this work is one that can easily be continued beyond the present and beyond the parameters of this project. There is always something interesting and relevant wherever you are, you just have to put in effort to find it sometimes.

¹⁰ Passerini, Luisa. *Memory and Utopia: The Primacy of Intersubjectivity*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2007.

Methodology

This thesis was originally conceptualized sometime during the fall semester of 2017 in my fieldwork course taught by Amy Starecheski. Originally, I wanted to interview people who remember the Dotbusters, a hate group that targeted South Asians in and around Jersey City in the 1980s. My father was a graduate student at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey at the time that the Dotbusters were active, and based on his stories I was hoping to find others who had either encountered them or knew people who did. However, because these events occurred within a small timeframe in the past and in a small location, I had difficulties finding interviewees. Sometimes oral history is concerned with filling a gap in the historical record, and although this project was significant to me personally, it was an undertaking that required more time than I could give it in my first semester of graduate school.

A few weeks after interviewing my father, I decided to widen the scope by choosing an event or flashpoint that was more in the public eye and affected more people on varying levels. In making the conscious decision to research and interview people about how September 11 and its aftermath have affected people, I had to familiarize myself with oral history research about September 11. Familiarizing myself with the interviews, methods, and results of the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project was key in adjusting the scope of my thesis. I concluded that I still wanted to focus on people generally from South Asia or the Middle East, but that I wouldn't actively focus on people who had been detained, tortured, surveilled, or

harassed by authorities because I didn't even know where to begin to find people to interview. Additionally, a large amount of the interviews either in the news media or oral history projects centers around people as witnesses or directly affected by the attacks, which for the most part centers around people in New York City. I had just moved to New York City from Lakeland a month before school started and I barely knew anyone, so I decided to find narrators for my thesis to interview through my own personal contacts, i.e. my family and friends.

Interviewing people you already know is a double-edged sword. And with interviewing family members, there are variables like power dynamics, history, respect, age, and so many others that account for the overall dynamic of the interview that might not come across in the transcript. But by choosing to rely on my personal networks, my family had a better understanding of me and my interests and I finally got to hear about their personal feelings about things not usually asked about. It was also relatively easy to schedule interviews with them; I would call or message the narrator about meeting and explain the scope of my thesis, why I want to interview them, what will happen to the interview, and the interviewing process. At this point I answer any questions they may have and if they agree to the interview, we schedule a time and location for it. Before the interview, I would explain the consent form and answer any other questions they may have before the interview begins. Once it ends, they sign the consent form and I set out to transcribe the recording according to the recent guidelines from the Columbia Center for Oral History Research. When the transcript is finished, I tell the narrator they can look it over and edit out any parts they don't want used or amend any inconsistencies or errors in

transcription or transliteration. However, many narrators declined to fully edit the transcript themselves and allowed me to make changes for them or trusted me to use their interviews and archive them later.

In using archived interviews from the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project through the Columbia Center for Oral History Archives (CCOHA), I had easy access to the interviews because for most of the 2017-2018 school year I worked there as a graduate project assistant. Instead of emailing the front desk of the archives to ask for open transcripts, I asked my boss, David Olson, to send me the appropriate interviews with open restrictions (almost all of the interviews in this project are open to the public with fair use). Some portions of these interviews have been published in different books, and I was familiar with some via Amy Starecheski and Mary Marshall Clark's respective work in the project.

The process to access the interviews through the 9/11 Tribute Museum was similar and different to accessing transcripts through CCOHA; I was an oral history intern for a semester at the museum and was directly working with their transcripts and archives, but the interviews were not as easily accessible to the public. Because I was tasked with audit editing, formatting, and making changes to their transcripts, I knew which ones had content relevant to my research and was able to request copies of them. However, the release forms for these interviews did not explicitly state that the interviews could be used for educational and research purposes, the oral historian at the museum had to draft another updated release and ask the narrators to sign it. Some contact information

was outdated and didn't elicit a reply; those narrators' interviews were not used at all for this thesis.

An important note is that while doing my research, I read and listened to over a hundred visceral accounts of loss, trauma, resilience, hope, and despondency from people who were not South Asian or Middle Eastern, and I sincerely do not believe that my work would be the same if I had not worked so closely with transcripts and recordings. I definitely had to remind myself to try not to overwhelm myself and to take breaks when interviews became too intense for me to handle. But out of that came a deeper appreciation for these narrators because it really put the events of September 11 in perspective for me, someone who was too young and too far away to truly understand the immediate chaos and uncertainties that arose afterwards.

I interviewed nine people for this thesis and plan on interviewing several more after graduation. Constraints like availability, obligations, and distance limited the amount of people I wanted to interview during the school year and summer, but this project on a wider scale is ongoing for me and will continue at a different speed. As the West continues to engage in conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia, the necessity of hearing from people who are affected by these decisions will always persist. I did not use all of the interviews I conducted in my thesis, but they will still be transcribed and archived at CCOHA, as will the interviews I conduct in the future.

I did not include excerpts from all of the narrators I interviewed. Despite their wealth of important life histories, experiences, and opinions, I did not want to have an overwhelming number of narrators who are from my family, i.e. Indian and Hindu. I

wanted to show the plurality of experiences and opinions of people who are perceived to be Muslim or are Muslims from the small pool of people I know personally as well as people interviewed in other oral history projects, while keeping the thesis at a readable length. This is why I purposely set out to look for interviews with other people of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent, Muslim and non-Muslim, in different archived oral history projects. The four narrators I chose from archived interviews, Zaheer Jaffery, Salmaan Jaffery, Inder Jit Singh, and Marium Rizvi, contribute crucial perspectives that help further contextualize what this aftermath is and explain relevant events preceding September 11. However, one blind spot of my project is the lack of voices of Black Arabs and Black Muslims, Arabs and Muslims from North Africa, Muslims from Eastern Europe and many others.

Furthermore, in an effort to provide more context about this project, I asked Mary Marshall Clark to interview me and I have included parts of that interview in this thesis. If there is any way I can make clear who the author is and where the author comes from with regards to this thesis, then adding my own interview is the clear and direct way to demonstrate that. I also have included questions from the interview for the very reasons of understanding the interviewer a little better as well as the dynamics between the narrator and the interviewer. The excerpts from interviews that I have conducted have been minimally edited in terms of removing filler sounds and words (“uh,” “um,” and “like”) and repetitive phrases like the rhetorical question “you know?” in accordance with the CCOHA transcript style guide. The excerpts taken out of the transcript are grouped

thematically and are put in an order that makes sense when read; they do not reflect when something was said in the original transcript of the interview.

In getting a sense of how to structure this thesis, I looked at a number of different oral history sources that were helpful in deciding the scope of my project and how I would present the interviews in my thesis. *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001 and the Years that Followed*, edited by Mary Marshall Clark, Peter Bearman, Catherine Ellis, and Stephen Drury Smith, includes nineteen interviews from the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project by Columbia University's Center for Oral History Research. This book was helpful in orienting myself with a handful of the narrators of the hundreds of interviews in the project. I already had a sense of potential interviews that would work with my thesis because I worked with the metadata and physical minidisks and cassette tapes belonging to that project at my job at the archives. Ultimately, I picked three interviews that already appear in part in the book, but consciously included parts of the interviews that hadn't been published but are still publicly accessible. This book, as well as *Detained without Cause: Muslims' Stories of Detention and Deportation in America after 9/11* by Irum Shiekh, were the two texts that primarily helped me in shaping how I present the narratives; my decision to leave my questions and include my own perspective via footnotes and introducing the narrators is an example.

Patriot Acts: Narratives of Post-9/11 Injustice, edited by Alia Malek and published by Voice of Witness, is another text (like Shiekh's) regarding those who were surveilled, profiled, detained, or tortured in the aftermath of September 11. I read this

book not long after realizing I wanted to write my thesis about September 11, and although I knew I would not be working with these texts or interview people with similar experiences as those who are in this book, I felt that it was important to read. Majority of the interviews regarding September 11 that I read either through Columbia's archives or through the Tribute Museum's archives did not deal directly with this topic, and it's relevant to understanding how the state engages in violence against its own people.

How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America, by Moustafa Bayoumi, is a book of seven interviews with young Arab Americans in Brooklyn. They discuss the ways they reconcile their identities while living in an age where being Arab and/or Muslim is under intense scrutiny, as well as what they hope for the future of the United States in spite of major setbacks. I felt that the narrators in this book were relatable to what I had been researching, but my main issue with Bayoumi is how he positions the struggles of Arabs and/or Muslims as if they are the one and only marginalized group currently being under fire. One of his narrators describes Arabs as the "new Blacks," which is a precarious statement because Black people are still going through so many struggles in the United States, and because Black Arabs and Black Muslims exist and deal with being Black and being Arab and/or Muslim. Oppression affects various marginalized groups in ways that manifest differently or similarly, but in order to work towards a better future of acceptance and no hatred, we have to be more careful about how we talk about others and how position ourselves in relation to them.

PART ONE

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

RIFAT HARB

I first met Rifat in his office on the day of his interview. That afternoon I had left class early to head to Astoria, where he runs a law practice with his brother. I knew about Rifat because he is cousins with Jalal Harb, who is the father of my close friend, Nabil Harb. Nabil told me of his uncle who is an immigration lawyer in Brooklyn and Queens, and through him and Jalal I was able to talk to Rifat and explain my thesis to him. I was nervous about this interview because it was my second interview since starting my graduate studies, and because Rifat was the first non-family member I was interviewing. We also had originally planned to meet at his home in New Jersey for dinner, after which I would interview both Rifat and his wife, but we had to reschedule due to his son's soccer game.

I opted to tell Rifat the thematic scope of my questions and the general topics of discussion in the interview. That worked out well because he would talk at length without stopping about anything he felt like sharing, which was all important and relevant. He answered questions before I got to ask them in a surprisingly intuitive way.

NOVEMBER 1, 2017

I was born in Haifa, and that is considered Israel, and I'm Palestinian. My childhood was in Nazareth, the city where I grew up, which is about an hour from my birthplace in Haifa. I went to elementary, middle, and high school there. And I moved out from Nazareth when I was eighteen. I moved to the United States in 1986, and I now have lived here in the United States more than I lived in Nazareth, almost twice as much. I have two brothers and two sisters. Three of my siblings are older than I am, two sisters and one brother. My two sisters still live in Nazareth. My two brothers, the older brother and the younger brother, live here. My younger brother is nine years younger than I am, so he kind of filled the void in the house when things started to get boring when we were a bit older. I was about nine years old and my older brother was eleven, and the two sisters were twelve and thirteen. Then you have a baby, and the house lights up. I feel like I reenacted that sort of experience by having a third child who is nine years younger than my youngest child, my daughter, who turns eleven today. Having siblings, I think, was a great sort of small society where you learn how to hustle.

You always feel that your parents, as any parents who care about their children, they want the best for you. I feel like my parents had so much on their plate. It's probably a cliché, but they had a rough life. We feel like we have it tough sometimes, but for them the basic things were a struggle, let alone the political situation. My father was a bus driver. I can't even imagine living his lifestyle of being Palestinian and driving a bus full of Jewish passengers and almost by law, you have to entertain the passengers and always have the news on, and then always hear people cursing you and calling you names. Not

necessarily you as the driver, but being Palestinian. So that type of thing here, we don't have that. There are different forms of that, and maybe more so nowadays, but it doesn't really rise to that level. The other thing is, I say that they, in a different way, had it easier than us because I feel that you have a collective sort of process of teaching you as a child. It wasn't really my parents that would take me to places like I take my kids now to a soccer game. We were just kids doing our own thing. But yet, we turned out to be okay. I mean, it could've gone the other way.

In a way, I feel like they were luckier because I do a lot of things now that my parents didn't do for me and I do that for my kids. Now, thinking that I have to be involved in every little thing that they do, but then I remember my parents and I say, "You know what? I need to give my son more freedom, more room, and let him make decisions for himself." So my parents gave us guidance saying that education is the right thing, but they were not showing up at school events and asking me, "How did you do on your math test?" and this type of thing. But we also had this sort of driving proverb where people or your parents would tell you, "You have to get an education to be somebody." Your parents, your father telling you, "You have to go to school if you don't want to be a bus driver." I still give them credit for instilling the concept that, to do well you need education.

I'm truthfully grateful for my mother, more than anything else, because I came from a family where my father was a very decent, hardworking man, but I believe that the

balance was my mother. My mother was a very intelligent woman with no formal education. She really was educated in life. She, I think, genuinely kind of taught me things that now I consciously try to teach to my kids. And with my education, I feel like I don't really do a job that is half of what she did. The way she used to always bring us, the siblings, together, and always talk about family and the importance of you being there for your brother, and your brother being there for you, and being always caring about your sisters, and always caring about your uncles and aunts, and calling them on the holidays, and helping the poor. We were not rich, we were less than middle class, but yet she was always giving, she was always generous. She didn't have money, so a lot of times she would steal change from my dad's small bag of change. We joked around, we called it stealing, but it was the fact that she had to make ends meet. And her ability to always make everything look good when we didn't have much. When somebody came to visit the house, she would put together food on the table and fruit, and we would look and see that she had all this fruit, and then my brother would tell me, "I found out where the fruits were hidden." And I'm like, "Where?" He's like, "Under the fridge!" And the fridge had this compartment where you move it and the motor is underneath, and she would hide a couple bananas, a couple oranges just for spare, in case we have visitors. And in Palestine you always have visitors. She would always come up with, things like that. She was so dexterous running the family. She was the engine. And I always hear her in the back of my head, even now. Sometimes, say, I don't call my brother for a week or so, and I hear her say, "Call your brother." These little things I feel that are priceless.

The irony is that my mom now has dementia, and so to deal with somebody with that illness and see them lose their basic motor skills, forget how to eat and how to chew and things like that, in a different way it's a lesson in life. That you cannot take things for granted. That's what I think, even her illness now, she continues to teach. She was always very patient. I'm not going to put Jalal¹ on the spot, but if you tell him, "I heard that Rifat is fond of his mom," he'll tell you that she was an amazing woman. Even other relatives always liked her because she was always the peacemaker, always trying to make everybody feel comfortable visiting. My dad and Jalal's dad were always old-school, "You said this! You said that!" and my mother would always try to be the peacemaker, not just giving you an example, but any of my father's relatives, she was always diplomacy first.

ON MOVING

I really moved here initially for school, but before I moved here, I moved to Canada. For about a year I went to school in Vancouver and I played soccer there. But everybody at that time thought that I was crazy because I was doing well in Israel as a Palestinian. I was involved in a few movies and I could've gotten into school there. I think in 2001 I was in a nice flattering article in the *New York Law Journal*, I have a picture of it, that says, "Palestinian Actor Leaves Acting in the Movies for Law" or something like that. I

¹ Jalal Harb is a former neighbor of mine and is Ola Harb's husband. He put me in contact with Rifat, his cousin, for this interview. Jalal is also Nabil Harb's father, and Nabil and I have been friends since the first grade.

felt that maybe I really shouldn't move to the U.S. But there was always that kind of American Dream, I guess, that was so much more powerful at that time in the eighties than it is now. And for me, it was kind of like, an escape from the political situation back home, because I felt like in the U.S. it really doesn't matter who you are and what you are, it's all about merits. Ironically, thirty years later, I feel like we're back to worse than that, you know? But there was a time that that's really what I believed. I believed it was kind of like a move into what sounded like a utopian society.

Of course, I was having these exaggerated thoughts that this would be life in the U.S., and it of course is not, it never was, but at that time I didn't really understand the whole civil rights struggle that was going on here. For a lot of us that moved here, it was kind of like, "it's the best education that you can get, but one day I'm going to go back." It's very common for immigrants to always feel like that. That's why when I have a client that tells me that they want to save some money to invest back home, and I tell them, "Don't do that, that's the stupidest thing you could say. You're here now, your life is here, and that nostalgia of going back home could be more in the form of you taking a trip back. It's not about you investing there." So it was more about education, it was more about getting my degree. And then you find yourself becoming, I guess, you build your roots. And once you become part of any society, it's hard to leave. That's one.

Two, I never really—once I moved here, initially, my thought was to go back. But once you kind of like, you start, you feel that there is so much potential, let's say the sky is the

limit in the U.S., one of my stories about “the sky is the limit,” three years ago, one of my big clients came in and he said, “ I really need you to renew my green card because I really have to fly to Canada.”

And I said, “I can do that, that's not a problem, but you can't fly to Canada because your green card expired. You have to first get a stamp, blah, blah, blah.”

And he's like, “You don't understand, now I'm an artist,” in fact, he had two body guards with him all the time, my secretary told me, so I said, “You're doing well, I'm happy to hear that.”

And he goes, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm doing really well.”

I said, “What are you doing?”

And he goes, “I rap!”

And I go, “What? That's very nice!” I knew him since he was a little kid, he would come here with his mom, in early 2002, 2003. To make a long story short, about a year later, I see him on TV. So now I see him, and it's not—success is not just financial, of course, but in this case it is, and a lot of things are attorney-client issues, can't really get into

them, but seeing that overnight he is buying a house for five million dollars, and going platinum and—with all due respect, I felt that that epitomizes the American dream.

So these kinds of stories are happy stories that I tell. But I also have the sad stories. I had a story of a family of a mother who was also Moroccan, and she wanted me to help her bring her son here. I said, “We can do that. The only problem is that his father has to consent,” because his father is there. And she said, “Yeah, he will.” And then once we did the paperwork, his father did not consent, so we couldn't bring her son. And then two years later that the father of her son passed away, so we resumed the work on her son's visa, he came here, he got his green card, she came to my office with her son and said, “This is the happiest day of my life.” And I said, “Well that's wonderful,” and I was happy for her, until maybe about twelve/thirteen years later. Her son killed somebody, and she hired me to defend her son on that murder case. And it was a defense that we relied on called “the extreme emotional disturbance defense,” try to get him the least time possible, and eventually we got him twenty years in jail. She asked me, “Is there a way to get my son deported?” And I just thought about the irony of the day she told me that was the happiest day of her life when he came here. And now with obviously, tears in her eyes, and thinking that this was the worst day of her life, when he was convicted, that she's trying to get him deported. “No, he's a U.S. citizen and can't be deported. Or even if he were, he wouldn't be deported before he does his time.” But this is like—this applies to any country, but more so here in the U.S., you see like so many stories that you have happy endings and sad endings. I think it's magnified, you can see these stories anywhere

else, but here there's so much drama that the success could be incredible, and the failure can be incredible. It's almost, like, magnified.

PIYUSH PATEL

I first asked my father if he would agree to be interviewed for my thesis topic at the time, which was about the Dotbusters since I knew he had a story about encountering them. In a lot of ways, my father can be described as someone who is more concerned with the big picture and less detail-oriented. He loves to talk but in this interview, when I asked him about his life in India, I felt as though he was holding back a lot of information. We tend to disagree a lot about politics and social issues and argue as a result, so before the interview started I told myself I would be as diplomatic as possible with my phrasing and tone so as to not end up in an argument, but I would still try to get him to speak more about whatever he was saying. In the end, this strategy partially worked and still backfired. We didn't outright argue, but I did feel that he interpreted some of my questions as traps and he didn't understand that I just wanted to hear his opinions and experiences, how he thinks about his identity and the world at large, about solidarity, about his former home in India and his current home in the United States. At some points late in the interview (and later in this thesis) I felt as though he was accusing me of setting him up; his tone was firm and parent-like, teetering frustration. But he left the interview with a smile on his face and said "That was fun," whereas I couldn't help but feel that I had messed up this interview because it didn't go exactly as I had hoped it would. A few months later when I visited Lakeland, I was in the car with my parents to dinner and my father was talking at length about immigration and discrimination, and I

wondered why he wasn't this keen on sharing with me in the interview. I asked him and he couldn't give me a clear answer.

OCTOBER 15, 2017

I was born in India, on January 5, 1964, in the state of Gujarat. And I grew up the first few years in a rural area called Bahucharaji, and then I was sent to boarding school and to Ahmedabad, which is the seventh largest city [in India]. And then I did some of my elementary school there, and also went to high school in Ahmedabad. I went to college also, engineering college, in India, in Ahmedabad at Gujarat University.

My parents—my mother was homemaker, and my dad was a businessman. He was in timber business, primarily, but we also had a family-owned farm, and we had a couple of other trading businesses as well. My family was an extended family, so my grandparents lived also—actually it was my grandparents' house, and my dad had an older brother, and his family. My uncle, he had a wife and four children, and I had three siblings. So, the total of thirteen people—fourteen people in one big house. My grandfather was also very active politically, so it was always—and socially, so it was always very busy household. It was business family, so lots of business people, community leaders. My grandfather was part of the independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. There were lots of freedom movement leaders from across the country at our house. And then lots of relatives, because Bahucharaji was also a Hindu pilgrimage place, especially for young

kids' offering of hair¹ to the goddess Bahuchara². And so there would be lots of people coming to Bahucharaji to offer their infant child's hair to the goddess for good health and good luck, and there would always be distant relatives and associates and friends of friends visiting us.

I would almost always get in trouble at school for something as benign as challenging a teacher, because teachers' authorities are considered to be almost absolute. At least in the U.S. in college, I don't know about schools, but if you question or challenge a professor here, you would engage in a dialogue. Over there, it was like challenging authority. That's one. Also, I got in trouble for violating school policies, like running around between classes, making a lot of noise, or disturbing the peace of other classes to—lots of other things that kids above ten-, twelve-, fifteen-year-olds age do.

High school was easy [laughs] because at that time, if you scored well—first of all, after tenth grade, you had to decide whether you were going to do science, commerce, or arts. And I chose science, and then after twelfth grade, based on your grades in the final exam which was statewide, you could either go into medical school, engineering school, pharmacy school, or just fundamental science like biology or chemistry or math or physics. And if you had great grades, you were expected by the family and by the community that you would go into either medical school or dental school or engineering,

¹ In Hindu tradition, the hair on a newborn is related to negative traits from past lives, and shaving it symbolizes moving forward.

² Hindu goddess of fertility and innocence. Her main temple is in Bahucharaji. She is also a patron goddess of the Hindu third gender (*pavaiyaa* or *hijra*) community in that area.

and not just civil and mechanical engineering, but electronics or computer engineering. I was fortunate enough to get great grades, and my family said, "Alright, then you're going to go to med school, right?" So, I did get admission in med school, went there for a week, and I said, "No, I don't want to go to med school." And they said, "Well, then at least you have to become an electronics engineer." So [laughs] there was a lot of family pressure. And plus, we also did not think of doing anything else, because it was very competitive, and if you were lucky enough to get good grades, you just grabbed that opportunity to become a doctor or an engineer. Only if you did not get into medical, dental, engineering, or pharmacy school, you would go into learning fundamental sciences, like physics or biology or chemistry.

I did my bachelor's at Gujarat University. I did it in specialization of instrumentation and control, which was part of electronics engineering. And then I came to the U.S. and did my master's in computer science at Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey. When I was choosing schools, it was not just good academic reputation but also a place where we had relatives. So it would be easy for me to get settled. And my aunt lived in New Jersey, so I applied to New Jersey schools, and Stevens had a good reputation and I got in, so I decided to go to Stevens.

When I graduated in the mid-eighties from college in India, India was still a closed economic society. And the opportunities were very limited. If you did not have your family business that you could join, or if you weren't a corrupt government officer, you

know, you joined the civil service. Or couple of other small professions; if you were a doctor you could start your own clinic and things like that, but apart from that, the opportunities were very few and far between. It was very usual for engineering students to apply to grad schools in the United States. Some applied to Canada and the U.K., but the vast majority of them wanted to come to the United States for grad school. And then, at that time, most would hope to get a job in the US and live in the US, but only few who had family business waiting for them would come back. So I was one of those who decided, "Okay, I'm coming to the U.S. to get my master's, but if I get [the] right opportunity and a good job, then I would just stay in the U.S. and eventually become [an] American citizen."

After I finished my master's in computer science I got a good job with a company. It was in a start-up mode, it was growing very fast, [and] it made air bags and air bag sensors. At that time with the federal requirement of either an automatic seatbelt or some kind of a passive restraint system, which, meaning the driver or the front seat passenger did not have to do anything actively and it would deploy in certain crashes, was becoming more and more prevalent in the auto industry. The company was growing, so I was, career-wise, also growing with the company. So I decided to stay in the U.S. And then they sponsored me for my green card first, and then eventually after spending a few years, I was eligible to apply for naturalization as a U.S. citizen, which I did.

The company had started in New Jersey, but since it worked with the auto industry, a lot of people were moved from New Jersey to Michigan. And that's how I ended up moving to Michigan. I was with the same company but worked with the Big Three: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. And that's how I ended up in Michigan. The company asked me to take some managerial responsibilities, and I was still fresh in the United States; I had about little over two years to three years' experience in a professional job and none in management. And so, the company and I thought that it would be good to get an M.B.A. [Master of Business Administration]. Then I enrolled in the part-time evening M.B.A. program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Q: I know that you moved to Florida from Michigan because I was about three years old at the time. What made you move?

The company's founder and his wife, who ended up becoming C.E.O. [chief executive officer], were from Florida. And she always wanted to move to Florida. And then the company expanded from just airbag sensors to airbags and inflators and other areas, and the company found a site that was environmentally permitted to do the research and development work and some pilot manufacturing work of inflators, of airbags, that had some hazardous material. So it was a big deal because the company could hit the ground running and get into airbag business right away. If this plant was already certified by the E.P.A. [Environmental Protection Agency] and the permit was already in place. They decided to move their plant over there, but then since the C.E.O. always wanted to move

to Florida, she moved the headquarters to Florida. And then she asked some of the people to come with her and I was given the opportunity to work with [the] worldwide auto industry. Not just the industry in Michigan. So it was a good move for me as well. So that's how I ended up in Florida.

Q: Did you always see yourself running your own business? Was it always something you wanted to do?

In our family, mine was the fifth generation that men had started their own business. So, when I moved to Florida, I had a problem hiring software engineers in Central Florida. This was in the late 90s. And it created, not only because of geographical location I could not get good software engineers, but it was also the Y2K scare and the dot com bubble was getting bigger and bigger. And so I saw that as an opportunity, that if I started my own company, it would be easy to get a lift because of the rising opportunities and demand. So, so I just quit cold-turkey and started my own business. Eventually I wanted to start my own business because of the family tradition, but also I joke that, you know, one company made a mistake of employing me, but what if I lose this job? You know, nobody else will [laughs] employ me [laughs], I should rather start my own business.

ON HIS FIRST DAYS IN THE UNITED STATES

When I first moved to the US [in 1987], my social circle was comprised of three kinds of people. One was my aunt and my cousins, people of Indian origin who had moved to the U.S. in New Jersey, so their friends and extended family of my cousins, you know, their in-laws and their neighbors of Indian origin. It was very Indian. I would like to call it “Indian ghetto.” So that's one, the second one was foreign students at Stevens. And mainly it was Indian students, but there were lots of Chinese students as well, and also from Taiwan, and some South Korean students. So that was my comfort level; first, you know, foreign students from India, and then some Chinese and Taiwanese and Korean students. And then the third one was people from my college who had gone to—meaning back in India—the undergrad friends who had gone to all these different universities around the country. So we would talk on the phone sometimes. Over the weekend or after ten o'clock, because at that time long distance calls were cheaper if you called over the weekend or after ten P.M.

Q: Could you describe a moment when you realized you were different after moving here?

The first ten/eleven months of my life in the U.S. I lived with my cousin and their circle were all blue-collar workers, mainly, or convenience store owners. And so their perspective of the United States, and their lifestyle, and their opportunities were totally different than what we had—I had envisioned. So that was—it was becoming abundantly clear to me, that I'm different. The second one was I lived in Jersey City. At that time, it

was not gentrified, and there were lots—and again it was a very blue-collar neighborhood—and so people around us also worked in blue collar jobs. And same thing in Hoboken. And I had no idea that not everyone had college degrees. This was my first exposure to a part of society where most people worked in wage-earner type, daily wage-earner type jobs. So, that was different, and then in Stevens, the American students treated me like equal, and the opportunities they were talking about were just incredible. I mean, they would tell me that, “Oh once you have your master's and once, you know, in five years you have a nice car and a nice house and this and that and blah, blah, blah, and you would be living in a nice suburb,” and I thought they were just telling me just to boost my ego or just to be nice. And I didn't realize they—the power of education and opportunities in the United States. Even though I was familiar with some of that from the people who had come to the U.S. before me from my college, as well as some of my dad's friends who had come in the ‘60s and ‘70s and how well-to-do they were.

So when I was at Stevens, I really didn't look at people as different based on ethnic background or their national origin because my cousins and also the neighborhood I lived in, and even after I moved out of my cousin's place, I lived in Jersey City in the area that was blue collar. And then at Stevens, everybody was either doing a master's or a Ph.D. so I thought of that as my group of people. So I didn't think of others as white or Chinese or Korean or things like that. Once I started working for this company, also it was more from the perspective of, “Oh if you work hard and play by the rules, you're gonna get ahead,” and I didn't feel any different from others, who were at this company. Yeah,

paperwork-wise I was different. I didn't have U.S. passport. I had to apply for visa and I had to jump through some hoops. Uh my company also had to jump through the hoops to get me a green card and, but apart from that, the company gave me opportunities all the time. They saw my work ethics, they saw how dedicated I was to the company. I had a sense of ownership, and uh, I think those qualities were appreciated more than, "Oh, this guy is from India," or, "This person is white," or "This person is Black." Even though it was a small company, everyone had an equal opportunity of advancement.

Q: What was one of the first instances that someone had outlined this racial difference or pointed something out where, I guess—because you said that you hadn't conceptualized it like that, you just figured, "Oh, it's America. Everyone has equal opportunity for the most part." Yeah, what was an instance where someone pointed that out as false or made you question it?

When I was a graduate student at Stevens, most graduate students worked in some kind of campus jobs. Actually, if you were on a student visa you could not work outside of the campus. And the campus jobs varied from teaching assistant and research assistant all the way down to working on the grounds and doing a lot of labor work. So one of my friends had a job to do grounds-keeping, and one time he asked for gloves, and the custodian said, "Oh yeah? What kind of gloves did you use in India?" And it was a very derogatory and condescending remark, actually. And so when we complained, somebody told us, "Hey, look. Everybody goes through that, but don't worry, there may be some resentment

because this custodian is still gonna be a custodian ten years, fifteen years, twenty years down the road, whereas you guys are gonna get good jobs, and you're gonna excel in your career. And don't mind this, this is about that kind of resentment.” So in a way, we looked at our, rightly or wrongly, our group as elite, educated people, versus the rest, rather than ethnic divide, vertically divided.

Q: Do you think at the time that the custodian would've had any upward mobility or chance at upward mobility? Because you did say that that presented itself to you as a graduate student, did you have this idea that that was possible for anyone in America when you first moved? Or?

At that time, I thought that if you get a good education and if you keep on getting new opportunities based on your skills and your hard work, and your dedication, then you could have upward mobility. America had the reputation, and I think rightly so, that you are not kept down because of, because you belong to a certain caste like in India, at that time. It was very difficult for certain people—if you didn't have the right social connections, it was very difficult for people to get out of poverty, for example. But in the U.S., it didn't matter. It was all about meritocracy. I do remember one case when there was this lady who would just go through the White Pages and call from pay phones and call the Indian families, especially Patel's, and would just hurl out all these insults and use f-bombs and this and that and go back and this—because this happened to one of my friend's families. Also, on our block, one Indian family's front door, there was a swastika

drawn with a chalk, and it said “white power.” And I talked to the family about it and what it meant, and they just shrugged it off and they said, “it was just some kids doing mischief, they didn't think much of that.”

Jersey City at that time it was economically depressed, so lot of unemployed people would be drinking beer and smoking cigarettes or whatever at street corners, so if you would be passing by they would call you Gandhi or Hindu or something like that. But we didn't think of that as any kind of discrimination. It's just that they didn't know what else to say to people who didn't look like them. I felt the other way around, that people were extremely generous and kind and warm and welcoming, and maybe my frame of reference was India of that time, so, but even now looking back, and even today, I think the United States is probably the most welcoming country in the world. It's not perfect, but I think it's the best.

ON THE DOTBUSTERS

Q: As you know, there was a group called the Dotbusters who targeted South Asian people in Jersey City and I guess the surrounding area too. Can you tell me everything, well, not everything, but can you tell me what you know about the Dotbusters?

First, I knew about it when there was an evening news, and they talked about this group of teenagers who were targeting Indians. And they had written a letter to the, I think *Jersey Journal*, that was a local newspaper in Jersey City, and then some Indian students were living in one house and so one person said, “Yeah, I heard about that, so-and-so was basically stopped on the street and they were saying, 'Hey, you Indians go back.’” And I said, “Really?” He goes, “Yeah,” and then we started hearing some stories of teenagers harassing Indians and sometimes physically assaulting them.

So our first reaction was, “Oh, these Indians, these are different kinds of Indians. These are blue-collar Indians who are not very well-educated, and they don't have good personal hygiene skills, or they still dress up traditionally and so they stick out like sore thumb. Yeah, so these teenagers are reacting to that.” And we didn't think much of that. Then when it became a little bit more prevalent, then our thinking was, “Well, these misguided youths, these teenagers, they're probably—they come from lower-middle class families and they have lost jobs and they see these immigrants as taking their jobs away, or their economic plight—they're making the immigrants the scapegoats.” Or we thought of that as, “This is a hazing ritual that all ethnic communities go through. The Italians had gone through before that, and the Irish had gone through before that, but it's mainly contained just to people who are traditional and who dress up traditionally, they are targeted.” So that's what we thought of that.

We actually did not take it as seriously as some of the American groups did. Because for example, there was a group of Guardian Angels, white young men, they started patrolling the streets where there was a problem with these Dotbusters, and they would escort Indian people home. So there were lots of volunteers on the streets of Jersey City who came out and said, “This is wrong, this is not what America stands for.” There was a lady who worked our company, and she offered me a place to stay above her garage, and eventually I moved over there. But I didn't realize well after I moved in that she had done that because she had seen TV reports of Indians being singled out by Dotbusters and being harassed and she thought that I needed to be extracted out of that environment. But at the same time she didn't want to embarrass me, so she just offered a place to live close to where I worked. And so I saw lots of positive actions by Americans.

Q: You said that you thought that these South Asian people were targeted because of the way that they dress, if they dressed traditionally, which is up to them. That shouldn't be the reason they should be discriminated against, or anything like that—

Oh absolutely, I didn't think the teenagers, the Dotbusters' cause had any merit. Actually, it was abhorrent and this was wrong. But this is how we justified, that, “Oh, maybe that's why, you know.”

Q: Right, but looking back on it now, what do you think the reasons were for committing these acts of discrimination and violence?

I think because their lack of socioeconomic mobility needed a scapegoat. Or lack of economic opportunities or something like that. And they thought these guys were coming in here, ten people living in one-bedroom apartment, with only one car, and then three/four years later, everybody has their own gas station or convenience store, and they all drive nice cars, and they thought the American government was giving them benefits. They didn't realize that this is how their ancestors had come also, meaning making lots of personal sacrifices, working extremely hard, saving money, and then putting their entrepreneurial spirits in buying a small business, and that's how lots of other ethnic communities did, whether it's Vietnamese or South Korean or Greek or Italian, they all—two or three families would live in a small place, save up money, send their kids to good schools and get good education.

I know that because I ran into one of the Dotbusters on a PATH [Port Authority Trans-Hudson] train. I was coming back from visiting my aunt in Kearny, which is near Newark, and then I was going back to Jersey City, and this seventeen/eighteen-year-old kid came in and sat and then he was staring at me. And so I smiled and he smiled back and he said, “Are you Arab?”

I said, “No. I am Indian.”

And he goes, “Indian from India?”

I said, "Yeah."

He goes, "You look different."

I say, "What do you mean?"

And he goes, "Oh, the Indians that I'm exposed to in Jersey City are all dirty and they smell and they dress up traditionally."

And I said, "I live in New Jersey, I mean Jersey City, also."

He says, "Oh, you must be different. These guys, they stuff like ten people in one-bedroom apartment and they always have six or seven people piled up in one car, and they don't talk to you, they don't smile. You smiled at me but they didn't. We hate them."

I said, "Woah, that's a strong word. They're just trying to make a living and set themselves up in the U.S. like anybody else. You may not like some of the things they do, but it's not illegal," and he goes, "Yeah, but you know, they take advantage of our government and they get jobs before we do."

And I said, “No, no, no, no, that's not how it works.” But I didn't start attacking him or anything like that, and he just opened up big time.

And I said, well, I asked him what ethnicity he belonged to and he goes, “My grandparents came from Italy.”

And I said, “Have you heard the stories how your grandparents lived?”

And he goes, “Yeah, but at the same time, my parents told me that we were not allowed to speak in Italian and these guys, Indians, always speak in Indian in public and they don't want to learn the language.”

And I said, “No, some people come in here with very little English language skills, but they want their children to become Americans and in order to participate fully and get good education, they do want their children to learn English and go to regular schools and blah, blah, blah.” I said, “They live in one apartment because they are saving up money and then five years, ten years down the road,” just like what I was told at Stevens by someone that, five years, ten years down the road they would have nice cars and house, and I said, “Well, these guys are working hard and saving money and then they would invest.”

And he goes, “Yeah, so the government doesn't help them?”

I said, “No,” I said, “they don't even know where to go to get all the government assistance. And plus, in India, you're on your own. There is hardly any government assistance. I don't think these people know that in the U.S. there are government programs, if there are any.” I don't think I convinced him completely, or converted him, but at least I softened some of his scales and tried to—I mean in retrospect, I think I didn't know that—developing empathy for others who on the surface don't look like you but when you dig a little bit deeper you realize that they are human beings just like you. And people who want to drive a wedge, they always focus on the differences, especially that are very visible on the surface. And that helps them demonize the other side and make them look less human, and that's when you kill empathy and that's when you start the divide. Of course, I didn't know of all these things but it looks like that helped a little bit more.

By the way, he did thank me when he got off the train and said, “Thank you, I didn't know about all these things.” He said, “You know, in our family, in our friend circle, all we hear is all these complaints about these dirty Indians coming in here, they're talking their language, they dress up like they used to do back in India, they take advantage of the generosity of the government and the system and they're taking our jobs away.”

Q: Is there anything that I mentioned or didn't ask about the Dotbusters that you would like to add?

I just remember one TV show in which there were some Columbia students, or at least one Columbia student was there, and the TV anchor was asking questions like, “So, why do they hate Indians? Is that because they don't date? Or the—” you know, they were struggling, 'cause again, the Indian community had started coming in after the immigration reform in 1965, but in the mid-eighties is when people started coming in large numbers. Also, the first wave of Indians in the sixties and seventies was similar to Cuba's, it was professionals and business owners. But then they started sponsoring their extended families and so the second wave was all kinds of Indian people. And the Americans were still struggling to understand India a little bit more. Also at that time, we were at the height of the Cold War and India was part of the so-called Non-Aligned Movement, but it was anything but non-aligned. It was very heavily aligned with the communist countries, especially the USSR. And India was not seen as a friendly country at that time. And it was still mysterious, people were intrigued by India's heritage and traditions and the rich history, but still, they didn't know or understand a lot of things about India. I still remember people asking me about Bhopal gas union carbide tragedy, because those are the only images they had seen, and they had seen India as a very poor country. So lots of people would ask me if I had lived in a mud hut or if we had running water, or if I had seen a car or television when I was in India, and things like that. People had no idea about India.

INDER JIT SINGH

This interview was conducted by Amy Starecheski for the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project created by the Columbia Center for Oral History Research (formerly the Columbia University Oral History Research Office). Dr. Starecheski was a master's student at Teacher's College at Columbia University when she became an interviewer for the oral history project. She was my professor while I was in the Oral History Master's (OHMA) Program at Columbia; she is presently the director of the OHMA program.

I chose this interview because I could not write a thesis concerned with Islamophobia and discrimination after September 11, 2001 and ignore the distinct history and experiences that Sikh people have lived in India and the United States. Sikhs are a religious minority in India and Pakistan and have seen their communities be discriminated against on different levels throughout history, the largest incident in recent memory being the violent anti-Sikh "riots" in 1984 after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards after long-standing tensions and violence. Official estimates place the death toll at around 3,000 across India, whereas the unofficial count is around 8,000 across India and 3,000 in Delhi alone. According to Human Rights Watch, the Indian government has yet to take action against the culpable parties.

Discrimination against Sikhs and other groups perceived to be Arab or Muslim in the United States increased after September 11¹, and increased again after the 2016 presidential election². Furthermore, Dr. Singh is a witness of the 1947 Partition, a violent and pivotal event shared in India and Pakistan's history. His narrative is an important one, as he is originally from Punjab, the state with the largest Sikh population which was divided during Partition; there is now a Punjab in Pakistan as well as a Punjab in India.

Parts of this interview with Dr. Singh can also be found in After the Fall, a book containing eighteen interviews from the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project.

JANUARY 20, 2002

I was born in a town called Gujranwalla, which is now in Pakistan. And you know that there was no Pakistan in 1947, and I'm a bit older than that, so I was born in Gujranwalla when it was India. Pakistan was formed in 1947, and we migrated from there to what is now India. And now good historians tell you that over eight million people migrated from one part to the other, and human terms, the problem with the issues of refugees at that time was greater than in Europe after the Second World War.

¹ Lichtblau, Eric. "Hate Crimes Against American Muslims Most Since Post-9/11 Era." September 17, 2016. Accessed December 13, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/us/politics/hate-crimes-american-muslims-rise.html>.

² South Asian Americans Leading Together. "This Week in Hate: Hate Continues to Rise, Our Communities Continue to Suffer." April 20, 2018. Accessed December 13, 2018. <http://saalt.org/this-week-in-hate-hate-continues-to-rise-our-communities-continue-to-suffer/>.

One of the fundamental premises of forming Pakistan, was the fact that the leadership in India, which was fighting for independence of the country, was somewhat Hindu-dominated, and according to papers that are released now and the history that we know now, they were reluctant to share power with the Muslims, and the Muslims wanted their own country. Perhaps with the encouragement of the British—the British were not there for our good, necessarily, and Pakistan was formed as an Islamic country, a Muslim country. Strictly. India, at least theoretically, had remained secular. And in a Muslim country, any non-Muslim was not really welcome. There are perhaps very few Hindus or Sikhs left in Pakistan. There are a few but not that many. Most of them migrated. And the migration of people from India to Pakistan—Muslims—and of Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan into India, was not a peaceful transfer. As I said, the refugee problem was perhaps bigger than it was in Europe after the Second World War. You know, thousands and thousands, untold thousands, were killed. It was not a peaceful transfer. We transferred a week after India had been divided and Pakistan was formed, and we escaped only through the help of our Muslim driver, otherwise I wouldn't have made it. And we left with the clothes on our backs, that's how we made it. My father went back two days later with an army escort to the house to see if he could get more things out, but our house was already occupied and things were already gone. Finished. That was it. He couldn't believe that people we had lived with for generations would turn against us. But I'm sure there were Muslims whose house, for example, we got—burnt out, broken down house when we moved to India, they probably, when they left, they probably couldn't

believe that Hindus and Sikhs that they lived with for generations would turn against them, but that's what happened.

MARCH 2, 2003

ON THE PARTITION

Q: You just mentioned that you had been able to get out because of your Muslim—

The Muslim who used to drive us to the school, he came and told us that, "You'd better get out." And he did get us out. I recall at that time there was a curfew in the area. After seven o'clock, nobody was allowed to be out in the street. This was summer. Seven o'clock was daylight, you know, July, August, and that we left that part on August 22. India was divided on August 14, 15, so this was a week later.

So technically for that one week we were no longer in India; we were in Pakistan. Yes. And I remember getting caught after curfew hours, because we were playing outside. It was a nice day. We got caught, and, of course, the police officers were not really happy with you little kids. They returned us; little scolding from both police and the home, parents.

We had come to India. At the time we were just come to India, and we were living in a sort of broken-down house temporarily until the civil machinery, the government

machinery got stabilized and so on, and my father got a job back. We were staying there for a couple of months, right near the border of India and Pakistan, and one day I was playing outside. I heard sort of explosions, sounds like—well, which turned out to be shots being fired. I don't know how else to describe those sounds.

It turned out that there was a trainload of Muslims that had been going to Pakistan, being repatriated from India into Pakistan, that was stopped at the railroad track which was very close to the house, and everybody killed them there, by the Hindu and Sikh mob of people around the train who had stopped the train and killed every Muslim, man, woman or child in it.

I even saw one guy washing his blood-rich knife at the—every, well that street that we were on had a tap, water tap, water fountain at the end, and there he was, washing it of the blood. It turned out later that the Hindus and Sikhs had heard that a trainload of Hindus and Sikhs coming from Pakistan into India had been killed, and this was their revenge. Now, I don't know whether, which was true, but I did see the revenge part of it, and I think that's a memory that will stay with me as long as I live.

[Off-tape conversation. Pause in interview.]

I don't think I'll forget that image. Ever. And then, you know, I still want to go to that area. I want to see that house, you know, where we were, and I want to see the school, 28

[unclear] Road, that I started when I was four years old, and wander through the school.

I'd like to see that part of the world.

I remember my younger brother, who later joined the air force—he was born in Pakistan. He was two years old when we left, and later he joined the air force in India. And one of those India-Pakistan wars—they had three of them—and he was in that and he was flying around there. I sort of joked with him and I said, “You know, you’re leading bombing raids out there. For all you know, you’re bombing the house where you were born.”

[Laughs] You know? I don’t think he was particularly amused. [Starecheski laughs.]

“You may be bombing the house that you were born in, that room where you were born.”

Q: You said that there was a curfew that August in Gujranwala. Was there violence there?

No, this was in Lahore. Lahore. Gujranwala was where I was born. This was in Lahore. In Lahore, yes. But Gujranwala, too, had that. And I remember finding my grandfather in a refugee camp in India, after we had moved there. So things were a little rough. I remember that we lived on dried onions and dried eggs and dried milk, powdered milk, which were left over after the Second World War. There were a lot of supplies the Allies had left there in 1945. That’s what we had in ’47. You know? That’s what we lived on.

And I remember my mother giving us all that sort of thing, and we asked her, “Why don’t you drink some milk?”

And she said, “No, I don’t like milk,” which I know was a lie. Now I know. Because there was so little. What little there was, she gave to the kids. I remember doing our homework by kerosene lamp, because there was nothing else, no electricity at the time. Things were different. Things were different.

I have read since that the refugee problem in Punjab and in India in 1947 was worse than the refugee problem in Europe after the Second World War. But so little of it has been documented. You know, there are a couple of books, and I have them. One movie was made, good, and that was that. But nothing documented. Indians are not fond of detailed history, plus, of course, the times were bad enough that they didn’t have the means to put it together, and they have not attempted to do it even later.

There was rioting. There were good people and bad people on both sides. I mean, there were Muslims who killed us and burned our houses and things like this, and there were Muslims who saved us, and we did the same to them. So, that had been Sikh history, throughout.

Sikhs in the seventeenth century fought many battles. Many of them were fought with Hindus as the enemy. In many of them, Muslims are the enemy. In many the Hindus were

our allies. In many the Muslims are our allies. So our battles are never against Muslims or against Hindus. Battles were for principle, whatever there was, but not against Hindu and Muslims.

We do not look at the religion as the enemy. That is why there's no pleasure in now saying, "Oh, we are not Muslim. Therefore, don't kill us." You know. "Get them. Get those bastards because they killed us in 1947." No. Or in the seventeenth century. No, that's not right. That's contrary to Sikh's teaching.

Q: How did you make the journey?

Basically, we took what we had and he hid us in a truck and he got us to a railroad station. And I recall in railroad station, all of a sudden there was sirens and thing, and I think some danger or whatever. They cleared the platform of all people. [Laughs] You know, including us; herded us into little areas guarded by the police, and then we came back out again. And the train took several hours to make the journey which normally could be made in less than half an hour. You know? Until we got across the border, we were not sure we were going to be.

My father did go back a couple of days later with an army escort to get to the house to get our possessions and things, but they were all gone. The house had been occupied.

Everything was missing. My only regret was I had made two albums. I used to cut

photographs of flags of different nations and photographs of political leaders and so on, of the world. And they were in there. There was a picture of the, diagrammatic sketch of the atom bomb. There was a picture of Clement Atley, who had defeated [Winston S.] Churchill, mowing his own lawn. The flag of just about every nation, that sort of thing. And, of course, they were lost, too. I had told my father when he went back for a day to at least bring those things back, huh? And he didn't. Of course they were not there, you know? And I fought a battle with him, that, you know, that was my treasure. That's all I valued.

Things were different. Things were different. For about three months we slept on the floor in this broken-down house until the Indian government reorganized and he had his job back. He was senior officer in the Punjab administrative service, and that was okay. But when I look at the fact that people who had private small businesses, they had nothing. At least three months later we got, you know, he got a middle-class living standard all of a sudden. No? It was okay. Sure, we started from scratch, but he had a job. He could buy a suit. You know? Kids could go to school. Things are okay.

Q: Did you know in advance that you were going to have to leave?

I don't think so. You know, my fa—if I remember correctly, my father kept saying, "We have lived here for generations. These are our friends. The country is being divided. Be no harm done." Then we realized we will be moving. He said, "That's perfectly all right.

The government will get us out. It'll be an orderly going out. We will take whatever we have. We'll take it with us. It's not a big problem. These are friends." You know?

But the friends set the town ablaze. And they were not the only one. The Muslims did it on their side; the Hindus and Sikhs did it on their side. So, you know, they were friends, but there was a frenzy at the time, you know.

Q: So in the time building up to the actual partition, did things seem normal? Or were things sort of out of control before?

Well, things were out of control, I remember, for a couple of months before partition. At night the people of that area, they had organized a group, a schedule to be night watchmen, and my father also performed his stint on it sometimes. They armed themselves with whatever they had in the house, a sword or a knife or a big stick or whatever, and people, groups of three or four or five, they would walk the street at night. And there was, you know, two-hour period of duty and then another group will come, another group. So at night they did that. They did that.

That was how safety was assured because occasionally you would hear crowds of Muslims chanting their slogan, and you could hear it. And what the Sikhs and Hindus would do, they would collect in the local Sikh temple in that area and they would just as loudly chant their slogan. And then both sides will stay put because they knew that both

sides were equally dangerous around, and nothing deters, you know, people quite like another side being prepared to fight. And yes, that happened for a couple of months, that I remember.

Q: But there wasn't a lot of actual violence.

Oh, there was. Yes. I've seen at night houses ablaze not too far from us. I've seen people being shot in the streets at that time. I've seen a man, a policeman patrolling the street during the day, pointing to his officer that over there is somebody lighting a fire to a house. A Muslim was lighting a fire to a Sikh house, and the Sikh pointed to his officer.

His officer—I don't know whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim; I can't tell the difference—he looked at him and he said, “Ignore it.” And so this police officer fired two shots, one at his officer, one at that in the window, and dropped them both. Whether he killed them or not, I do not know. I saw them both drop. I was a child, you know. Now, I can't condemn him, because he pointed out and the officer didn't act. The police job is to protect, and there are bad eggs in everything. So this man shot both, and I saw that. And would I remember it? Forever. [Laughs] Of course. Of course.

Q: Is there any reason why your family and your family's home wasn't targeted, or was it just luck?

Oh, I think it was within the neighborhood which was Sikh-dominated and they never came into that neighborhood. They didn't target it. But when he went back a couple of days later, because the people had all gone, they had taken over all the houses and then the property and things. That was gone. No, so they had taken it over.

It was more luck than anything else, because one guy who was not that far away from our house, he had been shot and killed here, murdered. I remember. I remember that, yes. So these things did happen. Yes. My own uncle was stabbed several times in a train while he was escaping from Pakistan into India, and thrown out of the train, left for dead. Except that some Muslim family found him, saved him, nursed him, and several months later—I don't remember how many months later, but some months later when we were in India—he stumbled into, he found us and there he was. Yes.

And even now—now, I don't think he's alive now, but thirty years ago when I last saw him, I mean, he was in good health. He was working. He still suffered from his old injuries. He was limping and things, but that was living history to us. You know? That was living history. That's why I said they have never documented the history of what happened there, properly; neither the Indians nor the Pakistanis. And they should have.

Q: You said that you had to look for your grandfather in a refugee camp?

Yes. We found him there.

Q: Could you tell me about that?

He came from Gujranwala. He was a goldsmith near the end of, you know, that time in his life, and he had a lot of gold and things like this. So what he did was—which we found later—he had built false pockets in his T-shirt, under the shirt, and in that he had put gold ornaments and things. He was able to escape from Gujranwala, came into a refugee camp.

Now, my older brother at the time, the school was suspended. There was no school. So instead of letting kids wander around, my father sent him to a refugee camp to do social service. So his day—my father would spend his day looking to government offices to see what's happening with his job, and where to get what, and my older brother would go to this camp to do social service, you know, to distribute those eggs and onions and things to people, or whatever he could. And in doing that, that's where he found my grandfather, and brought him home. [Laughter] You know?

I don't know. What can I say? What can I say? You know, I look at India. I think the best thing to do was not to divide it according to religion. The best thing that should have been done to India, the subcontinent, was to divide it into cultural-geographic, maybe five regions. Huh? North, east, south, west, and a central part, and each multi-religious, multiethnic society, and then perhaps they could have learned to cooperate like the

Europeans do now, like the European economic community and the Euro. That would have become a powerful, economically powerful place there, or places, four, five places.

What they have done is created a Pakistan, which is really a functioning anarchy. No, I don't know what to say that. I don't know if I want to say that. I think India is a functioning anarchy. They're both functioning anarchies. One is a Muslim functioning anarchy, and India is, on paper, a secular country, so it's a secular functioning anarchy.

They are about the most corrupt, you know. You could never find—they're a totally different thing. They're horrible. And the loss in '47 was horrible. And the arms race that's there now, their rivalry, is horrible. The people deserve better than they've got.

JANUARY 20, 2002

That's what religion can do at its worst, you know? A fanatical attitude that says, "The only way is my way, anything else is wrong." And to me that is not the American way. And to me that is the problem with the people that attacked the World Trade Center, the fanatical attitude that says, "We are the only true path and anything else is an infidel and therefore their dying doesn't count." And that's not right, that's just not right. And I think that's what happened here. But that's not the way of Islam, that's not the way of Sikhism, that's not the way of Christianity. Although if you look at history, Christians have waged crusades, and Christians have killed people who were not Christians, on the grounds that

they were not Christians, they have burned them—Muslims have done the same things. I like to remind people that the library in Alexandria was burnt twice: once by the Christians, once by the Muslims. Both their reasoning was the same. Anybody who—a library did not need to have the literature of people who were not believers in our faith. Any other learning is false learning.

I remember the first few months when we slept on the floor of this burnt out house, and we got leftover supplies from the army after the Second World War—you know, dried eggs and dried onions and things like that, powdered eggs. You know—powdered milk—that's the stuff we lived on. And my parents also used to sleep on the floor and they drank no milk for a while because, as I remember my mother telling us, because, oh, she doesn't like to drink milk. Which I know is not true. There wasn't enough. There was only enough for the kids, whatever she got that's the way it was. My father worked for the government and the government reestablished itself within a few months, and he got his job back in the Indian part of the country. And things moved on. We lost a lot but we rebuilt it. Things worked out all right. He had a job, so we were lucky in that. So, it was a powerful job and most people therefore, in Punjab, knew him. It worked out okay. A very bright man. Very bright man. With an honors in physics. A top student in the state for all these years from high school to college. And I have worked with some very bright scientists across the world in my years here.

I have to say that I have never met a man that I would call innately brighter. The sharpest mind I've known. But he lived in India. The opportunities were limited. Why didn't he go into physics and research and so on? Because he was one of a family of eight sons and daughter. My grandfather died and therefore he had responsibilities to work and so on. Had he had the opportunities and the training that people get here, I think that he could have been a Nobel Prize-winning physicist. That's a different story. [Laughs] A very bright man. But I—he—a very bright mind, but a very analytic mind. His approach to the religion was a very analytic approach. He read a lot. There were lots of books around the house, and my mother also read a lot but in Punjabi, and her approach to religion was perhaps more of a devotional kind. So we learned to read, that was one sure way to escape scolding at home, was to be found with a book. Okay, so no matter what you had done was forgiven. [Laughs] That was—we learned to play that card very well. All of us. So, I learned, I think to appreciate the rational process, the logical process and the devotional approach as well and I recognize that in approaching religion, you're dealing with a reality that transcends your intellect. Or, should say, your sense cannot perceive, and your intellect cannot fathom. It's a reality that you don't normally see. And yet you must use the intellectual process to understand it. And so I learned to combine the two, I think. I think, I took the best of both but, who knows. That depends.

**“I DON'T THINK THEY HAD EVER SEEN A SIKH, I DON'T THINK THEY'D
EVER SEEN ONE SINCE.”**

I wanted to be an English major, and I studied that to some degree, and then my father and I both realized that you cannot live on it. So I very quickly did dentistry, graduated from that, applied for a fellowship to come to this country, and my father thought that I was rather foolish, because who would give a fellowship to me, a newly minted graduate with a very spotty academic record, and who was going to do that, you know? [Laughs] But my young—my older brother had just come from England, he had been in England for training and he had trained there for seven years and he had come back and he encouraged me and he paid my way to the interview. He said, “It’s perfectly all right to get a vacation if nothing else.” Which I did, and I had no hopes of getting it, so I wasn’t really worried about it, and I felt really relaxed about it, and I was one of the two people selected. So I ended up here. I ended up here, and for the fellowship year and a quarter or something and then I applied to various places, and I said to you that I was accepted at Harvard and Columbia and NYU [New York University] and Oregon. I didn’t even know where Oregon was, but Oregon was \$500 a year, and New York and Columbia were \$4,000 a year. So to Oregon I went. And there I found that they did not have the right visa to support me for a couple of years. That’s when I changed to the Ph.D. program. I did a little dentistry for two years and then I went to the Ph.D. program at the medical school, and the visa wasn’t right, and they could not give me any money. And that took a couple of years to straighten out, that problem, so for a little while I had a job at night, from ten at night to six in the morning, and went to school all day. It was a little rough.

We processed film. It was a franchise called Perfect Photo and they used to process a couple of thousand rolls of film a night. And I processed film. But I knew enough chemistry that I could mix chemicals in fifty-gallon drums fairly accurately and things turned out all right. So the supervisor recognized that I was a little more educated than the usual minimum wage guy, and so my—I worked for minimum wage for only maybe a month or two. Then I was raised to a buck fifty, and then to—to two twenty-five. I think by two twenty-five the visa problem was straightened out and I—I retired from that job [laughs]. That's when I got the Ph.D. in anatomy. When I was a student, I married, and my wife was from a small town called Northsdale in Minnesota. Interesting town, 1,200 people I think at the time, we used to joke about the fact that I was 1,201 when I went there in the middle of winter. And I don't think that they had ever seen an Indian, I don't think they had ever seen a Sikh, I don't think they'd ever seen one since.

Midwesterners are very correct and very polite. That they were. But they were not pleased, and that I can understand. You know, I can understand that. So you see back to things that are happening now, I've said sometimes, I can understand if people look at you and they get concerned or they become defensive, or whatever, they have the right to do that. What I don't accept is when they do things which are legally not right. Or contrary to either the spirit or the law of this country. You know. And that, I no longer accept.

So when a security man tells me that he wants to remove my turban, I don't accept that. Not happy. That is not right, that is not consistent with the spirit of this country. I mean,

you don't ask somebody else to remove her—to drop his pants, or something of this kind. So my turban should be—if your beeper goes off around my turban, then you have the right to take me to a private room and suggest that you want to look under it because security concerns so dictate. But that should apply just as well to my shoes for that matter—if your beeper goes off, please, I'll take my shoes off too. No problem. Or my pants off too, for that matter, no problem. But if the beeper doesn't go off, why should you do this? Just because I look like somebody who may have come from somewhere else. That's got nothing to do with anything. Everybody here has come from somewhere else. Everybody. Even George W. Bush, [laughs] you know?

I came to New York on a special research fellowship from the National Institute of Health [NIH]. So I did a NIH special research fellowship for two—three years. Three years, and then I did have offers elsewhere, but my former wife was at that time working for her Ph.D. in experimental psychiatry here, and NYU also made me a good offer, an offer that I couldn't refuse. So I stayed here. I joined the faculty in '72 as an assistant professor, I think I became associate professor in '74 and a full professor in '79—it was fairly rapid. Within seven years, I—I did all right. And, to me, that is the spirit of America. You are taken for what you are worth and what you do, that's the way it is. It doesn't matter what you look like. I was the only faculty member with a turban and a beard then, and I'm the only one now.

ON RELIGION

When I came in 1970, when I came back from Oregon, I don't think the community was very large, perhaps twenty people who were recognizable Sikhs, you know, with turbans and so on, and we used to meet in the basement of a Catholic—the Catholic church school. In Queens. Rent a hall and meet there. So every Sunday morning we'll come and first clean up the hall, of all the beer cans and cigarette butts, coffee cups from the night before—the kids are at a party or whatever—clean that up and then we would set up our place. Now of course, there are about, I would say, ten or eleven Sikh temples and places of worship within commuting distance of New York. There are two right here in Long Island. And so there's a lot of property they have bought—a lot of—the community has been—is sizeable. But the community has not built those bridges with the—and again, the community is large, it's grown. Now a new immigrant comes and he gets absorbed within his own community. He speaks the same language, he, you know—they watch their own movies, do their own things. You know, restaurants, grocery stores—you do not have to go outside that community, except to work. That is it. You come back and be reabsorbed into that culture again. That is the advantage and it's also the disadvantage. Disadvantage is they never learn how the world operates outside. They don't know what their kids are up to. So there is a disconnect between the parental generation, and their kids. Because the kids live outside, in schools, and they live differently. They live like the typical homegrown American kids. The parents have still got their heads back in India. They have just transferred things. An unfiltered transfer, if you wish. So sometimes there is a problem, a generational problem, and that happens all the time. And that's where

people like me, in the middle, come in. The young people find that I understand them, I've lived their life, I know. I know where they come from. They talk to me. The parents, they also sometimes talk to me because I can speak their language, I know where they come from. So I often end up being the bridge between the young and the old.

So that's a role I enjoy. So much of my writing also concerns things of this nature, and since I use the language of the American kids here, they relate to this. So they relate to what I say. My relationship to them is good, for that reason. It's a very satisfying role. And that was the kind of building bridges that I'm talking about that is a very important part of living in a community. And that has not happened to our community quite as much. New York, on the other hand, I find, is a little different. New York is like really not a—not a melting pot, and not a mosaic—it is a mosaic, but every little community is in its own little self, like little villages. The Indians live in one community, and the Chinese are over there. There's Chinatown and Little Italy and Little India and so on. So that is good but it's also bad. It's good because there's a sense of community, they don't lose their tradition and their community. It's bad because they become isolated. And all they have done is transfer from a remote part of India, to a little bit of America. Their cars are bigger, their houses are bigger, and their heads are still in that culture. And that does not produce the relationship that you need with people around you. So there are problems with that. But the experience has been good.

Q: So you lived with your—did you have brothers and sisters at age ten? Do you have—

Singh: Yes, I'm number three. There are four of us, so—all four of us were there at that time, at the time of the partition of India. All my family live here now. My parents are here, over the years I brought them all here. And they all work here productively, this is the way usually the country grows, this is how it's always been.

My daughter was born in 1974, so she'd be a bit older than you are. Yes, and she was named after the two grandmothers. Annapiar—her maternal grandmother is Anna, and paternal—my mother is Piar Kaur, so she was Annapiar Kaur. And that's the way she was named. She carried a little absurdity in her name, because Kaur is the name that Sikh women use, and Singh is the name that Sikh men use. And so she is Annapiar Kaur Singh [laughs], because I use Singh as a last name.

We got divorced or separated when she was about, a little less than three. So, I saw her often, every weekend, and I still see her whenever she is in town, but she was raised primarily by her mother. I did not want to create problems for her identity and so on, so she was not raised as a Sikh. But she knows something about it, she came, she's been to the Sikh worship, she knows a little bit culturally about it, but she—I would not call her a Sikh, but she is enough informed about it. My first book of essays, in a sense, is dedicated to her. It says in the acknowledgements, in the preface, that these are conversations with my father and daughter that could not occur. And that's the way it is. And she's in a couple of essays. Some of the essays I write are about things that

happened. And so, things that happened with her are part of the essays. And when I gave her a copy of the book, she said, “I am told that I am in it.” And I said, “Yes, you are.” And she said, “Where am I?” I said, “Well, you’ll have to find out. Go read it.”

When I was raised in India, I was—most of us, you know, particularly who went to better schools and Catholic schools and so on, we were not given any systematic knowledge of our religion. I didn’t get any. Religion was around the house, there were books I read here and there, but no systematic instruction. And so I didn’t know all that much about it. And I came here, and I went to Oregon, and people asked me questions and I didn’t know much. And luckily my father had enough collection of books and sayings about it, so he sent me several books, and I was curious, and I read about it, and my question was—either I get rid of this, or I understand what it’s all about. And so I did read, and learned to appreciate it. I consider myself a convert to Sikhism. I fell in love with it after reading it here.

Then I started writing some book reviews occasionally. I would get books on Sikhism that I liked, and I would write a book review and publish that. It was a journal published from St. Louis—Columbia, Missouri—called “South Asia in Books.” They were book reviews. And that guy published—in fact, he saw one of my reviews and he said, “Send them to me as well.” So I did, and he published. This is a guy—he was a professor of history there, Gerry [N. Gerald] Barrier, professor of history, Asian history. I never met him. So we started publishing book reviews. Then he liked a couple of my essays that I

had just written, you know, out of fun, and he said, why don't you write a few more—I like your style—and I'll help publish them. I said, "Fine." So I wrote about twenty of them, sent them to him, and he arranged the publication. He wrote the introduction, arranged the publication, and I've still never met the guy.

The first book came out in '94. I think so—yes, '94. And of course, you know, after 1984, with all the things that happened in India, I gave several television interviews, and I said some things that the Indian government probably didn't like. Like, for example, when all those people were killed in November 1984, I mentioned to you, I was on an interview with the Indian consulate general, something like this, and he said to me that—“You people are critical of us, you Sikhs, but you don't know. You're living here. You're an American. You do not know the realities of India.” And he said that to me, directly, on television, and I didn't know what to say to him.

And I finally said to him, “Yes, I agree with you. I will do something that my Sikh friends will not forgive me for. I will agree with you that I do not know what the facts are in India. I will even agree with you that all the people you are shooting in Punjab, all the Sikhs that you are imprisoning, you're emptying villages and you are shooting them—you say they are all separatists, they're terrorists, and you take them, you never try them, you shoot them and you throw them in jail, throw away the key for the next four years, and I agree with you, that's what they deserve. I have to compliment you on a very efficient system. You can see a man, you know he's a terrorist. You don't have to

question him, you can shoot him. Great. Now tell me, you yourself say that 2,700 people died in Delhi alone in three days, now our figures are 10,000, but you say—I'll take 2,700. And if 2,700 people died, and this is now years later, this is the capital of the country, I would think your police in Delhi should be more efficient than the police in Punjab—how come you can't find a single guilty person? Is it not the same country? Don't they operate by the same laws? Are you telling me that the police in Delhi are so poorly trained they cannot recognize a terrorist? In three days, they can't see a guy being shot? They can't find anybody?" And the guy got so angry. He got up, walked off. You know [laughs]?

The result was, for the next five years, I could not get a visa to go to India. I was an American, I needed a visa. I could not get a visa. I was on their black list. And of course, I gave further interviews and I said, I'm on the black list for what? For saying what's on my mind. I can be wrong. You may think I'm a fool, that's okay. But you don't stop a man from traveling because he's a fool. You know? So I'm a fool? So what? I can afford to pay the ticket, to buy a ticket. You can't block me, you know, from traveling, not give me a visa because you think I'm an idiot, so what? And of course, I said these things, to the press as well, and I could not get a visa for five years. And I couldn't travel there.

And of course I wrote about it. I wrote even letters to the New York Times and they published four or five of them. Which didn't help me any. [laughs] You know? But I wrote—and I wrote more articles and things and some of the young people here liked

what I wrote and the way I wrote it, and so the book really came out of those kinds of things. And the book became quite popular, it went through two editions and a couple of reprints, and so they wanted another one. People in Canada wanted to publish a second one, which we did put together in 2001, about nine months ago, I published a second book of essays. So it deals with really—you see, there are other problems. Issues I deal with are more of an interest to young people growing up here. Our community has now built over a hundred places of worship here, but this is a community that has come from India, with an unfiltered transfer of values and matters and behavior and so on. And they set up their management that way. Our young people growing up here, I tell them that they have built up—built their places of worship to capture the sights, sounds, smells of home. And home is over there. The people are growing up here. Their home is here. Their sights, sounds, smells of home are different. Their management style is different. And so there are issues there: what language shall we use? How shall we do certain things? Certain behavior patterns, the way they speak, the fact that they don't do anything on time, you know [laughs]—the cleanliness of the place, whatever. The issue is young people here want to do things differently. They—these young people living here—don't want to look to Indian organizations for guidance for what to do in their religious matters. We want to make our own thing. We don't want to build a papacy here. So, issues of that kind—I write about these things. So young people enjoy that, they like it. And that's what's made the books sell.

ON LANGUAGE

I remember once, once one person here—and I've lectured in other places since I've been here in New York. I've lectured at Columbia, at Cornell, at City University [of New York], [Albert] Einstein [College of Medicine], just about all the medical schools in the area. New Jersey, you know, UNBNJ [University of New Brunswick New Jersey]—and what—there was an issue I was going to make out of that and I forgot. Absolutely forgot—how's that?

Q: About people thinking you're not going to speak the language properly?

Oh, yes, that's right. There was one guy from one college—I will not name him—years ago, he wanted me to come and give a few lectures. He had heard about it and he wanted me to come and give a few lectures. He didn't know me, so he called another friend of his who was working at that time in our college at NYU—in fact, whose department I later inherited—they combined two and I got that one part of my thing. So he came to his office and I was called there too—and so the three of us were sitting there: Sam, this guy Art, and myself. And he kept asking his friend Sam, “What does Dr. Singh—where did he get his degree, what can he teach, what does he do?”—and I'm sitting right there. Finally he says to Sam, “How good is Dr. Singh's English?” and Sam was recommending me highly, which was very good of him, and I finally turned to Art and I said, “You know, if you're so curious about what Dr. Singh can do, why don't ask him? I'm right here!” [Laughter] Well, you know, I said it in a laughing manner, but the guy turned to me very seriously, and he said, “Okay, Dr. Singh, tell me, how good is your English?”

And all I could blurt out was that, you know, “I have been listening to you for the past twenty minutes, and I have to say I didn’t understand a word of it.” [laughter] All I’m saying is in English. [Laughter] So, I’ve pulled some dumb things. I’ve pulled some dumb things. Not that they weren’t totally justified—they were at least partially justified. But they were dumb things. I was young, and I could do it. I could do it. I remember—I remember a women’s parade down Fifth Avenue in the early ‘70s, I think, 1970, ‘69, around that time. I don’t remember the year now. It was being led by Gloria Steinem and some other heavy hitters, maybe McCarthy or something, I don’t remember. Some really heavy hitters in the women’s movement at the time. And I was standing outside on Fifth Avenue, watching them. And I said, at that time there were maybe two or three Sikhs and I guess my turban must have caught their eye. So this one woman at the head of the parade, looks at me, yells out at me, “Come! Your women need it more than—” or something like that, “Your women needed to come join us.” Okay! I walked right in. I said to her, “Fine, but I want you to listen to me for a minute.” She said sure. I said, “I just wanted to tell you—there are more women that are doctors in India than there are in America.” And she sort of laughed, and I laughed too, and the parade ended at Bryant Park, and we made good friends and we had a conversation. So I said—dumb things I’ve done.

I also protested the—what was it, George Wallace? George Wallace was the—well before your time—the segregationist governor of Alabama—I think Alabama. Absolutely against any kind of integration at the university. And when the law did not permit him to

become the governor for the third time, he shoehorned his wife into the office, and he ran the state from behind the scenes. He was the candidate—there was a party he created called the American Independence Party, I think, and he was a candidate for the president. He was a fairly credible Independence Party candidate. And we protested, of course, we were students at the time. We protested his activities and I demonstrated against him, too. And finally I went to shake hands with him. And he looked at me and he didn't know quite what to make of me. You know? [Laughs] I thought it was great. I thought it was great to throw him off balance. Why not, you know? Why not.

I think the citizenship was around 1970, I think. The exact date I don't remember. I don't remember it. Nineteen seventy, I believe, because I missed that election. I missed voting for Hubert Humphrey, which I would have happily done. You know? The citizenship was, in a sense, not as great an experience as I expected it to be. After that interview with the immigration guy on citizenship who wanted me to write a sentence in English and didn't like the sentence that I wrote, which was, "What would you like me to write?" You know, he didn't like that. But nevertheless, it was not that great a feeling because there were hundreds of people packed in that one hall, and the judge comes. "Raise your hands"—reads the oath, and that's it. I expected it to be more of a personal experience, maybe half a dozen people at a time, but I can understand that in New York, you can't do that. You can't do that in New York, no. So, it was not a magical experience in that sense, but—it was good. Citizenship was okay. I've voted in every election since. I had at one time thought that I'd like to enter politics as well, and if I'd stayed married at the

time, and stayed in New Rochelle [New York] where we used to have a house, I would have, I think, entered politics. I very much wanted to. And I—who knows? Maybe would have won something. But certainly, even if not that, I wanted to do it so that in campaigning I would meet people and they would know me and I would know them. You know? They would know another face of America. I don't look at America as a melting pot. It's not a melting pot to my mind. It's a mosaic. And in a mosaic, every little piece has a place, no matter how small the piece—and so do I. And the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. And when I talk to young people, I tell them as much as it is possible to be a good Jew and a good American, or a good Hindu and a good American, or a good Christian of any kind and a good American, so you can be a good Sikh and a good American, and the two are not mutually exclusive terms. This is not culture that you get rid of when you get off the boat. You know, it's part of the religion. America is now my nationality, my citizenship, that's a different matter altogether. And so, that's—that's the message. That's what I believe. That's why now, forty years later, for people to question my patriotism, or whatever, nationality or something, by saying that you don't look right—that, I don't like. [Laughs] You know?

That I do not like at all. All right? I remember one—there was one person who had—
anatomist, very well-known anatomist, and I won't name him, either—who had trained many of the former chairmen across the country. And it is his job that I now have.
Excellent anatomist, great teacher. He did not like foreigners or women. And when I was offered the job there by the dean, I went to see him as well, and he didn't like that at all.

And he made some comments about it at a faculty meeting, and I went back to him—the matter came back to me, and I went to him, and I said, I just want to tell you that the passport that I carry is the same as yours. And yes, I speak with an accent. I don't think with one. And my children would be as American as perhaps yours, and if not, then, their kids will be. And that's not the issue. Your people came here a hundred and fifty years ago, and my people came you know, I came here twenty years ago, at that time. And I said to him, in terms of history, the difference is not even a drop in the bucket. And he was foolish enough to say to me, "Yeah, I agree, I agree, I've never said anything against this." And when he said, "I've never said anything against this," I think I lost my temper with him a little. I said, "No, I just wanted to tell you. This is where I'm coming from. Where I come from, people get killed for less." [Laughs] You know? It was not a nice thing to say. So he went and told the dean. And I—the dean called me and I said yes, I did say that. And I regret saying that to him, but it's still true. What I said is still true, and maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it. You know? That's like saying to somebody, "I shouldn't have called you a fool, even though you are." [Laughter] You know? It's about as bad as saying that.

Q: How did you meet your second wife, and when?

Nina was—she had a sister who was a practicing physician in—outside Seattle [Washington]. And she was visiting. And I was living alone in Manhattan. And a Sikh community—fairly small—one of her relatives lives in Pennsylvania. He's now retired.

He was a professor of economics in Lewisburg [P.A.]—Bucknell University. And I've known him for many years. He's one of the few activist Sikhs, and I've known him for as long as he's been around here. And he suggested that, "I have a relative visiting in Seattle. Why don't you meet her or something?" And somebody sent to me her photograph in a letter, or he sent me the photograph, and of course the photograph was absolutely ridiculous, because they had stapled through the face [laughter] and nevertheless, I said, okay, I called him in Seattle and I took a trip out there to see her there. And then I said to her, "Why don't come to New York?" I had my family here, my parents were here at the time too. That was in '90—yes, and my parents were here, and my daughter was here as well, and so you will meet them all and then we will see, where we go from here. In India, and the Indian system, you don't have the long-term courtships that you have. They're somewhat arranged but there is consent of those who are involved in it. Sikhism would recommend that. So, she came here. A couple of days later I got a—she was supposed to go back—I got a heart attack. You know? So then she stayed. She stayed, and we got married later, after I recovered and all that. That's how it worked.

Q: And that was in 1990?

Ninety. Yes, she came in August, and so we got the civil marriage done in the court, and then I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks, and recovery and so on. Then we did the religious ceremony in October, I think, September, October, late September, early

October or something. I don't remember the dates—she would know. [Laughs] She would know. I don't remember the dates.

Q: How did your parents adjust to being in New York?

They didn't like it. Again, the reason was very simple. My father had come here and then gone back. My parents had gone back. They had come here when my daughter was born and then they came here in 1989 went back a little. In '94, my father broke a hip—he was in his late eighties at the time—and he broke a hip in India, and there was nobody there. But he didn't want to stay here at the time because, he said, “What do we do? You all go to work.” Then, there's nothing to do here. They can't drive around. Walk around, yes, but there's nobody out there! No neighbors, nothing to talk to! Where do you go? The grocery store all day? What do you do? Television programs they don't really relate to very much, so they were bored with that. Saturday and Sunday, yes, there were community activities that they could be a part of, but what do you do five days a week? But he had broken a hip and I had gone there for a week. We got him fixed and so on, and I suggested that he come here. But they were not happy. They considered this country a gilded cage. It's a jail. We used to joke that it was a gilded jail. He said, “You know, there in my home, I could sit in the veranda and people going out by the street, the neighbors would walk by and they would stop by to say hello.” People visiting.

[Crosstalk]

“Nothing happens! Nothing happens here!” [Laughs] You know? All day, it’s true. Nothing happens. These are bedroom communities. You work in New York. There’s nobody here. By the time you come back, it’s six, six-thirty, the day is short. I leave at six in the morning, I come back at six-thirty. The day is gone. So they were happy in a sense that the family was here, but they were not really happy. That’s understandable. And they both spoke English. That wasn’t a problem. My mother doesn’t speak as much; she can understand it better. But my father spoke English. But what do you do? In fact, my mother—she took her citizenship, I guess, two years ago, perhaps. And I took her for the exam two, maybe three years ago, two years—I don’t remember the year. But I took her to the immigration people for the exam. And that lady gave her a long test, that you’re supposed to answer questions. Some of them are complex, like, what political party is your governor? Or your senator? Which senator, what political parties they are in. And she didn’t remember their names and so on, and she finally looked at that immigration inspector and she said, “I’m eighty-nine”—now she’s ninety-two now, so that was three years ago—she said, “I’m eighty-nine. I forget. I don’t remember these names.” And that lady realized, all of a sudden, that she had given her a hard test. So she, at that moment, put that paper aside, went back, and got one of the easier exams. She passed.

Q: That’s good.

Which is right. It's right. You know, at eighty-nine, you can't argue—I think there are Americans here, if I asked them who—name your senators and their political parties—

Q: I think most people—

—they would have trouble. They would have trouble.

OLA HARB

I first met Ola Harb (née Hawari) through her son, Nabil, who was in my first-grade class. Besides knowing her as my friend's mother and a friend of my family, she was my English teacher in the ninth grade. She claims now that I always talked in class, but I maintain that my classmates were talking to me first and I was merely responding to them; in any case, she is someone who I admire and feel is part of my own family. I was always interested in the Harb family while growing up, because they appeared to be secular Muslims in a similar way that my parents appear to be secular Hindus, and because they were one of the handful of Middle Eastern or South Asian families I interacted with growing up who weren't a part of my family.

In June 2018, I went to her family's home for two weeks in Nazareth, Israel, where I met the rest of the Hawari family. Ola's description of her family was spot-on; upon meeting her mother and her siblings and seeing how they all interact with each other, I could imagine how they interacted with each other the way she described it..

MARCH 17, 2018

I was born in Nazareth, Israel. I was born to a middle-class family I would say, or maybe on the lower end of the middle class. Well, my nuclear family, but my grandfather whom we lived right next door to was upper middle class, if not higher. So, I kind of lived a

good childhood. I am the oldest of five. I have two sisters and two brothers who basically follow me kind of like a year apart. My youngest brother is eight years younger than I.

When I was born, my dad was a construction worker kind of, and my mother did not work. My dad is a son of—my grandfather and my grandmother had thirteen children. But my grandfather had nineteen from two different wives. My grandfather, was when I was born, was a judge, I think he had just turned judge. He was a lawyer. That was his career his profession and then he was a judge. So it was a well-to-do family that I kind of—my big family that I grew up in. My mom is one of nine and my grandparents—my grandfather was also on the lower end of middle class as well, so kind of like all the way around, a middle-class family.

I was born in Israel. However, I am of Palestinian heritage, which means my parents—my father, actually, was born in Palestine and I was born in Israel, but we were born in just about the same place. And the reason behind that was that, as you know, I'm sure, prior to 1948, Israel was Palestine and that was when the Jews came from Europe mostly. There were a lot of native Jews as well, but they were a minority so a lot of Jews—it was called the exodus. They migrated from Europe post World War II and the Holocaust and took our land, and many of my extended family fled with many Palestinians to neighboring countries creating one of the biggest refugee problems in the world. One of the first refugee issues as well. And probably the biggest and most prominent one. And so, I grew up as a minority. I'm a Palestinian minority, my origin, my language, my

language—my mother tongue, is Arabic. But I grew up in Israel, which consistently—I would say even till now, is composed of eighty percent to twenty percent, with Arab being twenty percent minority. I kind of grew up as a minority and that formed my personality.

Q: I was going to ask you about that, what it was like growing up as an Arab in Nazareth. Because Nabil's told me a little bit about Nazareth's history and how it was not destroyed during Nakba¹.

Basically, when the state of Israel was formed there, was forming, being formed—actually after even after the independence, which was in 1948, May, coming up soon—most of the big Arabic cities were inhabited by Jews, and many people were scared because—anyway, it was complicated, and it still is, and it will ever be. But what happened, the result of that was that many people fled to—because they were scared that they were going to be killed, because of the Jewish propaganda then threatened, like, they had speakers and they would go around and threaten, “If you don't leave we're going to kill you.” People basically felt ambushed and had to leave. And many people, many—the majority of the people left with their homes intact. They basically locked their doors and kept their door—their keys and left so that they—you know, “things will get better,” and they kind of were promised by the Arab world that ‘it'll be good, we'll just kick the Jews

¹ *Nakba* (meaning “catastrophe” in Arabic) is the name for the exodus of Palestinians from their homes in the 1948 Palestine War. Nakba Day is on May 15, and May 14 is Israel's Independence Day (depending on what calendar one is using).

out and be fine.’ What happened was many people fled and never could come back. And so, the homes that were completely furnished one hundred percent, some people left their food still cooking. It was, you know, a takeover, so many Jewish families or immigrants took their homes. And those are the big cities, you have Haifa, Yaffa, Al-Quds—Jerusalem, that is. Acre. Many cities were just—became more Jewish than Arab because of that change.

Nazareth, however, for some reason, was not one of the first cities that they came to. And eventually Nazareth fell and then it was under military rule and then it got kind of out of that deal I think in the early fifties. So, Nazareth stayed almost intact. All Arabs. And many Arabs left but—many, like my grandfather’s brothers, fled. My mother—my grandmother, my mom’s mom, my maternal grandmother, all her family, her parents, and all of her brothers and sisters fled to Lebanon, to Beirut. She was the only one who stayed because she was the oldest and she was married. She stayed with her husband, so she was separated from her family. She never could see her parents, and her parents died in exile and her brother—she saw one of her brothers and her sisters after forty years. She was able to reunite with them in Cyprus. So, it was it was an issue that formed who I was. Because you couldn't separate yourself from your history and from what you grew up into. Growing up it was interesting. And I don't know if it's unique, but an interesting scenario because it seemed like the Arab minority or the Arab city of Nazareth kind of was, not compliant, to say, but kind of scared. People were scared to say their opinions or how they felt the Arab people against the Israeli government.

We grew up to, maybe eleven or twelve years old—at 1976, yeah, I'd say exactly ten years of age, eleven years of age. We were like hush, hush, hush. “Don't say—don't express who you are, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” But then in the seventies, some kind of patriotic Palestinian movement kind of grew and developed in Nazareth, started in Nazareth, and spread throughout the whole Arab sector, where we felt that it was time for us to stand up for our rights. That was like my teens, so I kind of grew up into that. And then I went to University of Haifa and there I kind of also joined the—there were Arab student pockets where there—with the Arab student organizations where they kind of we kind of stood up for—tried to stand up for our rights and for our place in the country. So, things kind of change and that helped build who I am and my personality.

I said my grandfather was a judge, but in the beginning of the formation of the Israeli government, my grandfather was a lawyer and was kind of in his prime as far as age. He was like in his forties maybe or thirties or whatever. I think there. He led a group of us called Najada [phonetic], which was a group of Palestinian soldiers and kind of was like a semi-military group that—they kind of tried to advocate for the Palestinians rights. So, they went as a whole group from there—and I think from other countries, but all mainly Palestinians—to Lausanne in Switzerland, and they had some kind of—it was an interesting endeavor on his part that he tried to like, vow for or ask for [not just] the United Nations, but the whole world to kind of listen to us and to see our story and to tell it the way we saw it, not just the way—the Israeli side. Because the world seemed—or

the United Nations seemed to sympathize with the Jews, because of the fact that they put that whole idea of the formation of the state of Israel as a result of the Holocaust, which of course, it is understandable that everybody would sympathize with that. But everybody forgot that to do that, they took the land of other people and those people, their rights are also taken from them, and their lands and their homes and their reality is kind of pulled from under their feet. And now they're like refugees, and then solving one problem caused another huge problem, which is about seventy years old now. And these people are still now—some of them, most of them died, but their children are refugees in other countries and most of them live in refugee camps scenarios and circumstances.

But all of that, said my dad was a very—even though he didn't pursue his higher education, he graduated with a high school diploma. He's eighty now and he's not well. But he was and is a very educated and very multifaceted, very well-rounded person, and very open minded. So, the conversations that we would have at home at the dinner table with my dad—my siblings and my dad, and my aunt, his older sister who would come and visit every once in a while. He gave me and my sisters—we're the oldest, the three sisters are the oldest. So, the boys were always kind of like right there in the background, but not really at the forefront of our dinner discussions. Those dinner discussions are sacred to all of us. And really that's how—I mean, I attributed my formation and my personality to the local movement, patriotic movement that took place. But mainly it started in the home. Because my dad is a very patriotic but also very wise man and very well-rounded, very, very well-rounded. He knew something about everything. He read a

lot. He watched TV. He was a news kind of junkie, so he always knew about everything and that those conversations basically, mainly, were the reason myself and my sisters, and my brothers, of course, are the way we are. So just to give you a bit of background, my sisters, my two sisters who are a year basically consecutively well are younger than I. One is pursuing her—you will meet her this summer—has her doctorate, her Ph.D. in gender studies. I just finished watching an interview with her about a social issue within the Arabic sector, and then my other sister is pursuing her Ph.D. in the study of the Arabic language. So basically—and I am a teacher. We all pursued our more than higher education because we felt empowered to and encouraged throughout our lives to pursue our potential and the highest of our potential.

Q: Is your family religious?

We're a secular family. We we're Muslim, I'm Muslim and of course is my family. But we did not grow up as religious Muslim family. We grew up as a secular Muslim family, if that makes sense. That probably doesn't make sense to most people, but to us because we don't—I mean, I don't pray five times a day. I do pray one time, my way, the way I feel it's the right way to pray. My mom prays but I think it's because of her old age she feels like, “Oh, I better catch up and do it before it's too late.” My dad is eighty years old. He still doesn't pray, doesn't believe—he believes in God, but he doesn't believe in the ritual or the rituality of religion. Neither do I. And of course, luckily or not luckily, but luckily, I think, Jalal doesn't either—my husband doesn't either, so we're like that kind of

family. And even though the idea that Muslims, all Muslims are very devout and very conservative people, we are certainly anything but conservative. And I grew up that way too. It wasn't anything that I got from my husband, it's the way I was grown—I mean, I was raised at home.

Q: So going back a little bit to when you were talking about your sisters and higher education—could you speak a little bit about what led you to becoming a teacher?

So to finish up the story of my teen years and my enthusiasm that kind of started in my teens—and it really was a movement that started—I mean the late seventies, beginning of eighties with the movement. So that's when—there's a school and most schools in Nazareth are private schools, church-affiliated schools. There's one—I think there's still, maybe there's two or three now, but there is only one government school. I didn't have a lot of options but to go to a private school and my school actually had—was always a boys only. The year before I became a ninth grader or a high schooler it turned into coed. It was the principal who was a priest but was a very patriotic, very open minded, very nothing but conservative kind of—anything but conservative, I should say—kind of person. So, I went to that school. It was an amazing experience. My high school experience was even better than yours². [Laughs] I know yours was wonderful, you had the best teachers, but I did too. I had awesome, wonderful teachers, and my teachers inspired me. A couple of my teachers were like, maybe in their twenties, mid-twenties,

² She was my English teacher my freshman year of high school.

more than a couple of them, and they were the product of that movement. So, it was pretty neat to be a teenager to be sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, and to have teachers that kind of have the same mentality and are pushing all of us to the future. That was like a big push for me.

So here I am, graduated from high school, and luckily, I was accepted to the University of Haifa immediately after and I had the option to choose. They said, “Your scores are really high, and you can do whatever you want,” because that's how it works back home. I don't know how it works in India. But in Israel you get accepted not to the university, you get accepted to the subject. So they'll tell you can—you can apply and you can start as a major in psychology, but you can't do political sciences or you can't do law school. It's not just the interest—not like if you go to the school, you can study whatever you want. That's not the case. So, when I got accepted the University of Haifa, they're like, “Okay anything.” And I'm like, “What the heck? What does that mean?” So, I was one that didn't really know what I wanted to do, and then I had a very limited amount of time that to make a decision. English was my first inclination because I loved English growing up. From fourth grade I learned English every year and I just took to that language like second nature and it's become that, and I am an English teacher because of that. So anyway, I decided English teaching. I love my teachers and I love their impact on me. I wanted to be a teacher I wanted to have that impact on someone. So that's how I started.

“WHAT THE HECK, I’LL GO FOR IT”

I got my bachelor's in English and education from the University of Haifa. And then when I moved to the states, it was '89. Jalal and I just got married. He lived here so when we met the deal was that I'm going to come here, which was a whole another story I'd like to talk about later, but the thing was that when I came here I couldn't practice. I did practice teaching for three years over there. I started in '83 graduated eventually in '87 so I taught for a couple of years over there in high school level. When I came here it was a whole another experience, I don't even know that my degree is compatible so I have to go through eventually I have to go through the process. but I started—I worked at a daycare center for about eight years before, because before I knew it, I had kids and I it was convenient to keep them there. But then I decided that's it, I'm done. I want to pursue. So I went to in order to actually kind of like validate my degree I had to apply to the master's program at USF because that was one way to validate. And I got accepted I'm like, "What the heck, I'll go for it." So that took me a while because I had babies and I was traveling and I was working full time. So that also happened I started teaching and then in, 2010 I always was a teacher. I love being a teacher and I love—I still love being a teacher, but then all of a sudden I decided I wanted to try administration. So for that my master's the first master's was in English education. I pursued the same focus. I had to have another master's in leadership. It's called educational leadership. Next thing you know I was signed up for the next program and I did get that second master's. I practiced administration for a year and a half. Hated it all the way around. It is not for me. I'm a teacher and I'm back at teaching. And lucky for me I'm back to teaching my IB students,

my International Baccalaureate students [at Bartow High School]. So I am where I've always wanted to be, teaching in the high school level.

Q: I remember that you taught Arabic classes when I was in high school. Do you still teach Arabic at Summerlin [Academy]?

I don't, unfortunately. I taught Arabic—the school I teach at, Summerlin Academy—Bartow High School has a military academy within the school, and I was approached by the principal of the military academy about teaching Arabic and I did that for ten years. And I enjoyed it. And that was a very, very interesting experience because I am in the Polk County realm of conservative, white American majority background, and to teach the Arabic language, which is viewed as a controversial language and a controversial culture, it was an interesting experience for me. I enjoyed it. The kids, most kids, loved it and did really well. But now when I left, they discontinued the program because there wasn't anybody else to teach it. And now that I'm back my schedule doesn't allow for me to bring in Arabic because I have to do two levels of it at least, they have to have two groups so that's not working out. So I only teach English now.

Q: How did you end up in the United States?

[Jalal] started pursuing his higher education in '82. He went to his mind was in Michigan so he went to East Lansing and he started at LCC, which is Lansing Community College,

and then he transferred immediately after that to Michigan State University and then after that to law school. So he did his seven years of schooling in Michigan. And thank God when I met him he did not live in Michigan. Right? So and he had just come and then his best friend lived and had moved from New York I believe to Lakeland a couple of his friends. So Lakeland and Florida seemed pretty appealing to him. So he decided to take the Florida bar rather than take the Michigan bar which is what he did. And so he took the Florida bar and he started to get himself established here. And he when we met he had just gotten a position at the state attorney's office here in Bartow, and so that's basically how we ended up in Lakeland. And here we are, twenty-eight years later and we love it.

When I met Jalal he was—he had just graduated from law school and he—anyway. I was twenty-four and I've had a very rich experience in life. I've met many people. And when I met him I felt like he was the one. And I guess he was the one—he still is the one. So, anyway, we decided to pursue our lives together. And that led me to come to the United States.

We—when I first came—alright. Just to back up a little bit, I was an English major. I spoke English better than I did Hebrew. Hebrew is supposedly my second language because I grew up—from third grade up it's the formal or the official language of the state of Israel. So I spoke Hebrew and I went to the University of Haifa—unless I'm in my English classes, the language used is Hebrew so I kind became fluent. But I always was—English was always my passion. So because of that I interacted with American

students on campus. There are a lot of American you know study abroad semester kind of students. So I had a lot of good American friends so I felt like I have an idea of the American life.

In addition, my dad always watched American movies and shows—very untraditional, very unlike anybody else he always loved that. And so we grew up watching those movies so of course views don't reflect the reality. They're anything but probably, but still, that exposed me to the language and to the kind of American conversation within the American context. So when I came here I was like oh I have it. And I did. I had English perfectly fine. I had no problem fitting in as far as language went.

However, the social system is completely different. And also, the fact that I am married now and dependent on someone else, because I've always been independent. I've always worked. As a student I worked and after school I worked. I always took care of my own needs—I always did everything for myself. I was very independent and all of a sudden I'm dependent. I had—I didn't know how to go to a doctor, I didn't know how to go to the bank. I didn't know how to do anything. So that kind of was a shock for me. Food was a totally other shock and experience. So to me it took me a little while to kind of mesh into this new society. However, it didn't take me long before I started working because I couldn't just sit at home and do nothing. So six months later I'm already at a daycare which I could reach by walking, it was close walking distance from where I lived. And I didn't have a car. We only had one car and that's another whole story. I

mean, the whole system is different. Like, transportation is non-existent in Lakeland. However, you couldn't—if you blink you will see either a bus or a cab back home. So it's like a whole different kind of life that was difficult. But then It didn't take me long really. I still I mean I feel now twenty-eight years later that I'm very American.

I was actually just talking to that—we were just yesterday reading James Baldwin's essay titled "The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American." I don't know if you've read that, but you should, and I would suggest that your parents read it. It's really neat. But he writes—James Baldwin as you know is African American. So he wrote it from that perspective. He wrote it from the perspective of a writer because he is a writer. He was a writer. So I was talking to my kids yesterday about feeling American—I feel more American now than I do Nazarene because when I go there I feel like, "Wait a minute—I have been away from home too long." So that's kind of like an interesting evolution of my being American. Took a while—it did take a whole lot I mean take—it took almost nothing in comparison to other immigrants that come to this country and struggle and some people twenty-eight years later are still struggling and can't assimilate completely. I feel like I'm—I have done that very easily. But still, it was a struggle. It's not that easy after all.

I mean, it's a whole other way of living. From the everyday needs, from not having transportation when you need it. And we couldn't afford a car when we just got married to people into and social relationships. They're so different. Now I'm used to them. But

when I could stand and talk to my neighbor when I first moved for an hour and a half outside the door and she never once mentions “come in and have a coffee” That's unheard of where I come from. Where I come from, people just, I'm exaggerating, but people barge into your home and sitting and the coffee's already being made because it is just the way it is. You call people from the street and say, “Hey come on in and hang out,” whether you like it or not whether you have whether you are on a mission or not. You just got to come in and you can't say no because you feel like, “I gotta come and it's not nice to say no.” But here when I came I'm like, “What the heck? We've been standing here for a whole hour. Why don't I ask you to come in or—” what if I ask—then she's gonna say, “No I've got to go.” But then she'll stand for another half hour and tell me her personal life, like very personal life but won't—I mean, it's just different. So, then we met our Indian friends [laughs]. It's another story. Anyway, it's a different system that I have become very accustomed to now. But it took me a while.

RUPAL PATEL

I think the biggest bump in the road I encountered with interviewing my mother was convincing her that her life and experiences are worthy of being recorded and worth something academically or otherwise. She was surprised when I asked if I could interview her and said “I don’t know if I have anything special to share.” We have an easy time talking to each other, so when I asked for more details about something she had said, she would comply. But she wouldn’t share those things if I hadn’t asked. I wanted to interview her because I rarely ever get to hear her version of events, especially from her childhood, unless I think to ask about it. Additionally, seeing my own memories from when I was younger from another perspective and hearing about her memories that happened without my knowledge but in my presence is fascinating, which is a big part of why I interviewed her.

MARCH 15, 2018

I was born in Bharuch, Gujarat, India on July 15, 1967. You want to know about my childhood, right? Well, all I remember was a lot of simple life and lot of fun. My first memory is of my dad walking in a room and I'm on—I'm sitting on his bed and watching him come to pick me up, and instead of picking me up from the bed he tickled me silly. That's what I remember. Growing up was very—I remember our simple life. Dad used to work for this firm that makes conveyor belts and escalators or elevators over there, and

he was general manager, so he was always busy at work. But home life was simple. Mom took care of the house and the kids. Of course, we had help, but everything was hands-on. You cannot ask a person to get you stuff or boss anybody around. I have two brothers. One is very close to my age, a year and a half younger, and my youngest brother is about eight years younger than me. So growing up was lots of fun and lots of hands-on activities. Summers were like catching butterflies and looking—watching the flowers grow or seeing the butterflies and all that kind of silly stuff that kids do during summer time. Regular school year was like the same old routine: go to school, come back, do your homework, go out and play on the streets till it is dinner time, you come home, wash up, dinner with the family, chit chat, and then go to sleep.

When my parents got married my dad used to work in Baroda. So mom, after getting married to Dad, she moved to Baroda, and from there his friend—they were thinking about—I mean, we didn't happen right away. So, it was ten years of marriage. After that, mom gave birth to me. They had to keep their mouths shut for getting her married for one year or something like that is what I vaguely remember. But in those days, it was done thing like that, that the girls would get married at age of sixteen or seventeen. And like your grandma, your dad's mom, got married I think, I don't know when she got married, but she had your dad at age of nineteen. So like that. So, things like that happened but it was a norm, but mom gave birth to me when she was twenty-seven. Twenty-six or twenty-seven is when she gave me—gave birth to me. So after getting married to dad till the day I was born, I think they were in Baroda after their marriage. I don't know how

many years they stayed in Baroda, but then they moved to Vidhyahagar because that's where Mahendra kaka¹, my dad's friend, recruited him to move to Vidhyanagar so they can work together in that start up that made conveyer belt and gears and such. So this—my mom and dad were living in Vidhyanagar, but in India, when a person gets married, she goes to her father's place to deliver the baby and my mom's dad and mom used to live in Bharuch at that time. So that's when in her last trimester. She went to Bharuch that's where I was—that's the reason why I was born in Bharuch, and then after a month or so be moved back—and she came back to Vidhyanagar. And that is where I grew up.

Dad was always busy at work but would come home around five thirtyish and he'll have his quiet time, listen to music. Ask us about our school work and such. And that was it. He watched over us is what I would say. Mom was more hands-on. More details. What happened at school and whether we got in trouble or not. I was probably the good one. I don't know how else to put it, but if I get in trouble—no, I never got in trouble. But if somebody says anything to me at school, my best friend, she would come to my rescue. In this sense she will watch over me no matter what. So she was a big wall for me at school. If my brothers don't do homework, then they would always call me to make sure that I tell my parents, which didn't happen, but I'll make sure that they do their homework, so I don't have—I don't ever get in trouble with my parents for not sharing

¹ *Kaka* means uncle in Gujarati. It connotes an uncle who is your father's brother (i.e. a blood relation), but can be used for family friends.

their lack of doing homework on time. Other than that life was simple, fun, easy. No glitches.

Q: Were your parents religious?

Growing up in India, religion is just like what it is. It's like, everybody goes through that path. I don't know whether they actually believe it or just they're just doing their rituals, because everybody's doing it, so it's traditionally done by everybody. Whether a person believes or not, I have no clue. But I grew up like that. My mom was religious, and dad was religious at the same—I would say, but they would never impose what they thought of their religion on any of [their] kids. They would do their own thing but never asked us to—"You gotta do it." Be respectful. There was one thing they always made sure, be respectful of elders, respectful of any human being. But they were not strict or traditionally strong-minded about it, so they left it on us in a sense to see what we make out of religion or how we approach it just—we were on our own there.

I grew up with Muslims. At my grandparent's place, every summer we would go to Bharuch² for summer break. Mom will go, or she will drop us off and we'll stay there for a month or two depending how long we want to stay. And then they'll come back and get us back to Vidhyanagar when the schools are about to start. That was our time with our grandparents and our uncles, because in school year you don't get to see them. And it was

² At this point, she and her family had moved from Bharuch to Vidhyanagar, a small town about five and a half hours from Bharuch on the opposite side of the Gulf of Khambhat.

always fun. Those summer months in Bharuch were always fun, because all the cousins will be in one big house, like there are fifteen, twenty kids running around, playing and all the good stuff. But where my grandparents' house was, my mom's parents' house was, it was in the—how you call? In the city area. It was part of the city. So, there are tiny streets. The houses are all lined together without any gaps, and the starting of the street there were Muslim houses, ten, fifteen Muslim houses. Then will come our house and few of the others. But then there was a bunch of Hindus in two, three streets or network of streets. And then if you go to the other side again, the Muslim streets were there.

So, it's always—I mean, when we are playing, we had friends who come from—all the kids will be together. And you play on the streets. So that's there. I will go pass by and one of the *chachi*³ will say, “Rupal, *aaj mutton khaogi?*” [Rupal, want to eat mutton today?] So it's just like they have made—they sacrifice their lamb and say, “Would you like to try it?” And I would try it. So it was not—and nobody was going to say that, “Why did you go there?” or “no.” Or if my grandma was—I mean our house had lot many people, but for whatever reason if somebody is sick you go visit. When you come from Vidhyanagar you go say hi to everybody. Even the bookkeeper was Muslim at my grandparents' place. So *chacha*⁴ would always come. We grew up calling his sons *bhai*, big brothers, and we would visit them. I still remember, I visited them right before I got married. Just like—they were not doing well in the sense health wise, so I went to their

³ In Gujarati, *chachi* means aunt, or a woman who is not related to you but is close, like a neighbor. Sometimes it means aunt in other South Asian languages.

⁴ Similar to *chachi*, *chacha* or *chachu* means uncle in the way that *chachi* is aunt in Gujarati. *Chacha* sometimes means uncle (of an actual kinship relation) in other South Asian languages.

place visited them and so, everybody used to be together. It was not—yeah, you're Muslim, you are called Muslim because you pray differently. I mean, you pray to your Allah. That doesn't mean—I mean that it was not—when we have Diwali they would come and meet, say happy Diwali and all that stuff. So, it was not something, “Oh, it cannot be done,” or “It's not right.”

Q: Were ba and dada political?

My dad—the way I remember it is, yes, everybody has a say in politics, whether it's based on reading newspaper or whether they go through things and they strongly believe in it. I don't know what makes them say or do things based on what reason, but I do remember my dad. He grew up during—'47, he was thirteen—so he was seventeen-year-old when India got independent. So, he had stronger belief in political system at the time of that time. And so, he was for—I don't know—I don't know whether it was [India National] Congress or not Congress—for Jawahar [Jawaharlal Nehru], so then it was—he was on the opposite side of the whatever the other party was. I was very little when you hear stories about it. I have—I didn't pay attention to it. But he did believe in party. But then all those party went to transition to different levels and whatever it was, it's not the same party now in India. So right now, he goes for Bharatiya Janata Party⁵. And I don't know what their approach is. I don't follow politics as much, so I wouldn't know. My mom didn't have—I mean, she was never verbal about her political views. So, I wouldn't

⁵ The Bharatiya Jantana Party (BJP) is a right-wing Hindu nationalist party in India. The current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, is a member of the BJP and is Gujarati.

know it, and I never showed any curiosity about it, so I didn't pay attention to. Never asked her a question.

Q: I don't know which schools that you talked about were public schools, but I know that they taught Hindi in those schools instead of regional languages like Gujarati and that you can read and write in Hindi pretty well. How do you feel about all of that in addition to not learning Gujarati or the grammar of Gujarati while being a native speaker?

I went to kindergarten for English teaching school. All I remember is that that teacher was not that great. She was always mean to me for whatever reason, because I didn't like the food that they used to provide for lunch and she would make sure that I would eat that crap. So that was that. But after that I went to a central board school or CBS board. I'm not a language person so I didn't miss it in the first or tenth grade. The central school they had—the medium of learning was either Hindi or English. So it was not one of the regional schools. CBS board is spread around India so that when the federal employees, they move around their kids always have a school that they can go to and the curriculum is consistent or same standards all across. So—but in Vidhyanagar they didn't have that many number of federal kids who would go to school. So they used to just to fill that class size they would take local students or kids as students.

And that's how I got into that school. Not learning Gujarati—no, I did show curiosity about learning it. There's all this newspapers and books all over the house or anywhere

you go. So you were—I was exposed to the letters and I figured out that even though I didn't have any formal tutoring about Gujarati I figured out because languages or the writing—I mean, some of the letters are differently written. But other than that the structure is pretty much same or similar. So I would read it, understand it because I talk in Gujarat. So understanding was not an issue. The only—I don't know what you—what I want to say is—regret that I have is—not even regret. If I had learned it formally, then I would be able to read and write better and in Gujarati because the works that you learn by reading a book you can use it to your advantage.

I went to V.P. Science College because my twelfth grade or the senior year in high school I didn't have that great of a percentile because I didn't do well in math and physics. So architecture school was out of question, because the grades were not that great. So I went to Bachelor of Science program and didn't master—my bachelor's in microbiology and I enjoyed it. There are no regrets about not being an architect or anything like that. I enjoyed what I was learning. I was happy that I don't have to deal with the math part at all, and science I always loved it. So it was easy.

Q: I'm going to fast forward here a little bit, if that's okay. Why did you come to the United States?

Everybody goes to the United States From where we come from. 'Cause there's always somebody going or coming or so we were exposed to what it is like or what it looks like

what—or what is the culture like that, through hear and say and through movies and pictures and books that you go through. But what made me decide—there was not a formal way that I want to go to America. I did try for a visa before—once to attend a friend's wedding, but they had they said that I'm of marriageable age. So what if I stayed back in the U.S.? So they didn't give me a visa. And that was that.

Q: How did that make you feel?

I was disappointed that I couldn't attend my friend's wedding, Neela's wedding, but it is what it is. Everybody goes through that kind of—not getting visa kind of situation. So it didn't bother me much. It is what it is. But then after that happened, one of my cousins ended up saying that, “Hey, here is Piyush—is coming in and then you should meet with him and all that stuff” and we did meet, and we decided we are going to get married. And that is how it happened. And I came away it right away because he was on [H-1B] visa, so the spouses can come right away or along with them. So that was that. And I did come to U.S. After getting married to him.

Q: What was it like, first moving here?

Moving to Ann Arbor [Michigan]. Oh my God, it was summertime and I was still so cold. And I remember the minute I get off the plane it's like, “Dang it's cold.” So I put my thickest sweater from India and wrapped myself with that, cap and all, hat and all. And

here he is outside waiting for me to show up and I'm bundled up and he's like, "Oh my God, she finds this place cold, what is she going to do in winter months?" So first winter was freezing cold for me—I mean I enjoyed Ann Arbor every single day, all seasons, but adjusting to that cold was—kind of it took me a while. I bundle up so bad when I have to step outside of the house. But it was fun, it was exciting, it was beautiful. What else can I say? What was it like? Yeah I still enjoyed cold season, fall, spring, summer or however, or the snow falls. Everything was awesome.

I remember I used to take a bus during day time to go to different places I used to volunteer at University of Michigan Hospital and I would take a bus to the downtown. I'll stop by the library. There was a main library there. I'll stop by and then catch a bus to go to the hospital to—as a volunteer. But I was so impressed that people are always nice, always happy to help you. They want to talk to you whereas in India there are so many people I guess we were so tired of each other, so you would just mind your own business [laughs] when you are walking on a road or not talk to somebody until and unless you have reason to talk to that person. So it was super nice. I remember the bus driver that I was pregnant with you, Kyna, and I would take the bus to get the groceries. Nothing heavy because I used to go out every day, so but then he makes sure that he stops us so that I have to walk to class and then he'd make sure he's carrying my groceries and take it almost near my gate. And it's just like—it felt as if a parent is taking care of me the that. he was an old Black man, Walter, and he always had a smile on his face.

Q: Did you experience any kind of discrimination or anything like that?

One time, but I didn't sense it. We were—after we moved to Farmington Hills. It was a little bit off—I think it was forty-five minutes away from Ann Arbor and—maybe thirty, I don't remember, but there in Farmington Hills—or actually, I got used to eating fresh bread, fresh baked bread. So there was a bread factory in Ann Arbor close to our apartment, so I would buy bread from that place instead of the grocery store. So same thing I used to—I would make a day like Monday. You and I go get bread from Northville Bakery. And what happened is—I mean, they would have a good spread of freshly baked bread with butter, and then we'll try different ones out. One time there was this white person tasting. And you and I and a friend of ours was with us and we were just trying. She was Indian also, Swapna, she had just married a friend of ours and she used to go to school. She was a physical therapist. And so we stopped by to try the breads out and the white person who was again shopping, not the owner or anybody working in that bread shop, but the one of the customer made sure they had she had her purse on the side and the minute we walk in she grabbed her purse and she was hugging it tight. I didn't notice it. And you were like happy to see somebody so you'll be saying, “hi, hi, hi.” And that person didn't want to talk because I guess we were Indians or brown people. I don't know, and I didn't—so I said “Okay. She doesn't like kids.” So I asked you not to bother anybody and make sure you stay with me. And we bought our breads, tried the breads, bought our breads and then stepped out of the place. That's when Swapna says that, “Oh, did you see that? The minute we walked in this white person Kyna was trying

to talk to—” and you were a naughty one, too, “when she lifted her purse. And [she] was guarding get like this.” I said, “No I don't pay attention to that.” If they feel that way, I'm sorry, but they have nothing to—it's their own thinking, not mine. It didn't bother me. I didn't see it and they didn't bother me that she did it after my friend told me that this is what they were—she was thinking. I said, “I don't care. I haven't done anything wrong.”

But yeah, that's pretty much about it. Discrimination in India? Yes. They'll prefer white people over Indians anyway, so if you go to a hotel and you're checking out and then they—you know, in Delhi, right? When we travel we used to go through Delhi and we would stay a night if we come in late in the night would stay there and then go to Ahmedabad. So what happened is one time they got our bags out for us. They put it in a car. I think it was a Mercedes or something like that, and then a white person comes along and just to please him—he didn't even ask whether—he asked for a car but just to please him, they put our bags out, put that white person's bag in the Mercedes and then they went off. And he was after us but he still left early, and then they shifted our luggage to one of the Camrys and then we went to the airport. But you notice things like that. Not that it matters. We still got our ride back to airport. But things like that would happen.

ZAHEER JAFFERY

Zaheer Jaffery is a Pakistani American civil engineer who was interviewed by Gerry Albarelli for the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project. Jaffery is another narrator who was a witness of the 1947 Partition but was forced to move to the newly created Pakistan after another closely-related violent event, India's annexation of Hyderabad in 1948. The majority of Pakistani people are Muslim which is part of the reason why Pakistan is often mistaken for a country in the Middle East. The United States also has very different relationships with India and Pakistan, especially after September 11, during Trump's term as president, and after Narendra Modi, member of the Bharatiya Janata Party, became Prime Minister of India.

I included Zaheer's interview because he and his oldest son, Salmaan Jaffery, were interviewed by Gerry for this project (I've also included Salmaan's interview). Their interviews are powerful on their own but when read together create a more complex impression of a Pakistani family affected by September 11 and its aftermath that comes from the family members themselves. Including the Jafferys in this thesis was important to me for that reason. Additionally, since Partition there has been a longstanding tension between India and Pakistan; some of this tension spills out as nationalism-entrenched bias and at other times, violence, and I feel responsible as a person of Indian descent to provide a fairer portrayal of people that some of my communities are biased against.

NOVEMBER 16, 2001

I was born in India, migrated to Pakistan when I was about four years old; that is 1949. In 1968, I came to the U.S.A. for the first time. I would say that as far as my ethnicity is concerned, I'm not truly either a Pakistani or an Indian as such. My family spent about six hundred years in Iran before coming to India. In India we spent, maybe, a hundred fifty, hundred sixty years—we came in the reign of [Emperor] Jahangir. So that's not that long [ago]; it's about two hundred years. But we were five, six hundred years in Iran and before that in Syria. In any case, that is my background. I became a U.S. citizen about twenty-five years ago.

My father was a government servant in India. At the time of Partition [of 1947], all government servants were asked to indicate their preference. And he actually opted for India. My father, he was—because he died last year—but he was a very secular kind of person. His heroes were [Jawaharlal] Nehru and other socialist kind of people. But in 1948, I suppose my father changed. Toward the end of '48, when India annexed the state of Hyderabad, the Indian Army basically rolled in and, among other Muslims, they destroyed our house, killed several people of my immediate family—my mother's brother, my father's brother and some cousins. My father felt betrayed, and the house was burnt. My father, in fact, escaped with the young women and children in the dead of night. That left an extreme sense of betrayal by Hindus who were most of his friends.

And he, in fact, never went back to India. He had asked his children not to visit or ever trust Hindus or visit India. That is the backdrop. I don't know if it's relevant at all. It's probably not.

Q: But it is quite relevant.

Okay.

Q: Who was killed in your immediate family?

My mother's brother and my father's brother.

Q: How old were you at the time?

I was probably three, three and a half, so I don't remember those events at all. I only know that my mother's brother walked several hours starting at dusk to warn my father that the Indian Army was on the march and that our house was a target. He didn't have enough time to do anything, really, so my father took all the young women and children, loaded them up in a truck and went cross country to the main city of Hyderabad. So he left all the older people, the older women, and so on and so forth. I was among the children that went with him. The Indian Army came and the first thing that they did was to find out who had given the information and the first person to get shot was my

mother's brother, and then my father's brother and several other people. The house was burnt. We lost everything. And this was a blow to him because he—it was a secluded area—he was working for the British. Well, it was the British before Partition and he was in charge of coal production. He had been brought up in a very British kind of way. In fact, in an Irish school in Masouree, in Simla, a very elite kind of education, Western education. All his friends were either Britons or Hindu aristocrats—the police chief, the magistrate, you know. He knew that they knew this was happening, so he felt a complete betrayal—how could these people do to me just because I was a Muslim?

In any case, when we went to Pakistan—because he was delayed, he did not go in '47—there were no government jobs to be had. And by chance he met up with an industrial philanthropist, Mohammed Ali Habib, who in fact was at that time one of the richest people in the subcontinent and who helped Pakistan financially to a great extent. My father admired very few people and this man was one of them. He became his protégé, my father, and the man asked him to join his business. My father did wonders and he made a lot of money for the Habib and for himself. He became a successful contractor.

Q: And what about your own education?

Being the only son and very close to my father, I was “made” to gravitate toward engineering, because I was supposed to take up my father's construction business. So I went into civil engineering. I was a bright student. I was accepted at MIT [Massachusetts

Institute of Technology], Stanford [University], Cornell [University], [University of California at] Berkeley, and I went to Cornell simply because I liked the brochure. I know that's not a very good reason. If I had brought myself up, I would have gone into political science, history and stuff like that because at heart I'm not an engineer. I did engineering. I never worked with my father. Never. And twice I came to this country and twice I went back for the love of my country, but it was disgusting to me. I mean, conditions were not conducive for an honest, hardworking person. Ultimately I came back. In 1978 I became a U.S. citizen.

Q: And what about religion? You mentioned that your father was a secular kind of person.

My father was a very well-read person and his concept of religion was compassionate religion, an enlightened religion. More or less he felt sure that it should reflect an enlightened person. He himself was a very enlightened person. So, if you could pray five times, fine; if not, doesn't matter. If you can fast, fine; if not, doesn't matter because the main thing is to do good. All I remember is that all my life while he was making money—I mean there was a time, of course, when he did retire and then he lived off his savings—he just gave and gave and gave. And it was not tax-deductible kind of giving. Every day there would be somebody from some charity organization or some orphanage that my father would be giving money to. In fact, for almost two decades he supported three families within one house. In fact, one day I counted, there were like twenty-two

people who lived with us altogether in one house for twenty years. Our own immediate family was six persons, so he was physically supporting the rest apart from helping the rest of the clan. So his brand of religion was very enlightened.

My mother, actually, was a converted Muslim. She was born a Hindu, Rajput, and she converted to Islam and became, I guess like most converts, a very staunch Muslim. But she was also a very dynamic kind of person and she would always be—almost totally involved—after doing her house things, cooking and then cleaning and Saturdays she would be always helping somebody or other in the neighborhood—clothes or things like that.

Q: You say she was a staunch Muslim. What form did that take? What expression did that take?

In the sense that she performed all the rituals, but she was a good person to begin with. She was not educated. In fact, she was practically illiterate when they got married. So here is my father who has gone to the school which only the English and the rajas and the maharajas would attend and then he went onto Lucknow University and he was a great athlete. He was an All India Interschool Boxing Champion. And he marries a woman who is totally from the village and she converts. Therefore, there was a big gulf in their outlook, obviously. But then these were different kind of women, totally; their values

were totally different. She had left her entire family, her entire clan for her husband. She maybe went back twice to see her folk. I don't know if you know anything about the Rajputs. The Rajputs are probably the most quote, unquote chivalrous people in India. I mean, their code of honor is truly medieval. They will die for honor. If you give somebody your word, you have to keep your word no matter what. And that's the kind of person my mother was. She was physically the most courageous person I've known. She fell down one time taking a bath, hit her face on—these were the old-fashioned bathrooms with the faucet coming out of the walls—and it broke one of her teeth—it got embedded in her jaw. And she came out with a swollen jaw. There was not a whimper or a single complaint and her face was swollen for days, but she continued her chores and said, "Oh, it's nothing." Unbelievable. So anyway, this is my mother. She died when she was in her early forties.

Q: Oh, young. What did she die of?

Jaffery: Brain hemorrhage. She had high blood pressure. None of us knew because she would never go to a doctor.

Q: She would never go to a doctor?

Jaffery: She just did not believe in going to a doctor to get herself examined.

Q: She didn't believe in it for religious reasons or—

Jaffery: No, no, no. You don't use the word "macho" for a woman but you don't go and see a doctor unless you're dying. And in fact one of the few times that a doctor did come and see her was when she was complaining of an intense headache. Well, the only time I have seen her complain of anything. We called the doctor, he came and gave her a shot, a sedative, to make her sleep and then she never woke up. She died the next day. She went into a coma and died.

Q: Okay, but you became Muslim or you grew up as a Muslim—

I grew up as a Muslim. I grew up as a fairly moderate Muslim. I would fast, I would pray but not five times a day. But we were all relatively extremely well read. In other words, I knew more about religion than many, many people who prayed five times a day and fasted all thirty days of the month and year after year. But I knew more about the history of Islam and the principles of Islam. We read books in English translation. We came from a book-loving family, and therefore we think we had a slightly different take on religion than the man in the streets. And you don't blame the man in the streets, because he has nothing. I mean, Islam is a fourth world religion. That's why you see it's so popular among the poor. For example, in the United States, the fastest growing segment of Islam is among convicts, Black convicts. It's not to take anything away from Islam; it's just that it provides you with a very firm reference point.

You cannot have too much relativism; you really have to be very strong intellectually, otherwise you can get lost because everything is relative. Sin is relative—fornication—I mean, the things that were absolute taboo twenty years ago are totally permissible, so everything is relative. But you need to have certain values to be fixed in time and space and your morals and your coordinates in order to survive. Anyway, I was a moderate Muslim. I underwent a change, in fact, when I was in Medina. I was transferred to Medina, Saudi Arabia. Most Muslims would have given an arm and a leg to actually go there and earn money. But I felt that Muslims had gotten off the true path. I performed hajj and I almost died in the crush—you know what happens?

Well, in one of the rituals you go to a certain place and you cast symbolic stones at Satan. They're not stones, they are pebbles, and it's all symbolism. But you go there and the idea is abstract. I mean, you go there, and you actually see people foaming at the mouth, taking off their shoes, giving four letter words to Satan, I mean, hurling things as though Satan were actually there. The thing about hajj is and the reason why Muhammad wanted hajj to be performed was I think, is that every segment of the Islamic world should see each other from the best to the worst. I mean, that was the whole idea. And it makes sense because here I am with umpteen years of education and this and that and world travel and a little bit of being jaded and you're rubbing shoulders with a man who has no education, he's a ditch digger and he's smelly and sweaty and under normal circumstances you would not be within fifty feet of him. But you're forced to. But the point is that at some point when Islam was young it made sense to get all the umma

together, but when you have two billion Muslims in the world and almost everyone wants to perform hajj. And you have a small town, you get three million people coming in the space of ten, twelve days, some people are going to die. And they do die.

There was a wave of people and I got swept off my feet and somebody got hold of me and I was able to stay on my feet, but I could have been crushed to death if I were not lucky. I have a polio-affected leg so I'm not that stable on my feet. My right leg is weak. That person held on to me and I survived. I'm an engineer and this is the kind of thing that you start thinking in terms of how many millions of man hours, how many millions of dollars do we spend every year for this ritual? And the Islamic world could build a nuclear facility—and I'm not saying in terms of building nuclear arms or power plant—maybe three power plants every year for that amount of resource. Or two dozen engineering schools. And Muhammad would have been much more happy to see this happen because I have read a lot about his life and sometimes the way his life is emulated by Muslims appalls me.

In other words, what Muhammad did, if you emulate his actions it gives you—I don't know the translation for *sawab* but it means certain good points you get for good deeds. But if you had a beard—I think everybody had a beard at that time—I mean, Gillette was not invented, razors were expensive, so most men had beards, even in Europe people had beards. But because he had a beard accidentally, it does not mean that if you grow a beard it's going to make you a better Muslim. You see, that's my point: I mean, this is

nothing. This is an organic growth, these are follicles. What relationship does it have to goodness?

Muhammad asked people to be clean and wear a dress that does not hang below your ankles. But wearing something above the ankles to show that you're pious, it does not make you a better human being. I mean, it just makes you look like an idiot in ordinary society—or ill-dressed. But Muhammad did say that if you have to go to China to get education, go to China, but eighty-five percent of the Islamic world is almost illiterate. That's my take on it.

I got married in 1970. Thirty-one years. She's also from Pakistan. And she's a very Orthodox Muslim. She'll be starting her fast today and she'll be fasting all the month of Ramadan. She prays five times a day. She works for an insurance company, Aetna, I think. I don't know the exact nature of her job. I have three sons. I'm a manager, I guess Project Manager. It's a little difficult to describe what I do because—in a nutshell when the aircraft land or take off there's a lot of noise generated, and there's a federal program which provides soundproofing for schools which are affected. I manage that program. But this is something I've been doing only for the last couple of years. Basically, I've never worked for a bureaucracy before in my life.

JUNE 24, 2005

Q: You came to this country when?

In 1968, August.

Q: Tell me about your early experiences here.

When I came here, I had actually never traveled outside of Pakistan—although I had done a lot of traveling within Pakistan. I attended Cornell, which had a very extensive foreign-students' orientation program. When I came here people were extremely courteous, and I think Americans, if I may say so, were somewhat better people then, than they are now, in general. The whole spirit of reaching out—the typical “American-ness”—has gone out now, whether it's 9/11, or—there has been a gradual shift in American values, for whatever reason, making them more wary of foreigners. But in the sixties, it was an extremely open country, and whomsoever I met, people were gracious. They knew very little about anything else other than America, but people by and large were generous. They would invite you over to their home at the drop of a hat. You became a guest, you ate with them, and they would show a lot of interest in you.

During the orientation, one of the interesting things that was told to us, was—especially to people from the Middle East and the South East—because, I guess, these people had a different concept of friendships, and had a sort of romantic notion of friendships—versus the very practical nature of connections and associations that Americans have. You see,

particularly in the Indian and Pakistani culture, you form friendships. Then there are demands on friends. Sometimes your friend will be more true to you than your real brother or blood relatives. So friendships had a great place in our culture. When we came here, they said, “Make sure you guys know that Americans—“and when they said ‘Americans,’ they meant white Americans—“They will be very friendly, and you will tend to become thinking they are your friends. But they will not be your friends, as you think you make friends in India or Pakistan. Because come the first day of school, all these people will disappear. You will call, and they will sound different to you. Because they’ll be busy. And this is their life.”

It was very, very good that we were hammered with this thing, because some of our people did have traumatic social experiences, adjusting in the United States, especially a couple of people who did not have the kind of Western upbringing that I had; people who came here with an entirely different cultural background. One of us—and I will not take his name—came from a tribal area in Pakistan. He came from a very rich family, but they were very tribal. This person would have had social problems in a city like Karachi. Suddenly, he's flying in from a place in Balochistan to here, he's the son of a tribal chief: his father is a big, big gun; he owns hotels, he owns lands, and suddenly he comes and he's a nobody here. And not only that, his English is not that good, and he cannot command automatic attention from people around him. There is no band of sycophants around him. So he actually had a nervous breakdown, and he had to be taken out. He was

a guest of the local—I don't know what the name of the institute is, asylum for disturbed people or whatever.

We also had another gentleman who used to actually be one of our instructors at the engineering college. He was a couple of years ahead. He was an instructor. So we used to look up to him. But when he came here, he could not cope with the social change. He was extremely religious. He had a problem eating the food that we all ate. He would be questioning whether this meat is halal or not. He would ask the cafeteria whether the soup had any bacon—those kinds of things—until finally he ended up living on omelets. I think he was not a very healthy person to begin with, but then he used to remain in his room and eat just eggs and bread. He flunked, and he had to leave the university.

The idea was that I would do my master's, go back, and join my father's business. The whole idea of my doing civil engineering was because my father had a very large construction business. I was the only son, so it was appropriate that I come here and get my education. In fact, my father could have afforded to send me for any number of years here. I had applied, at the undergraduate level, but my father was advised by other people. My father was very savvy, but he had no idea of advanced education, especially in the United States. He was a great lover of American culture. As I said, we grew up on comic books and Jack London's *White Fang*—all that stuff—but he did not really know what the United States was like. He would not let me come as an undergrad, because he thought I was too young and I would be corrupted by American values.

So I came here for my master's. The intent was that I would go back, and I did go back in 1970. It was a bad time to go back because Pakistan was undergoing a civil war. It used to be East Pakistan and West Pakistan. East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and Pakistan fought a disastrous war with India. I went back. I did nothing for a year. The Pakistani economy had completely stalled. Then I came back.

SALMAAN JAFFERY

This interview was conducted by Gerry Albarelli for the September 11, 2001 Narrative and Memory Oral History Project by Columbia University's Center for Oral History Research. Salmaan's ability to contextualize a lot of the political situations he witnessed throughout his life with clarity over the course of three interview sessions is a huge benefit to any of us who reads what he says. My own exposure of news relating to and coming out of Pakistan is filtered through the United States' media outlets and the different communities of (predominantly Indian) South Asians I belong to, so hearing Salmaan's explanations of and attitudes towards issues and histories in Pakistan is important. I appreciate his tone and criticisms of the United States in the Middle East and South Asia, because fifteen years later a lot of his frustrations are sadly still relevant and frustrate a lot of us today. Furthermore, we can begin to see the contrasts and overlaps between him and his father, Zaheer, in the ways that they respectively describe their lives. Parts of this interview also appear in After the Fall.

DECEMBER 3, 2001

My name is Salmaan Jaffery. I'm thirty, and I have been in the U.S. [United States] for about fifteen, sixteen years. I'm a naturalized U.S. citizen. My place of birth is Karachi, Pakistan, so I'm Pakistani by birth. I grew up in many different parts of the world,

including Pakistan, but really, from the age of about eight until fifteen, was in Pakistan. Before the age of eight, I spent a couple years in Hawaii, Jordan, the Middle East, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah [in the United Arab Emirates], traveling all over the world also, then Pakistan; and then after fifteen, came back to the U.S., and have been here ever since. I graduated from college in '92. Finished my M.B.A. [Master of Business Administration] May of 2001. From Cornell [University]. My undergraduate degree was in international relations from Colgate [College] in '92.

Q: So talk about the traveling you did as a child.

My father was and remains in the field of construction management. He actually came to the U.S. in '68, to Cornell as well for his graduate degree in engineering. Then after spending some time at Columbia [University], a year after, he was one of the few people of his generation who actually went back to Pakistan, didn't stay back directly.

To make a long story short, he returned to Pakistan and the war broke out between India and Pakistan, and that resulted in him not being able to do the things he wanted to do in Pakistan. So he ended up working for a famous construction management company called Bechtel. The result of this was that he had assignments in different parts of the world, in particular, in the Middle East. Well, it started in the West Coast of the U.S., then Hawaii, and then Jordan. Jordan happened to be a base for a lot of our travel in the Middle East. My mother is Pakistani also. She was born in Karachi. My father actually is

Pakistani but born in India, because he's older than the country is. My mother is born in Karachi and she is a well-educated housewife, basically.

Q: Do you travel to Pakistan?

Yes, quite frequently. On average, I'd say, over the last fifteen years, it's averaged out to once every year and a half, two years. Most recently, the travel is more frequent. I was there in December 2000, 2001, and then in August 1999, and then two years before that.

Q: You go for what reason?

Primarily, to visit extended family. My immediate family is here in the U.S. By immediate, I mean father, mother, two brothers and my wife; but the rest of the family happens to be in Pakistan—aunts, uncles. Well, actually, two aunts in the U.K. [United Kingdom]. By aunts, I mean my father's two sisters, both older. But everyone else is in Pakistan.

Q: How has Pakistan changed over the last couple of decades?

Well, I'm going to talk about it in the last fifteen years. In several ways, very starkly. I grew up in Pakistan in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. No B.S. [bullshit]—this was very much part of our lives. It was part of our TV dramas, everyone

was talking about it. As students—happened to be eight years old when they invaded in '79—we saw in front of our eyes, refugees coming into the city of Karachi outside my school.

So first they weren't, and all of a sudden people started pouring in who were very poor and whose limbs were missing and blown off. This we actually saw because our schools were in the heart of the old city. One change is just the, I guess, demographic/ethnographic change. Karachi is a city now of some twelve to fifteen million people. Who knows? About half are undocumented. It's also a multicultural city, but it's a city largely of people who came over from India. These people are called *Mohajirs*, which means “refugees.” It's sort of a derogatory term, but there's a degree of self-identification because these are Muslims who left what they had to come to Pakistan. They are Urdu-speaking.

Then you have people who speak Sindhi who are from the province of Sind, where Karachi is; there are Punjabis, who are from the province of Punjab, which happens to be the majority of Pakistan, and, by the way, millions of Pashtuns. Pashtuns happen to be the people that are now being talked about in Afghanistan. Pashtuns are forty percent of Afghanistan and probably anywhere from fifteen to twenty percent of Pakistan. Pashtuns across the nation states of Afghanistan and Pakistan are the same people, okay. They speak Pashtun as a language. They are tribal people. Their identification is first and

foremost with their tribe, then with their religion perhaps, and then with Pakistan as a nation state. So, anyway, this is Karachi for you.

After the war, the number of Pashtun-speaking people increased dramatically. Numerically, by about two million—right off the bat—but its impact always felt greater, again, because they speak a different language, they look different and in this case, they happen to be quite ravaged. They looked sort of like mendicants. They had missing limbs. That was one change.

Accompanying that change was another change, which was the advent of drugs. This is not to say that Pakistan never had drugs. We always had drugs, but we never saw them and heard about them as much. These drugs were heroin and other opium derivatives or opiates, as they say. The number of people using them increased. There were addicts all over Karachi. This was something that for those of us who were young at the time, who didn't have context, we were told that this was not the case before. So, clearly, something had changed, and we saw people coming in from Afghanistan as being one reason why these drugs were increasing.

Thirdly, what everyone who lives in Karachi can attest to was the advent of weapons. Again, Pakistan has had a history of weapons, again, in the North-West Frontier, which is where the Pashtuns live. They manufacture their own guns. Their warehouses are famous.

But by and large, the cosmopolitan urban areas like Karachi, we never had a weapons problem, per se. In front of our eyes, weapons became rife. A first-time experience, I went to a party when I was fifteen, and some kid over a girl or something pulled out a gun—pulled out a Kalashnikov [AK-47] and started firing in the air. It was a show of bravado. From the age of nine or ten onwards, when we start to associate with older kids, everyone knew the dangerous kids, or the kids who were well-connected or sons and daughters of landlords, bureaucrats, powerful people who had their jeeps. They had weapons, and they used them quite liberally, or at least brandished them. This I saw again. You'd go at night somewhere and people would start firing—if there was a wedding—to celebrate. These are things that happened in the villages but not in Karachi. Those were at least three changes.

One other major change that I saw in fifteen years in Pakistan was increasing religious fanaticism. This was the result of a president who was a dictator—a military dictator, [Muhammad] Zia-ul-Haq—also an American puppet, mind you. He was a paradox. On the one hand, he was an oppressive, cruel dictator. On the other hand, he was a very devout Muslim. He would go to Saudi Arabia, perform the hajj every year, and he would press upon Pakistani society a degree of Islamicization that it had never seen before. This I know because my parents grew up in the sixties in Pakistan, and they said Pakistan never had that kind of religious intolerance or religious orthodoxy, “Don't do this. Don't do this. Go to a mosque” and no one was forced, but the milieu became more and more and more religious.

Pakistan never had alcohol officially, but everyone drank. That became much tougher. Crackdowns on non-Muslims. So as a result of this, I didn't feel anything personally, but it was all around me. For example, I identify with the Shi'a sect of Islam, which is a minority in general; and in Pakistan, about fifteen percent of Muslims are Shiite. Shiite Muslims are Muslims who are in Iran. Iran is a Shi'a Muslim country. To give you an example, my mom is Sunni; my father is Shiite. So I had a very interesting perspective. A very fortunate one, torturous, but I was lucky to see it because I got to see all sides. We never had sectarian problems in our family. You know, the occasional snide comment by an older aunt or uncle on either side, but the fact that my parents married was in and of itself significant.

The Shi'a side of my family, we were made aware of several preachers who were preaching very virulent anti-Shiite sentiment during the same time that I'm talking about. It's one thing to have views against Shiites because they're minorities. Like Jews are a minority, so it's very easy to pick on Jews. Shiites are very similar in some way, a bad example but it's the best I can do. Because they're a minority and we have some pretty unorthodox beliefs, we're often easy to target. We never felt targeted, though, until this time. These preachers would go out and basically say very, very nasty things about our brand of religion and what we did. The result of this was that we had the beginning of sectarian violence. We've had the odd nut ball go and throw a firebomb into a Shi'a mosque or things—tit for tat. But it was still not rampant, but it started.

Just to let you know why that's important, today in Pakistan—that violence has gone out of hand. We had a family relative who was the head of one of the major departments of waterworks in Pakistan who was shot dead because he was a Shiite. There have been tit for tat shootings and mosques, and it's terrible. So that's one area. Another area is that if you'd go for Friday prayers, the rhetoric became more angry. Some of it's understandable. I mean, you go to any middle-class mosque in Karachi, Pakistan, and you'll hear some discussion of the oppression of Muslims by Zionists, as it's termed, or how America oppresses Muslims. That's standard in any poor country because that's the forum. But there are just some very and aggressive sort of strains of this, I thought.

The examples are more recent, even when I actually wasn't living in Pakistan anymore, because I've given you a span of fifteen years. The most egregious examples have actually occurred in the last five, seven years, which corresponds with this whole Taliban thing. During this time, I was not in Pakistan. But I've seen them when I've gone there. For example, there are these green turban guys who go around—and people fear them. People don't fear them for mortal fear, but people say, “Let's not talk to them, let's not get involved with him.” Why? Because they'll come to you and say, “Have you been to the mosque? Have you done this?” It's more of an annoyance to some people, and to some people, it's a source of intimidation. They go around, little brigands, and it's the equivalent of sort of proselytizing, Bible-thumping. And for Muslims, it's very new,

because we're a Muslim country already, so there's no one left to convert, really. That's one example.

The other example, actually, I can think of when growing up was we had this thing called *Tableegh*. It's T-A-B-L-E-E-G-H. It's an Arabic word. The exact translation, I don't know. I think it refers to like being a missionary or having a mission; and people who belong to *Tableegh*—it's not an organization, it's just a concept—would be these old people, like, educated people who suddenly became religious, and they would go and do all their prayers and be extra rigorous. We had a couple of people in my family, on my mom's side, who started doing that. That was a very, very benign form of this green turban version, so just to get a progression. We had those people in the eighties, who were just like, “Have you prayed today? Okay, well, you really should.” Then you had the green turbans, ten, twelve years afterwards who were like, outside your door and knocking, “Have you prayed today?” That's an example.

I've digressed. How's Karachi changed? So guns, drugs, religion.

Oh, well, part of drugs and guns is the violence. We grew up amid violence. One of the reasons why September 11th is so interesting is because it was absolutely shocking—and we'll talk more about that, I'm sure—but for someone who has grown up in Karachi, Pakistan, or even Beirut, for that matter—it's not unprecedented. I mean, yes, we've never seen something that grand, absolutely. But I lived, I grew up through curfews. I grew up

with people being shot, hearing firing, shooting in my neighborhood, to the drillings of kneecaps of students. This was in Pakistan. I mean, over the last fifteen years, we must have had at least thirty or forty thousand people killed in some sort of violence.

Also, when you belong to a poor country that does not have safety security like Americans do, it's not uncommon to go to an intersection at five in the morning, every third morning, and see two trucks having collided and blood and gore on the street. So what I'm saying is, you become more inured to violence or violent scenes or dead bodies. I've seen dead bodies before, okay. You become a little bit more accustomed. It doesn't make it easier, but you've seen them before. Our funerals are not antiseptic. It's like you're dead, they put you right out there in front of everybody, and you're buried as soon as possible. There's no embalming, there's no makeup, nothing. So you're seen by everyone who chooses to see you, as is. I mean, there are some things that are propriety, of course. If you've been mangled, God forbid, they're not going to show you. So you begin by seeing corpses when you're young at funerals, and they're wrapped in cloth. They're nude and they're wrapped in cloth and they're washed. So you see that.

Q: Any violence that you were almost caught off in?

Good question. No, we were always like a block away or two blocks away. I mean we could see things happen. When we drove from Jordan to Pakistan in 1976, '77, we drove through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan into Quetta—which is Q-U-E-T-T-A, Western Pakistan.

Soon after that, the government of Pakistan had changed because [Muhammad] Zia[-ul-Haq]—this dictator—sent President [Zulfikar Ali] Bhutto to the gallows. So we had a nationwide curfew for a long time. But I'm trying to remember if—about '70—'87, '86, '85—I mean, I've been a block or two away. I've seen curfews, but I've never had my car attacked, never been that close. Not political violence.

Q: Never were you afraid that something was going to happen to you?

No. We've had that fear. We've certainly had that fear because the city has been gripped. I mean, curfew, let me tell you, we've had so many curfews. We've had shoot-to-kill curfews. So, literally, you open your gate and you could lose your life. So in that regard, there's been great apprehension. I'm not suggesting that you ever become comfortable with it. I mean, you live around it. But certainly, at the worst curfews, we've had those fears.

Back in '85, a major political movement started in Karachi. Oh, gosh, it's a very long story but it's called the M.Q.M. movement. It's called the Mohajir, M-O-H-A-J-I-R, Qaumi, Q-A-U-M-I, Movement. Mohajirs were, again, these displaced peoples, like myself, my family from India, Urdu-speaking.

Qaumi is an Arabic word for nation. So MQM was a movement for land for people. Because what it basically was, was a plea to the national government to tell them that the

Urdu-speaking population of Pakistan, i.e., the millions of people who have come from India, were being discriminated by virtue of their language, and this was a mistake not only morally but practically because these very people—people like myself, my background—were the most educated and were the most capable for jobs, for all civil-service jobs and science jobs and accounting jobs. But unfortunately, in Pakistan, because of these ethnic tensions, the government had instituted a quota system, according to which different ethnic groups had to get a certain percentage of medical-school seats, civil-service seats. It was ridiculous. I mean, Affirmative Action has a historic reason, which you can even argue it, but there's some sort of context. This had no context. I mean, it was literally the case that fourth-fifths of the population or three-fifths of the population of Pakistan was uneducated. It wasn't their fault; it was just a reality. It was not educated, didn't have access.

So they were force-filled into positions for jobs, where—what should have been the case that it was a new country, people needed talent to run it, so the best people for the job should have been given the jobs. So it's from that grievance that this movement started.

This movement was very non-violent. But as I mentioned to you, Pakistan and Karachi specifically had become extremely violent and extremely armed. But the people who were armed were not these people. So the result was that by the time the movement actually developed, and developed a voice, it had a huge population base, it had an intelligentsia, it had a platform, it had an agenda. But it didn't have military strength,

which wasn't an issue initially, except when they came under attack, again, because of ethnic rivalries.

The MQM movement was disliked by the Pashtuns, was disliked by people who lived in the province of Sind, S-I-N-D. They were Sindhis. Again, for the usual reasons—you're Urdu-speaking, you're from India, and we were here before. This led to a lot of violence. Finally, the MQM, the Mohajirs, got wise and started to arm themselves. Unfortunately, they armed themselves, and the political battles became very bloody. The area of Karachi where I lived with my grandmother was an MQM stronghold. As is always the case with political parties, there's violence but there's infighting, corruption. So the violence was not only outward, but it also turned inward. Factions formed by neighborhoods, by last names. It was very complicated. So the areas where we lived actually became very dangerous. Even though we used to play cricket on the streets or on the mosque grounds, we were advised not to go to certain blocks or neighborhoods, certainly not alone, certainly not at night, and certainly not wearing certain kinds of clothes, overtly Western sometimes or overtly Muslim, because different people had different sensibilities. So in that regard, it was unsafe; but we were never attacked personally.

ON HIS GRANDFATHER

[My grandfather] was truly a remarkable man, both in terms of his personality, of which he had a great amount; but also because he was the strongest man you had ever seen, both

physically and also just his force of will, and then also just the things he did. He died—actually, it's been exactly a year, almost, ago, at the age of, what, eighty-eight. I grew up with him. He raised me, basically. His life is probably the last snapshot of sort of colonial India, like from what [Rudyard] Kipling writes about, even though Kipling was a racist bastard, but that whole era. Why? Because he went to boarding school in Deradun, which is this hill station, D-E-R-A-D-U-N. It was a hill station built by the British officers to escape the heat of the plateau—or of the plains, rather. Very elite boarding schools. He went to, I think King George's. He had an Irish boxing coach who was a priest, and all the classic things, and spoke English like an Englishman. To the day he died, he used the expression, “by Jove,” “By George.” He loved the Irish, hated the English, because the English were the oppressors.

But the story of his life is amazing because he was extraordinarily handsome. Imagine Humphrey Bogart but shorter. He was 5'6". He looked exactly like Bogart, had green eyes. This is a Pakistani or Indian, and a very strong chin, pronounced nose and large forehead; small in physique, huge in stature, I mean. He carried himself so well, he was so good-looking, that he failed history, I think, or he failed physics and couldn't go abroad to England to study. But he was a very smart guy, just not bookish. He had such a great personality that he ended up landing a job in the British/Indian civil service, and there was an article in the India Times or something. He had the record for like one of the fastest ascents in the civil service because the Brits loved him because he was very charming, good-looking, spoke English perfectly, and dressed impeccably like an

Englishman, of course. I don't know if this is acceptable, but he had “brass balls” and he had chutzpah and he could get things done.

So he ended up at a very young age administering a large number of people in India. He was sent for the toughest tasks. He was a ranger. So he was sent after bootleggers all over India. So he saw the length and breadth this huge, huge country and, again, armed. He shot and killed a couple of people in the line of duty. He would go on these raids in these villages where they had these stills, and people would attack him. He once shot a man from ten feet away, in the heart. This is the kind of things he had seen.

Then secondly, leading up to partition, the center of India is a province called Andhra Pradesh. That's where Hyderabad is. Hyderabad is on the Deccan Plateau. The Deccan Plateau is amazing because they have huge coal mines. Like, my grandfather was sent to manage thirty to fifty thousand workers. I mean, he was that amazing of an administrator.

Again, he had lots of adventures there. But the flipside is because he was a government servant and a Muslim, when we had partition—when Hindus were killing Muslims and Muslims were killing Hindus, fighting for creation of Pakistan, he was on the short list. He was Muslim and he worked for the British government. So the Indian/Hindu troops were after him, and his name was on a death list. Oh, did I mention that he had three wives?

Yes, I mean, the family was in the compound and had their—this was probably 1947. Indian troops were out to kill him. He comes back home, he tells all the women—the word is the *zenana*, Z-E-N-A-N-A—it's a derivative of an Arabic word for “women.” The *zenana* refers to the women in the household.

He told them, “If I'm caught or if the troops come in, I will shoot all of you and, of course, myself,” or whatever. But, “I will shoot all of you,” which refers to the preservation of the dignity of the *zenana*. For women to be caught would be such a huge shame. So it's a shame—given the environment also, this was 1947. There were rapes and pillage and plunder. It was a very tough time, and especially for our family. Our family were Syed, which means we were descended from the prophet. So we had this extra thing where no Syed woman will be captured—this whole thing.

But, anyway, if you knew him, he was serious; he would have done it. I tell you, none of us would have—I wouldn't have been alive because he would have shot every woman in the house. They belonged to a generation where they would have accepted it. I know this because I spoke to my grandmother about this eight years ago. She was like, “Yes, of course. To be dishonored, to be raped, forget it.” Of course, there's always some exaggeration. Who really wants to be shot, right? But, again, it makes for a great story, and that's what we were told.

So there are many such stories about him. So that was my grandfather. So many different stories.

Q: You said he raised you.

Yes.

Q: What was that like?

Oh, amazing. He had mellowed out. He was the kind of guy who could literally move one of our servants to tears, to whimpers, with his eyes. Like, when he got angry, he would like get up and his eyes would bulge out. He just had a vicious temper, but he was always fair.

So by the time I came along, I was very special to him because I was his first male grandchild. My father is the only son, and I was the first-born. So he used to call me “number one.” He said he used to call me “my number one.” My middle name, which is this long, complicated name which you can try to decipher, it's called Ghiasuddin, which is a Turkic Persian name. That was my ancestor's name from six generations past who was given a title, “King of kings” by one of the Mogul emperors because he was a brilliant administrator, an inventor, and just a great warrior.

So my grandfather with me was very loving, very kind; and my growing up was basically him telling me stories about India or about my ancestry. My ancestry came to India in the 1820s. Our family was in Iran before that for four or five hundred years. And before that, we were Arabs from Iraq, and then eventually Saudi Arabia, because we traced our lineage to the holy Prophet, hence, the word Syed. You can write that down, too, S-Y-E-D. So I grew up with all these amazing stories, and it really gave me a very powerful understanding, culturally, of the area that is now India, Pakistan, and the Middle East. Because for a lot of people is it Arab, is it Asian, is it Persian, is it Turkic? It's very confusing, but it's also very rich.

He shaped my basic values, who I am as a person. For example, he used to always say, “The hand that gives is always higher than the hand that receives. Always be a giver. Always help other people.” He lived that life. He left everything in India, and—my father told me this two weeks ago—at one point, in one quarter, he was supporting four or five families. He was the godfather of the family. He put so many people through college, paid for so many people's education. To this day, we don't know how many.

He was big on honor. One of the reasons why he had three wives—that's a whole other story—is that he was intensely good-looking, but he was not into what he called “womanizing”—or what was the old British term, gamaroosing or—it's a derivative of the word from Gomorrah—gamaroosing or something, some old, quaint British word. But he looked down upon behavior where men went after women.

So I said, “Why did you marry three times?”

He said, “Well, because if I was attracted to a woman, I did the honorable thing. I married her.” The fact that he could means that he a very strong set of principles. But also, he didn't give a crap about what other people said. Marrying three times in upper middle-class families was still something not that common. People are like, “Huh.”

His first wife was my real grandmother, and that's a whole other story. She was a Hindu, and she was a Rajput, R-A-J-P-U-T. Rajputs are like second in the pecking order of Hindu—sort of the caste system, and they're known for being great warriors; and Rajputs are known for their honor and their chivalry. So if a Rajput gives his word, that's it. My father gets a lot of those traits, too.

So the story has it, confirmed by four, five members of the family, who knows what the truth really is? Like I said, it's a great biography. He's on horseback on one of his tours of duty for the government, walked by this open window, and there she was. In those days, where people's declarations of love were through notes or through the eyes alone, especially in our culture, where the separation of sexes was quite strong, all it took was an acknowledgment of one's presence and, like, lives were committed and promises were made.

I mean, this is right out of the *Arabian Nights* and all that stuff. That's a legend.

So he felt compelled to protect her honor because people had seen this exchange; and he went back and they eloped. He took her off, and he had to marry her. They were chased for, like, three or four days by her brothers, who wanted to kill him. So they get married. She converts, of course. Then she forces him to marry into the family for the second time, for the second wife. Why? Because he had been shunned by the family. Even though he was this young rising star, the family said, "Oh, you've married out of the clan." Families of my background, in Northern India, were very insular. They were very clannish, interbred because they wouldn't marry Hindus, they wouldn't marry others. They would only marry Muslims of Persian Arabic background. Blood is very important.

So she didn't force him, but she encourages him to marry into the family, to get back into the family. So he marries his first cousin, which is allowed, very common in our culture. He marries his first cousin, who is the grandmother that I knew growing up. I never actually met my blood grandmother, because she died before I was born.

So two wives, so that's the family he brings to Pakistan. Then in a fit of middle-age angst, I don't know what he was going through, but he was doing construction work in Kashmir—in Pakistan, Kashmir, which we called "Free Kashmir," of course, as opposed to Indian-occupied Kashmir—in the early sixties, and he comes back with this beautiful, young bride. That shocked a lot of people. I mean, that was just like, "Oh, my God,

Jaffery, what is he doing?" Again, he didn't care. That was tragic, actually, because that hurt a lot of people; and the woman was alive for five more years and then she committed suicide. So that was a very tough time for a lot of people. A lot of people questioned why he did it. She committed suicide, and then shortly after, my father's real mother—my real grandmother—she died suddenly of a brain hemorrhage. Who was left was wife number two, who I ended up knowing as my grandmother.

PART TWO

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

NABIL HARB

Nabil and I became friends in the first grade. We both grew up in Lakeland, Florida, attended the same elementary school, went to different middle schools, became neighbors, and then attended the same high school. As we both went off and did different things after high school, we still kept in touch. We would visit each other while I was an undergraduate in Sarasota and while he was working in Boston and New York in art and fashion, and then while I was in Germany we would send each other mail and chat a couple times a week. And we still talk a few times a week now that he's in Florida and I'm in New York.

If there is any human who understands what I'm about to say before I say it or gets where I'm coming from without much explanation, it's Nabil. We discuss our respective identities, our families, mental health, social issues, the news, the arts, politics, race, and so many other things that it would have been silly of me not to ask him to be interviewed for my thesis. We were at the same place at the same time on September 11, 2001, and because we already talk at length about ourselves as first-generation Americans and about inherently political or uncomfortable things, I figured correctly that he would be cool with talking about these things through his eyes.

Nabil is currently attending the University of South Florida studying anthropology, photography, and Arabic. He will graduate with his B.A. in anthropology in the spring of 2019.

JANUARY 8, 2018

I was born in Winter Haven, Florida, but my family lives in Lakeland. Which is weird because my mom went from Lakeland to Winter Haven to give birth, which I still don't understand. I guess less wait time or something. Lakeland is bigger. I'm not exactly sure population-wise how much bigger, but I know it's definitely much bigger. Lakeland has a lot more wealth accumulated in it, property value is much higher. People kind of tend to look down on Bartow in Polk County and they feel more superior being from Lakeland because Lakeland is bigger, it has more shopping. It's got “better” schools, although IB¹ [International Baccalaureate] is in Bartow, and they don't have that here in Lakeland, so that's something they got. But Bartow is the county seat, so that's where the courthouse is, it's technically the county seat of Polk County, and all the major government buildings—you know, Florida Department of Transportation has a satellite office there. And also, Summerlin Academy²—that's right, I keep forgetting—Bartow has a good situation going on. But it's seen as smaller, more redneck, poorer, less interesting. No one really goes to Bartow to hang out, like, Bartow people come to Lakeland to hang out. That's usually how that goes.

¹ The International Baccalaureate Program is an international accelerated educational organization with programs for students in elementary, middle, and high school. Certain schools offer IB classes, like Bartow High School. I also was in the IB program at Bartow High School with Nabil.

² Summerlin Academy is another school, along with IB, that shares part of the Bartow High School campus. It is a magnet Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) magnet school.

The biggest childhood memory I would say is just probably going to The Oaks School in Bartow and growing up in that area, which I know you can identify with³. I remember saying the Pledge of Allegiance out front every morning, I remember standing in lines by grade and saying the Lord's Prayer and doing the Pledge of Allegiance.

We had a nice, big yard [at school]. And do you remember that field that was actually the old pool that they filled in with dirt? It had the pipes with the wheels on them that you could open and close, and that's where the water would come in. They just filled it in with dirt and called it a field. I remember one time, I was running. It was after school because my parents—my mom is a teacher and my dad was a prosecutor and is a judge, and back then they both got off work much later than I got off of school, so I would do after school care. And I remember I was running. For some reason, fitness was something I was interested in and I was running around, I was making laps, and I knew in my head that carbohydrates were good to give you energy to run, so I was eating animal crackers while I was running. And the lady, I forget who it was at the time, who was in charge of us, told me to stop and that that would in fact make me sick. But I didn't get that at the time, I just thought like, “Oh! This will give me energy right now so I can run right now.” I remember that. I think about that a lot actually. I don't know why.

³ I attended The Oaks School with Nabil from first through fifth grade. The Oaks School was a small, nondenominational/secular private school in Bartow, Florida located in an old house where each room had all the students in that grade (about fifteen students). It was founded in the 1960s and shut down due to low enrollment in 2005.

One memory that came to mind recently was—I don't know why, but when I was a kid, everyone used to make me butter and jelly sandwiches on pita bread. My mom would make that for me sometimes, her friend Leena, who I used to see a lot more when I was younger, she would make that for me sometimes. And my grandma would make that for me sometimes. The other day I made one for myself, and it was the most nostalgic thing. But I remember that. What are other things from my childhood? I remember getting stung in the ear by a wasp at my first house. Well, technically it was my second house, but it's the first house I really remember because I think we moved in when I was like two or three. I had to have been like six, and I remember getting stung on the ear by a wasp because it had a nest under a palm tree leaf and I was running underneath it, and I guess I disturbed it and it stung me right in the ear. And I remember thinking, “Is it pierced now?” That doesn't make sense. [Laughs] It was not pierced. But I remember that. I remember picking avocados for my dad because we had three avocado trees in that yard. Same house.

What else do I remember? Oh, well I mean I remember meeting Jonathan and Evan. Oh, and fun fact, that first house I lived in with the avocado tree and the wasp, when we moved out to move into the neighborhood that we lived in when I met Jonathan and Evan after that, Jonathan's mom's ex-husband bought our old house from us, and we didn't know at the time. So I met Jonathan, met Uzi [Jonathan and Evan's father], got to know them, met Susan [Jonathan and Evan's mother] eventually, and come to find out Susan's ex-husband Danny, who's the father of Jonathan's eldest siblings Chris and Olivia, was

the guy who bought our house and we had no idea. It was just like small Lakeland stuff. Very weird coincidence. And they still live there to this day. We lived there and now Danny and his wife Barbara have lived there ever since.

Q: We were in third grade when 9/11 happened. Can you tell me what you remember from that day in Ms. Carden's class?

You know what's so funny, is that actually today I talked about [9/11] in Jason's⁴ class. He asked me what I was doing over break and I actually explained that you were doing interviews about post-9/11, like pre-/post- 9/11 experiences of brown people, and he asked me about that. He asked me, "Is flying a stressful experience for you? Do you remember that day? Do you remember a shift?" All these things, and I'm like, I felt kind of bad because we were literally in my class introduction, we're all going around talking about what year we're in, what we do for a job, what other classes are we in and I brought up this, and then that's my entire introduction. It was me talking about getting profiled in an airport. And then he moved onto the next person and I'm like, "Damn," that was a visible low point in the class that day. Such a bummer on day one. But Jason is naturally curious, I don't think he was cognizant of the thread he was making and the moment that was caused around that was such a bummer and I felt weird about talking about my experiences. I was like, "No, I shouldn't have told them all of that," but it's like, "no, I should've, but maybe I shouldn't have then." Like maybe I shouldn't have been called on

⁴ Jason Lazarus is a photographer and professor at the University of South Florida (USF).

to do that then. Whatever, it's fine. I know most people in that class so it's not like anyone thinks, "Oh, who's this kid?" But still it wasn't the best foot to start off on.

But going back to your original question, I remember hearing, I mean, you have a better memory than I do, but my memory of it is being in class. I think I remember someone calling her over to the door to tell her something, and then she came back. And I don't know if we already had a TV in there or if she wheeled one in, but I feel like I remember watching it. But maybe—and that's the funny thing, is like, that footage has implanted itself in so many different memories of mine from back in that time because it was everywhere, like you couldn't go home without—and it's like everyone's parents only wanted to watch that on TV. I remember that. That's all that was on TV anywhere. I'd go to Jonathan's house and it was on TV, at my house it was on TV, I was like, "What is happening?"

But I remember that, and I also remember—'cause it was my brother's birthday, so I knew it was Rami's birthday that day. And it's funny because I also conflate another experience; I know September 11, 2001 I was in class, but also I remember a birthday party of Rami's, and for some reason in my head the news broke there. But I know that's not true, so I have these two separate memories: one which is shared with you in class with Ms. Carden when it actually happened, which I know is true, and I have this other memory of being that age at Rami's birthday party. Kids were playing in the pool, and we hear that 9/11 happened. I think that must've had to have been something else. I think it might have

been parents talking about it at a party that weekend for Rami's birthday or something.

It's confusing the way that that presented itself in my head.

But I remember that it happened, I remember finding out soon after that it was Arabs, that they were Muslim, and that this was supposed to—people were seeing this as a representation of Islam. And I did know that I was Muslim at the time, like, obviously. But that's mostly it for that day. I don't remember specific emotions and I don't remember being sat down and talked to about it either, but that's not to say that it didn't happen. I just have no memory of that. Like I don't remember my parents being like, “This is what happened, this is what these people say,” like, I don't remember being talked through that this is a thing that happened. I don't know if my parents even expected any kind of backlash or anything like that. With my dad working in the criminal justice system, he has his own bias on these sorts of things, and he's very—and sometimes it gets on my nerves—I feel like he's very restricted to his specific experiences. So I don't know that they expected there to be Islamophobic backlash, which is weird, because I also don't know what kind of events similar to this that have happened prior that would've made Muslims look or feel a certain type of way.

OLA HARB

MARCH 17, 2018

Q: Could you tell me what you remember from that day, on September 11?

There's a lot of memories from that day. As you know, 9/11 is my son's birthday. It is Rami's birthday. So Rami at the time was six years old, and he was at the Oaks School. And I was an English teacher at Bartow Middle School. The first—when the first plane hit, my first played with my planning period and that was during my—no, yeah, actually was first period. That was during my first period and I was on planning and so was my English teacher—colleague. I think it was about eight-something when the first plane hit, and then we, as everybody else in the country, in the world, didn't really take it as like an accident. "Oh my God what a terrible accident." And then when the second plane went into this tower, the second tower, then we all realized that something bad was happening. So what we did we—you know, we have TVs in the classroom and usually kids watch Channel One News, blah, blah, blah. So we—I remember, it was Jeannie McCarthy, Larry Mohler, and myself, we all were like back-to-back next door. So we all came into one room I can't remember whose, and we turned on the TV. We held hands and we stood there and watched in astonishment, like, I couldn't even—we couldn't even all three of us talk, we were just like, jaws down, staring and trying to fathom what was happening. Still we couldn't talk. It was a terrible day.

That morning I had planned to go buy cupcakes and go to the Oaks School to celebrate Rami's birthday. Rami was in either first or probably was no he was probably still in kindergarten. I decided to proceed with the plan because Rami is expecting me. So, I took cupcakes and I went to the school, and when I first met Rami—I remember, I wrote about it, something about it when I was doing my writing workshop in—at USF summer, one of the summers, 2003. When I first met him, he says to me he was—remember, he's six years old, a six-year-old—he said to me, “I hate my birthday mom. People died on my birthday.” I didn't know what to do. I almost cried but I had to hold myself together and tell him that “Your birthday happened before this. Don't forget that. Just because they chose the day that's your birthday doesn't mean your birthday's bad, it means they're bad people.” So that was a very emotional—talking to a six-year-old trying to make sense out of a senseless scenario and talking to him about it and trying to still cope with that but proceed with his birthday plans. It was a very difficult day and for the longest time he held that grudge in his heart, that his birthday is a bad day. And we parents did our best to try to get him to overcome that. He's perfectly alright now. But still, it's very emotional and difficult thing to deal with as a parent and as a job.

KYNA PATEL

FEBRUARY 8, 2018

Florida's a really weird, unique place. It's strange isn't that it's unique. It's a town that's very—I don't know. It's weird. It's a mix between like your typical like Southern and like central Florida town. A lot of the industry in Polk County is phosphate mining and orange groves. So that's basically where most of the money comes out of. And then also Publix, the biggest grocery store chain in the South was founded in Lakeland, so there's a lot of Publix related wealth. And then there are a lot of like new immigrants too who come there. So it's like you have this blend of like older money and more established white families and stuff in Lakeland. Then you have all of these newer immigrants who are coming in. Both immigrants with higher education backgrounds and then you also have a lot of migrant workers there because of the citrus industry. Florida Southern College is the only place in the world where you can major in Citrus. Yeah. So. Yeah I don't know that you have a lot of different like class—there are a lot of class differences there and also a lot of racial differences there. I went to high school and elementary school in this really small town called Bartow. And yeah that's more of your, like, stereotypical Southern town that mostly is like centered on like one main street like and it's off of a highway. I don't know. Bartow is also a strange place that I feel some kind of connection to because that's where most of my formative school years were.

Demographically speaking that school—I remember my fifth-grade class—Nancy Smith, she said our class was the most diverse class that she'd ever had. I think there were around eleven to twelve students total in that fifth-grade class in the whole school. Because you had one teacher teaching one grade. And that's how it was. This is also in an old school house or not even a schoolhouse. This was someone's house that they converted into a school. The fourth-grade classroom was always in the upstairs room which had a cool fire escape outside, and second grade was in the basement. That was a big deal to me because that was the one rare building in Florida that I remember that had a basement. Because you don't have basements in Florida, at least not until you get to the Panhandle and Tallahassee in north Florida because everywhere else is sand when you dig. But yeah most—or actually, all of my teachers were white women until middle school. A lot of my classmates were also white for most of elementary school. I was one of two Indian girls in my grade. Jessica Joseph was the other girl. We went to high school together and we're still friends. We still keep in touch from time to time. She's super brilliant and is going to medical school. She was one of my really good friends, and I mean everyone was my really good friend in elementary school because it was such a tiny school. You have no room to have major beef with anyone. That's impossible. Nabil was also in that class. His parents are Palestinian. Jessica—she was in my year. her family is from a different part of India though, so I never—because my family is Gujarati we speak Gujarati and her family is from Kerala so they speak Malayalam. I think they're Pentecostal Christians. I don't think that they're Catholic, but they are Christian. So we are just very different but we're really good friends. Rainna was the only Black girl in our

class and depending on the school year, even the whole school. I don't remember many Black kids being there, even though Bartow does have a lot of Latinx families and a lot of Black families too.

But Bartow, like a lot of small southern towns, has a really messy history in terms of its relationship with Black people historically. I started looking through some public records and I couldn't even find back in the late 1880s and stuff, like, accounts of Black people being there because they had just been removed almost entirely, which is really gross. I mean, Summerlin Academy is the name of the JROTC program/school that's part of Bartow High School, which is where I went to high school but in a different program entirely. But yeah, Jacob Summerlin was a slaveowner. And Bartow High school's name initially was the Summerlin Institute because he donated land to the town to build a high school in the late 1880s. And Bartow was named after Francis S. Bartow, the first Confederate commander to die in the Civil War. So there's a lot of Confederate, Civil War, Reconstruction-related history and racial violence everywhere in Central Florida. It's one of those kinds of towns. Lakeland is just bigger.

On September 11, 2001 I was at the Oaks School. There was Ms. Williams who had taught third grade at the Oaks School for a really long time and she had just retired when I was in second grade. So we had a new teacher, Ms. Carden, who was really young. Like, I don't even know how old I would say that she was, because as a child it's hard to gauge people's ages like that, but I remember she wasn't married.

I don't remember her saying anything to us in class that day. I don't remember watching the footage until I got home. Maybe that's the thing, like, it's just—it's kind of really blurry for me. I just know that I do remember Ms. Smith, the fifth-grade teacher, and Ms. Carden in the hallway talking, because Ms. Smith was the one, I think, who went around to other teachers to be like, "Hey this just happened. Like, parents are going to be picking their kids up from school." Yeah, I think that's kind of maybe what she was talking about. I remember not overhearing specific things but knowing that they were talking about something that happened outside of school that was really serious. And I didn't know what it was and then I remember kids getting pulled out of class being like, "Your mom is here to pick you up" and all this stuff, and I didn't actually realize this, but my mom had come to pick me up earlier in the day too. I think it was because all of the kids were supposed to be picked up. I think they had canceled school that day just because they didn't know what was happening and didn't know if there was going to be another attack like in Florida, because that's where the president was at the time¹. So really, I guess in that morning specifically like as everything was happening in real time I didn't know what was going on at all except for knowing that something's up because the teachers are talking about something and all of these kids are leaving school.

¹ Former President George W. Bush was reading a book to a class of fourth graders at Booker Middle School in Sarasota, Florida, about an hour and fifteen minutes away from Bartow.

I interviewed my brother. He was three years old at the time and what he remembers, like, mom coming to pick me up like him going with her to pick me up from school. And it was one of those things where I don't know—I don't really remember it until I like came home. And turned on the TV and the news was just on the whole day, like, 24-hour news coverage. I remember watching the second tower falling and the first tower falling. I mean, I remember all of the imagery that you would see—working at or interning at the 9/11 Tribute Museum, for the first time going through the exhibits and seeing all of the videos that they have up of the footage from that day and the days following, I remember a lot of that.

RUPAL PATEL

MARCH 15, 2018

I remember I dropped you off at school. Ryan as usual had gotten up early and after we dropped you off we came home and he was hungry. I was getting his breakfast ready and I was thinking about putting *Blue's Clues*¹ or something so that he can focus and finish eating on time and Riddhi kaki² called. She goes, “Turn the TV on!” and I said, “I’m about to going to put Blue’s Clues.”

She goes, “No, put on CNN!”

Because—I said, “What’s the big deal?”

And she goes, “One of the World Trade Center got hit by a big plane.”

I said, “Are you crazy?” So, I turn it on, CNN, I mean they are showing the images of it, and they’re talking, “It looks like it’s accident but how can they”—I mean, they are dissecting and they’re showing the same thing over and over again, whereas the anchors

¹ *Blue’s Clues* was a children’s TV program on Nickelodeon.

² In Gujarati, names for aunts and uncles indicate whether a relative is related either by blood or marriage; *kaki* is the name you use for an aunt on your father’s side of the family who is married to one of your father’s siblings. *Foi* or *fia* also mean aunt in Gujarati, but denote that someone is your aunt on your father’s side, but is specifically your father’s sister.

were talking about what's and what's not of the whole thing. They were dissecting it in the sense that is it a mistake or it did—the pilot was drunk or whatever that was. And while I'm watching it and listening to it I see another plane hit and everybody's just like, “Oh my God.” And that's when—I still get goosebumps thinking about that. And then when Munjal calls, just like, “Did you see that?” Because he was also watching CNN or something, because this was a big news and everybody was watching their TV. So when Munjal kaka³ calls me saying, “Hey Rupal, are you watching TV? Look at this. This is what they are showing on CNN or other news channel in India.”

And I said, “Yeah I'm watching it” and so he says—I said, “Who—do you think it's planned?” That's what we were talking [about].

And he goes, “Yeah must be one of the Americans.” I said no. Can't—I mean you can't—Oklahoma bombing. I mean it—so that is what he was getting at.

And I said, “No, it doesn't sound like—nobody will plan things like this. So it must be something bigger because it takes a lot of planning. And Oklahoma was just a bomb outside. And then it got the federal building down. And that was that.” And then I called your dad and he said—I said, “It looks like it's a planned version.”

³ Munjal is a close family friend and has known my father since college. The term *kaka* means uncle who is your father's brother (blood relation), but can also be used to show a kinship-like relationship with someone. Similarly, *fua* is the term for uncle on your father's side who married your father's sister (aunt of blood relation).

And he said, “I’m aware of it, Chhottu⁴ kaka called.” And you know that story that I’m sure you have heard his version of it. So I won’t go there, and he said, “I’ll keep you posted about my whereabouts,” because it was very obvious that they’re gonna—the way they kept on saying there were gonna close the routes off. At the same time, by the time I end up talking to your dad the D.C. version of the Pentagon thing happened. So it was back to back to back to back. So I knew that they’re going to freeze all the planes on the ground making sure—he was planning to travel back from—I think he is gone through Milwaukee or something.

So I said, “Don’t go anywhere, just stay there.” And that was that. But after that the TV was always on just to see what they make out of it. And the information when it started coming it was obvious that it was a terrorist attack. That’s all I have are the memories. And then your dad called, said they are driving—they found a rental car, so they were driving. So, I was just making sure I talked to him regularly so that even though they were three—dad and John and John were in the car. Dad was the one driving. And since they were driving through the night I made sure that I call them frequently just to check on them.

I remember picking you up early from school. At the carpool line, parents were talking while I was waiting for you to come in. I do remember talking to a few of the parents and

⁴ Chhottu is a nickname for Jaydeep Patel, Piyush Patel’s brother and Riddhi Patel’s husband.

they did share that George Bush was in Sarasota. And probably it was Ghia [Spinosa, née Putnam], because her brother Adam [Putnam] was with him, so I was like, “Oh, he's with President? But they are going to take him someplace? Where is he going to go? Do you know?”

And she says, “No, that kind of information is not shared.”

So I was like, “Oh my God.” But other than that, nothing.

I remember asking you, “Did you watch the news?”

And you said, “Yeah, a big plane hit the World Trade Center, and both, mom!” But that was it. It's in the kids' eye, that was the news. And then we started focusing on the homework and such, so I made sure that I don't turn the TV on, or if the TV is on it's something that you guys want to watch instead of that, so that the images of it doesn't—because they were—I mean, they would be talking about anything and everything, dissecting the whole thing. So I didn't know how would—how you would take it, because you didn't like violence, you didn't like burning, and you would get scared because you could read everything and anything that you can get your hands on from very young age. And I fed your curiosity, but I also know that you will be scared. So, I didn't—I made sure that I don't talk about that or keep anything like that on. No violence. And that was pretty traumatic to look at. I made sure that you don't get to see it because

the images were kind of scary in my mind because I—when they were showing the footage and the World Trade Center crumbling down I know—I mean, I saw that people were jumping off the building. They were trying to—they think this is where this will probably—jumping off the building will probably save him, or it's an easier death for him. I mean, it was scary. It was heart wrenching to look at and it still bothers me. I didn't want that kind of image imprinted in your mind. Yeah. You see the plane crashing in that, but it's just a picture. But when they were—that day later on they were showing pictures close up, and that, that I didn't want you to see.

ZAHEER JAFFERY

NOVEMBER 16, 2001

That day, I got up, we leave the house together, she drops me off at Princeton Junction, I take the train. And I told my wife, “I really don’t feel like going to office, because I didn’t sleep well last night. I didn’t sleep well the night before and I’ve got a bad backache.” In fact, I’ve been having x-rays and MRIs [Magnetic Resonance Imaging] taken of my back. But the day before I had given such a severe tongue lashing to one of our consultants and I had penalized him—I drive myself hard and I drive other people very hard too—so he said, “Please, please would you give a priority to my document, to my project.” So I gave him my word and I have to come. If I hadn’t promised this man, I wouldn’t have gone to work.

So I went and I was in the office for maybe about twenty minutes, half an hour. I’d just finished a cup of coffee, I was looking at my email, and suddenly there was a huge blast that had come out of the sky. Totally impossible. And the building was designed to oscillate, the steel structure is elastic, but it seemed as if I’m in one of those old-fashioned swings. I mean, I went like this, I went like this, and I was totally stunned. I don’t sit near the window, I sit about forty feet away—or I used to—and I thought the sky was simply filled with confetti. The confetti was just endless. I mean, it was papers, it was pieces of things I could not describe, but the sky was full. And we got up collectively and we

started milling around. We had been through certain evacuation drills. So we knew that we should basically wait for the announcement. We waited about, I would say, a minute. We mulled around in the corridor. And I said, “We should not really wait, we should leave.” And it was just instinctive in me that I said it because I myself in my heart, I thought something had happened which would have been a gas leak which had caused the explosion. It was a massive explosion but I had no idea of the magnitude or the gravity. So we went back. I actually went back to my computer. I closed all of the windows on my computer. I had about eight or nine open, I closed them all. You know, collected everything—I wasn’t carrying this bag—and made sure that I had my glasses, my pens. Then I went and we started. There were a few people. I would say from the time the blast happened until I took my first step down the stairs was maybe six, seven minutes, not more. And once we had gone down maybe two flights of stairs when I said, “You know, I should have grabbed the zip drive because it contains two years’ worth of work.” I said, “Oh, come on, I’ll come back later or tomorrow. I’m not going to go back, there are so many people coming down now.”

Q: I don’t know if you said here, but what floor?

Sixty-fifth floor.

Q: Sixty-fifth.

Right, right. And the first two or three floors, there were not that many people—in fact one of the women made a remark, she says, “Hey, are we doing the right thing?” Her name is Fran, Frances. I said, “Fran, we’re absolutely doing the right thing. I think we’re being very smart. The reason you don’t see too many people is because we left within a few minutes of the blast. Don’t worry, we’re doing the right thing.”

And of course, as we went down, trickles of people started coming in. We went down maybe five or six floors and then there were so many people by now that you could only proceed at a certain pace. There were three or four women who were weeping and who had to be consulted. But by and large I was in fact surprised by some of the nobler traits shown while we were going down. One of the things I did mention in one of our group sessions—we had to stop several times during our descent because of injured people being brought, down. For example, you would hear, “Move to the right, move to the right” and everybody would move to the right so that the injured could be taken down. And this happened, three, four times. People in a groove and then they had to reposition themselves. And people would actually: “No, no, you first,” I couldn’t believe it, that at this point people would actually say, “No, no, please take my place.” It was uncanny.

There was smoke, there were fumes and somebody got hold of a wad, a big, big stack of paper napkins and it was being passed in an orderly fashion. I mean, you would take one and you would pass the other—it was uncanny. It was very uplifting.

While going downstairs, I did not have my cell phone, I did hear somebody say, “What? A passenger jetliner?” And when he was done, I said, “Come on, this is how rumors start. Are you crazy?” I didn’t believe it. And then of course he lost the connection.

I have to say this: that the heart-rending part came when we were about [the] fortieth floor—we had come down maybe twenty-five floors and there was another commotion. We had to move aside to let the firemen come up. They had at that point climbed forty floors and these were big men and they were dead on their feet from exhaustion. Believe me, they were walking like really old men and their clothes must have weighed thirty pounds, their helmet probably weighed six pounds, they had maybe twenty pounds on their back. And they were carrying these hoses. And I don’t know if you’ve ever tried to heft them—they’re heavy. And I actually started applauding them and we applauded them. I don’t really get emotional very much but that is when I felt like weeping because I did not realize it but I just felt, these men have trudged up forty floors and God knows how many more floors they are going to go up. Can you imagine? The physical exertion.

At around the last fifteen floors the stairwells became wet, went from moist to wet to a torrent of water. And by this time my back was really hurting so I was going very, very carefully and the rails were obviously moist too, they were wet. Water had started dripping from other places and it was beginning to look more and more chaotic as we went down. The only thing that I was concentrating on was that it would be the most

stupid way to die if I fell down and broke a bone. That would be a stupid. By this time, the second building had been hit and it had already fallen.

I was still in. I had not gotten out of Building One [North Tower]. Building Two [South Tower] had already fallen. I think now how much time it took me—most of the people that started out with me actually were able to leave quicker, because there were two or three times when we had to change the staircases. I mean, these staircases don't run from top to bottom. They are broken for structural reasons. I was walking very, very slow by now because I could barely walk. In the concourse level I was going so slow that two or three times people offered to carry me and I said, "No, no, maybe somebody else needs help." You know, the water was this much, up to my ankles, and it was slimy and slippery. My shoes were new and they were slipping. And by that time I knew that it was very serious because people were actually now beginning to run and you could hear the volunteers saying, "Get out of the building before it falls. Get out of the building before it falls." I still didn't believe that the building could fall, but when I exited the building and I looked up, I said, "This building will not last."

I just put my head down and I was walking very, very slow. It was like ten-fifteen already in the morning. And I had gone maybe two hundred yards away from the terrace area when the building came down.

Q: What did you see when you looked up that made you say it wouldn't last?

Oh, it was like an inferno. It looked like somebody had hit the top part of the building. It was almost surreal, like a Hollywood piece. I mean, every window was alight. I mean, like the top third was like flames. It was ghastly.

Q: And then when it fell—

I was at the park I think and the Century Building was between me—of course I could hear running and people—but I was so focused. I had a particular problem because I had no money. I had only two dollars in my pocket. I was trying to make a phone call and every pay phone I went had like fifty people around it. The first three banks I went to, they were closed and that made me really furious. I felt that this is probably the most rotten thing somebody could do. So my first priority was to get some money. The fourth bank I tried, it was open. The main branch had closed but the little lobby area where there were the ATMs [Automated Teller Machine] was still open. I got some money and then I tried to call home and I went, literally, from pillar to post, I mean, pay phone to pay phone but nothing. I couldn't get connected.

At one pay phone, there as a young girl with a cell phone, and her cell phone was dead. She was trying to make a call too. What I would do is I would make two or three attempts and then I would get back to the back of the line because I didn't want to block people. Or I would go to a different phone. Suddenly, her phone rang and I just had the presence

of mind to pick up a brown paper bag which was lying and I wrote on it, "Please tell this person to call this number and tell them that Mr. Jaffery is alive and well."

And she said it to the caller—well, not only did she say it but it was her mother. Her mother must have tried all the time for two hours, because my wife did get the message by two, two-thirty and this thing happened at twelve noon. I reached home at five thirty, six.

But I was so focused on quote, unquote, "escaping," that as people ask me: Did I have nightmares? Did I have sleepless nights? No. Because I think I totally exhausted my adrenaline in trying to just get away. There was no conflict between flight or flee kind of thing. It was just flee.

On the other hand, my son, my eldest son, he had a very rough time. He had an appointment in World Trade Center One [North Tower]. He was working out of World Financial Center, which is just across the street. His train stopped there around, what, eight forty, eight forty-five. He had a nine o'clock appointment. He heard outside some kind of muffled roar or bang and people started running. Somebody said, "There's been a shooting." He goes up to the lobby and he senses there's something drastically wrong, and he sees debris falling. So he comes out and then waits for me. We often have lunch together or used to have lunch together, my son and I. You know, once a week or so we would just get together and have lunch in that courtyard. So he stands there and he says

he saw thousands of people leave until he was asked to leave by officials. He stood there for like a couple of hours—the people would make him move and he would move and then he would stand somewhere else. He could not believe I would have survived, that I made it.

So he called my other son who was working in New Jersey, upstate New Jersey, I mean, north New Jersey, and he said, “Mustafa, you’d better go home and take charge and be the man of the house because I cannot get out, all the bridges and tunnels are closed and Baba is dead. There is no way he could have made it out. I stood there until everyone had left and the building was going down.” He saw the second building hit by the plane. He saw the bodies fall out. He saw one body fall and hit within forty feet of him. And so he went home to a cousin’s apartment. They offered prayers of the dead for me. So he had actually given me up for good. And he had a very rough time later.

Q: What was the reunion like?

My middle son and my youngest son were waiting for me at the train station because I had been able to get them by that time. We hugged, we went home. It was normal. But again, it didn't really change my outlook much because I've always said that life is a gift. And I have no tolerance for people who complain—you cannot imagine how well off you are compared to billions of other people. So I don't think it made a great change of outlook for me. I'm not a very strong person, I had polio, I have had three surgeries on

my right leg, I have a bad back, so it's not as if I'm counting to live a very long, healthy, robust life, I mean—but life is a gift. And the only thing I'm try to tell people is after this, all those petty squabbling, complaining, bitching, backbiting, it seems so trivial. It seems much more trivial now.

SALMAAN JAFFERY

DECEMBER 3, 2001

I was working in the World Financial Center for Merrill Lynch. It happened to be a temporary assignment because I graduated from Cornell in May. I had a job offer that was rescinded a week before I graduated because I was going to start work for an investment bank in August, here in Manhattan. I lost my job before I started because of the market.

So I landed this high-end temp assignment from Merrill Lynch just to make ends meet because I had an apartment in Stuyvesant Town, right, and I had to sort of pay rent. So I got this job with Merrill.

Q: Your father mentioned that you two used to have lunch?

Yes. We had lunch, gosh, sometimes every day. But, on average, two to three times a week, a couple times we'd go down to the Sbarro's in the mall level, at the World Trade Center, the food court. But more often than not, we'd each have a little tiffins or lunch boxes. We'd, like, meet by the fountain and just sit there and have lunch and talk. My father and I, in case you haven't figured out, we're very close. We're very good friends.

Q: Your father worked on the sixty-fifth floor of the North Tower?

Yes.

Q: So, now, just take me through the day.

Okay, well, I wake up, and I planned on being at work by about eight-thirty, which is a little bit early. On the way from Stuy Town to the L train—because I'd walk from there to the L train, take the L all the way down to Seventh Avenue, and then take the 1/9 down to the World Trade Center—I called my brother-in-law, for some reason, to ask him where my mother-in-law was. This was around, like, eight-thirty. Then sat in the L, got to Seventh Avenue, took the 1/9 [train].

Here's what's interesting. I would always position myself on the platform for the 1/9 in the forward most cab because the staircase at the 1/9, on the World Trade was right there. So it just saved time. So I tried doing it this time, but at Seventh Avenue there was a huge line of people on the platform. The train was running late, so I couldn't actually make it to that super spot in the first cab. I was in the second or third cab. I get to the World Trade. Because of my positioning, rather than being the first person up the stairs, into the shopping area, I was in this long line on the platform, underneath the World Trade Center. It would have been a line of about maybe twenty people, twenty-five people, maybe two thick. So maybe fifty people. Twenty-five rows, two thick. It's progressing

nicely for about fifteen seconds. Then all of a sudden there's an stampede, people running down, saying, "Someone's been shot, someone's been shot."

Now, in retrospect, this moment—because I pieced it together—this was the moment—this was probably about a minute or thirty seconds after the plane had hit, okay, but we didn't know it.

"Someone's been shot, someone's been shot."

What happens? So people started running down, stampede. Probably because I haven't had my first cup of coffee or probably because I couldn't care less, I'm skeptical of these things. So I just stood my ground, and a few of us braved it and said, "Look, how bad can it be?" Because we didn't hear anything. We walked up and into what would be the shopping area, okay. So we entered right across from the Banana Republic, perhaps; and it's eerie, like, there's no one there and there's a very strong, acrid smell.

I look left, and there's this guy being carried by two men, so he's being picked up by his knees. He's in a sitting position and he's being carried. He had blood on his foot or something like that, and he seemed a little bit in shock.

So that didn't disturb me. I was, "Huh." Then this gentleman walked by, I said, "What happened?"

He was like, “Some plane hit the North Tower, I think.”

At the time, I thought it was a Cessna. Because the week before, some idiot had gotten himself stuck on the Statue of Liberty. I recall some para-glider. So I said, “Okay, some weekend warrior has probably gone off-track.”

So I proceeded along the exact same path I take every day calmly, which is walking past the PATH [Port Authority Trans-Hudson] train escalators. Then I made a left, up one more flight of escalators. And up those escalators, I would have been in World Trade Six or Seven, one of those shorter buildings right in front of the North Tower.

I get out of the escalator, and now I'm on ground level. By “ground level,” I mean where the fountain is, between the towers. I'm not outside yet. But the building in which I'm in is glass, so I can see. So I'm facing the North Tower. To my left is the fountain. I can see everything very clearly because it's glass. Pieces of the building are falling. There's paper everywhere and chunks of the building are falling, like, pieces of metal and, God knows what else, debris. I realized that this was really serious. It looks like it's just absolutely surreal, something that you couldn't just imagine.

So despite that, I go through the revolving door. Okay, I go through it, and now I'm in the outdoors. I'm in the open, but the reality is, I'm covered by the overhang of the building.

So I'm in the open air, but I'm covered by the building by whatever the overhang was, five, ten feet. But I can smell everything. It's powerful. I can see these things. I don't remember whether it was at that instant I looked up, but within a second or two after there, just looking there, I was being told, "Just go. Go," by some security guards, not by police.

I make a right towards Vesey [Street], and all of a sudden this thing in the corner of my eye slams to the ground, maybe thirty feet away from me, and it's a body. I knew immediately it was a body. I mean, I knew it was a body immediately because it had the form, it had the head, the arms, but it was burnt. Thirty? Yes, I'm not prone to exaggeration. It had to have been within thirty to forty feet because I was able to recognize the outline and everything. It was a loud thump.

This woman, who was evacuating with me, she said, "What's that?"

I said, "Nothing. Don't worry about it." So I saw it. I mean, I saw it register, it hit. Half a second later, I turned my head; I had seen enough. I walked downstairs to Vesey Street, and I looked up, and that's when I saw a big, gaping hole. Meanwhile, the moment I got out, I started calling my father, and that's when the panic started to hit me because I knew he was in the North Tower and I knew he was high up, but I didn't know what floor he was on. In all of his lunches, he had never actually told me what floor he was on. But I

knew he was high up. Now nothing—there's no connection. So I walked down Vesey, and I redial, redial, redial, nothing; looking up in absolute horror. But very calm.

Then very quickly after, maybe four or five or six or seven calls, and looking at how black the smoke was and how raging the inferno was, I suddenly realized, I said, “You know what? My father is probably gone. He's probably dead by now.” I looked up, and it wasn't like a hysterical, “Oh, my God, he's gone.” It was more like, I was very sad and started to weep; but it was because I had sort of done the math, almost. I knew he was up there. I look up, I know it's up there, and I see that fire—he has a bad leg, and people are waving their flags from there and people started jumping. There's no way. There's no way he can escape this.

I walk to the edge of Church and Vesey, and everybody else is looking up at people jumping. That was really horrifying, I think, to tell you the truth, even more than the body. Because the body just sort of happened. I didn't, like, sit there and stare at it. If I had stared at it, I probably would have been more moved. The body was more like sort of a piece of flesh.

The people were actually kicking, and you could see them. Their arms were waving as they were falling. Then there was the collective angst—the collective angst when you're with people. Because they were saying, “Oh, my God.” People were crying, so it magnified the grief because you felt people feeling pain.

So the whole thing, since we know that the second plane hit eighteen minutes later, so whatever, around 9:13 or whenever it was, I'm just standing there, looking up directly at the North Tower where suddenly the South Tower explodes, this plume of orange fire comes racing towards us. Again, it's very vivid in my mind because I was staring at the towers. That was very loud. It was very loud. I remember it was very loud. There was a little bit of fear because, much like when you're at fireworks for the Fourth of July and you see one of those bursts, they're sort of coming towards you but you're not quite sure; I mean, they're obviously very far away, but it looks like it's coming towards you. First of all, it was coming towards us, so people started to, like, panic.

Then an instant later, my reaction was, "Wow, this building is going to fall," or, "The pieces are going to fall over," but it didn't. I was pretty much like I had basically strolled back. But then people suddenly started to stampede because the pieces of the building started falling. Some of the pieces fell as far as where we were, Church Street. Some people panicked. That's when I first got really afraid because people were stepping over each other. I mean, there was a baby carriage that was pushed over. I mean, it was terrible. So then I decided to just be calm, and I pulled into a building for about ten seconds, and the wave of people sort of subsided.

Then I'm basically weeping profusely because I'm convinced, without a shadow of doubt, that my father's dead; so I need to find someone that I know. So I walked towards

William Street, where my father-in-law works. I went all the way up to his building—he works for the City of New York also. I couldn't find him. I look like a derelict because I'm walking around with this bag and my eyes—I'm tearing—I'm sniffing and tearing. I'm not bawling but just like, crying a lot. I couldn't find this guy.

I went to the Duane Reade, picked up a pack of smokes. That's where something really upset me is, people were treating it like a spectacle. See, people ran in to get cameras. I'm not sure that I wouldn't have done the same if my father weren't there, but after I walked away from Church Street, I could not look back because every look at the building reminded me my father was probably in there. So that actually spared me because I just basically didn't look back. I saw glimpses. I didn't really look back after that.

Then I walked—I don't know why, but I just kept going east. So I walked to Fulton [Street]. I went to this bar at Fulton and mind you, I'm phoning constantly. Nothing was working. I go into the bar. I'm in line for the phone. The phone's not working. I'm at the bar with coffee, smoking a cigarette, drinking coffee and basically weeping. I couldn't get through on the phone, couldn't get through to anybody, and all of a sudden you hear the news that the Pentagon's been attacked, and I couldn't believe it.

Then, shortly after, someone said, “Get out. Let's go. Get out.”

I said, “Why?”

They said, “The buildings collapsed.” So we all sort of walked out of there. It was more like a very brisk walk, maybe galloping, trotting a little bit, but just a very brisk walk. Suddenly we see this—I didn't hear the rumble or anything—I see this cloud coming towards us. Because if you remember, when the first building fell, the cloud—for some reason, the wind, it went straight to Brooklyn. I mean, it just went [whistles]—it went straight east.

So we were just close enough where we had to walk pretty quickly to escape it, and we just got the edges of it. But, I mean, we weren't, like, covered with anything. I basically walked up the East River to my cousin's place. I didn't go back home because I couldn't be alone. My cousin lives in the Harborside Towers. Along the way, I met this woman that I told you about. I'm walking there by myself. I'm out of tears. I'm clearly in shock and I'm exhausted because I've cried for, like, an hour and a half, I'm dehydrated, and I'm in shock, and people are just in shock, and there's a collective—excuse me, what time is it? Do you know what time it is?

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

Q: So this woman gave her a hug, and she worked—

Yes, it turns out that she was a survivor. She worked for Aon Risk, the insurance company, Aon Risk Management.

It took me a while to figure out, for many weeks later, whether or not she was in the North or South Tower, but I think she would have been in the South Tower - North Tower, wouldn't she? I don't remember. I actually found out, but I forgot. I forget which tower they were in. Nonetheless, she was on the one-hundred-somethingth floor. So I'm inclined to think that it might have been the North Tower because the South Tower, I think, was hit much higher.

But, anyway, she was distraught because she had walked down one hundred stories. She, in her mind, had most certainly lost a large number of her colleagues. No thanks, by the way, to an inane procedure by which people went back up because they were told it was safe. So she, I think, lost a whole bunch of people there. Just by the trauma and the horror of the whole thing.

Then I sort of found comfort in her and said, "Look, I don't know where my father is.

He's probably dead." Her heart went out to me, but she was also very consoling.

She was like, "No, you have to keep faith. I'm sure your father made it out. You know, keep the faith, keep the faith."

My only regret is that we parted ways. I was going to drop her to her apartment, but she said, “No, don't worry about it.”

She gave me her number. I put it on my cell phone. For whatever reason, it didn't save. So all I remember, her name was Terri. She had a father in Florida. She was married. She had at least one or two children. She lived at 6 Peter Cooper.

Shame on me because I really wanted to go back and just say, “Hello” to her, and I got caught up and I ended up moving out of the area. So my own future was uncertain there. But I will look her up because I just wanted to leave her a note saying, “You know what? My father is fine.” Because, you know, her last words were, you know, “I'll be praying for you. I'll be praying for your father.” She was a very sweet lady.

Then we basically sat at my cousin's house; and I was just a wreck. I couldn't eat, couldn't drink. I'd just lay on the couch. We were basically in limbo until three o'clock, waiting to hear from my father.

Meanwhile—I have two younger brothers—my younger brother, Mustafa who's five years younger than I am, he works for Everest Broadband in Fort Lee [New Jersey]. He just went into sort of crisis-management mode. He got in his car, and he just went down and picked up my brother, my youngest brother, who's fifteen, from school. Went home to my mom, and people started gathering at my mom's place. I couldn't even call my

mother, because I knew if I called her, I'd just freak out emotionally. We just started praying, praying and praying.

Right before I entered my cousin's house—it was probably like twelve o'clock—I had my first conversation with my wife, because we were unable to reach each other. I remember she called, and I completely burst out crying, saying, “He's dead, he's dead.” Of course, she started crying. It was very emotional. But basically, we were in this really horrible situation, where we didn't know whether he was alive or dead. Then at, like, three o'clock—and I had gone from one extreme to another. I had gone from absolute certainty that he was dead; which, in my mind, was a rational decision, “He's old, he has a bad leg, he's high up. I saw it; he's dead” to, “Please God, if he's dead, I hope it was very quick,” to, “Okay, God, it's up to you if he's alive or dead. Maybe he's not. Okay, let me try and pray and pray and pray.”

So at three o'clock on CNN [Cable News Network]—I'm watching CNN—and there's this young guy being interviewed by someone on the top of some building, and he says, “Yes, my name is so-and-so, and I work for the Port Authority, and I was on the sixty-fifth floor.” By this time, I had spoken to my brother or something, and he said, “Yes, he was in the sixties or somewhere.

So this guy was standing there, and he was alive and well. He said, “Yes, you know, as far as I know, all of our colleagues got out.” So that was the first ray of hope.

Shortly after, we get a phone call from home. It turns out that my mom had received a phone call—or my brother—someone at home had received a phone call from a complete stranger, saying that a Mr. Jaffery has said that he's fine. Of course, then life became—I mean, it was a whole new day. I'm sure my father told you, but he had basically asked a stranger on the street to call the number in Jersey, which this person did.

Q: He also said that you said prayers to the dead for him.

For him? Yes. Did my father tell you that?

Q: Yes.

Yes. It's interesting. When I was convinced that he was dead, like, when I was walking up, I was like, “Okay”—because for those moments, it's like, “Okay, now life is different. He's dead. Now what are you going to do?” I was thinking about my mom, my brothers, what's going to happen. In my religion, when someone dies, you say a prayer for them; and so I had said that prayer for him.

Q: What's the prayer called?

Well, there's two—it's [*Sura al-*] *fatihah*. I don't know what *fatihah* means. There's two things you do—one is, you recite this very standard prayer, which is not specific to

someone dying. It's just a prayer that we say to God, which talks about how great God is, essentially; it reaffirms the basic doctrines of our faith. Then the other one is this phrase—I don't speak Arabic, but I know enough Arabic that I can try and translate—I don't know, it's something like, “To God you return,” or something like that. It's a one-liner. Like, if you are not Pakistani and you are my friend, and you come up to me and say, “Oh, by the way, Harry Potter has died,” and we knew him, I'd say that phrase. Both of us would lower our heads and say—it's like saying “too bad.” It's one of those things. I said both those prayers for him because I was convinced that he was dead.

Oddly enough, I didn't see him for another two more weeks. Once he got home to Princeton Junction or to West Windsor, rather, I spoke to him, and that was sufficient. But I did not go home for about sixteen or seventeen days afterwards because I know myself well enough. I mean, had I seen him, I would have just like burst out crying or I would have been very emotional. That's exactly why I didn't go. I'm glad I didn't because I saw him over two weekends and a few days after that, and it was so very emotional. But it would have been much more, had I gone immediately. So I didn't actually see him.

Q: What was your conversation like on the phone?

Very brief. I mean, my father is often very understated—or sometimes. I mean, he's very expressive, when he wants to be. He's very well spoken also and very articulate. But he's not the kind of guy who's going to go out of his way to like—I mean, when I spoke to

him that afternoon, I actually didn't want to ask him much because I knew he must have been through a lot.

I said, "Look, we don't with have to talk. I just want to know, are you okay?" "Good."

Then it was only after maybe at least two or three days after that I said, "Hey, what happened?" But it took me a good three or four layers of questioning to tease out a lot of the details that I wanted to know. Then it became important to me. I did want to know. I wanted to know exactly what happened to him. I mean, he was completely willing to tell me, but he was not as expressive in the beginning. So it took, I think, a good week, ten days before I knew every single detail.

He told me about the fact that he was sitting in his chair. He mentioned that the building appeared to rock violently back and forth, giving him the sensation of being on a swing, almost, a couple of feet, it seemed. Which makes sense, because the buildings are designed to absorb stress that way. Then he said, if I recall correctly, he said that there was an overwhelming sense of calm on the floor—not an overwhelming sense of calm, but people were pretty calm and just got up and went to the exits. He said that he was one of the first to go to the exits, but he also said that he had no idea what was happening. They went pretty quickly, but he said he shut off his computer, logged it off, waited for all the prompts, put on his jacket, gathered his things. So it wasn't as if they were running out the door, either.

He told me that they walked down the stairs and there was human traffic. So their pace was mitigated by the pace of everyone else. He told me that a few floors down he realized that he had forgotten his pipes and his address book, but that he was so sure that he'd be back, he said, "Oh, it's not worth it." A good thing, too, because that could have made the difference between living and dying. He mentioned that around the fortieth floor, that he saw his first firefighters. This was the saddest, actually, because no one had actually said this on TV, but all these large, heroic, swarthy, muscular men were walking up with full gear, my father said, and they could barely take a step at a time, they were so exhausted. He said they were just like step, rest, step, rest. They're all probably gone by now. But he said they made it down. The last couple of floors were in darkness. The ground floor, whatever, might have been—there was water. He said, then by the time his right leg, which is his weak leg, was hurting tremendously. After they left the building, everyone sort of like ran or walked very quickly; he couldn't do that. That's where his disadvantage was.

So as long as he was in the stairways, he could only go as fast as everyone else, but outside, he was really slow relative to others. He said that he walked north. He said that he looked back once to look up and see the gaping hole, and just kept walking. He said maybe a couple hundred yards down, he said the South Tower fell. He had already been going north—was it Broadway? I'm not even sure. That's it.

But he told me he kept walking, going up towards Penn Station, I think, stopping off at hotels for phones. All the phones were down. The pay phones were packed with people, and that he tried to find a place to stay overnight, but I don't know what happened. He eventually went to the Port Authority; they were closed off. They went to Penn Station and caught a train.

PART THREE

THE AFTERMATH

ZAHEER JAFFERY

NOVEMBER 16, 2001

Q: How has [9/11] affected your life since?

I have begun to really value life a lot more. And coincidentally, it's not just that but the repercussions that I see, for example, what's going on in Afghanistan. And I see, on the one hand you have so many thousands of innocent lives gone, a wonderful structure, a landmark. It was a landmark in this civilization, I mean, it really was, is gone. And you also see the misery of Afghani people and you say, my goodness, this country is really wonderful. Whoever is here and is having a reasonably good life does not realize how unbelievably lucky he is. I mean, most people obviously do not have either the inclination or the means to read about the life how it was in medieval times, Renaissance, the nineteenth century. Life was miserable. And you come to this country and the amount of leisure, of physical luxury is uncanny. Maybe this will never arise again. Maybe when this civilization is over two hundred years later—maybe this is the peak, who knows? And this is probably the only civilization on earth that has not actually gone out and started conquering other people.

And this is not my outlook now—when I came to this country, I felt at home. I was brought up on Lucky Lulu and Gene Autry as a child. We had a very Western upbringing,

but I had a lot of love for my country too. That's why I went back so many times. I did not immediately come for a green card or anything like that. But I even then I used to say oh my goodness. I would say to Americans who were born here or who have been here at least two, three generations—that you guys do not know how lucky you are. It's only people who come from other places that you realize what a great country this is. And this is a fact.

Oh, I was about to say that there are a lot of the people who have higher education, they have Ph.D.'s [Doctorate of Philosophy], M.D.'s [Medical Doctorate]. Those are the people that I would expect to be broad minded; I was sort of surprised and a little concerned about the spread of meaningless ritualistic religion among them. I mean, I expected these people to come up and support me when I said, Look, we have to have a religion which is really meaningful to our children and their children because right now they are losing touch with it. We were brought up in a culture in which whatever your dad says is right. And we went by it. Okay, that was the culture. You know, like Confucian culture—you respected the elders regardless. And if a person was older than you, you gave him respect regardless.

Now it is different. Now, first of all, the older generation does not necessarily know more than the younger generation. In fact, science is developing so rapidly that I actually use my fifteen-year-old son now as my guru in computer matters. And I've been using him as my guru for the past four or five years. And even my other sons sometimes go to him. So

it's a topsy-turvy thing. And he's as well informed as I was about a lot of things as I was at the age of thirty. So if I explain something to him, if I yell at him, which I do unfortunately when I'm upset or something, he will say, "Look, you did this and you did this and why are you yelling at me?" And I have to sit down and I have to apologize to him. Last night I yelled at him and I had to go and apologize to him there, four times, because I felt so bad, because he was right and I was wrong. But in my father's generation, if my father said—and you would have done it if your father said—"Go and stand in the freezing rain," or something, or "turn your face to the corner and stand on your leg for four hours," that would be it. And there would be no hard feeling either. It's a different world.

DECEMBER 4, 2002

Q: Pick up the story where we left off, which is, I think it was last November I spoke with you.

Right. Right. I'm not sure whether much has changed in my life. I mean, nothing that I can relate to September 11th. Things have happened with my life, but they seem to be completely unrelated.

Q: But tell me about that.

Okay. One of them is essentially physical. One of the reasons why I was one of the last to get out of the building was because I was, in those days, experiencing severe back pains. And later on, when I got through with my MRIs [Magnetic Resonance Imaging] and x-rays and stuff like that, I discovered that I had nerve damage to my backbone. Then subsequently I had two or three slipped discs, which may have been exacerbated simply because suddenly in a day, walking down sixty-five floors, and then being on my feet all day, practically. Apart from that, my life has been uneventful, really.

Q: The last time I spoke with you, you were working in Queens, I think.

Right. Right. And that was last year, right?

Q: Yes.

Okay. Our temporary office, at that point, was Building 14 in the J.F. Kennedy Airport, at the J.F. Kennedy Airport. In December we were moved to One Madison Avenue, December or January; I forget. And there we stayed for like three, four months. In July we moved to the present location, and we are told that in four or five years time, when the new buildings go up, whenever—I think it's at least four or five years—we move back to the World Trade Center location. So, I mean, I can't, I really cannot think of any impact on my life, really.

Q: Well, tell me, for instance, how you feel. There are things that you touched on that we didn't really get into, and I think should be part of the story. For instance, you mentioned your group at work.

Right.

Q: I think it's the support group. Can you tell me about that, and how often you did that, and was it useful, and [unclear] people in it?

Yes. Right. I think Port Authority made a pretty conscious effort at comforting people. There were quite a few people who were not affected, although there's a friend of mine; he's a psychiatrist, and he says that, "Believe it or not, you don't know, but it has had an effect on you. You may not realize it. It could come out in some other ways, but nothing goes unrecorded on the human psyche. It was a huge event, so don't think that it has left you unaffected. It has affected you. You may not realize it."

But in any case, Port Authority, as an entity, government entity, I think took it very seriously, and there were several group sessions. And then there were—because I didn't partake in it. I mean, I took part in the organized get-togethers, but we could also make use of professional counseling. There was in JFK, there was an area where we could go

and actually have a discussion. So I don't know what went on there, because I never utilized it. I never thought I had the need.

Q: But you did go to the organized get-togethers.

It would be something like, there would be a notice, and so we would get together in a group of forty, fifty people, and the director would give a little pep talk, ask—

[Interruption]

But it would be a session where we would actually tell him, or just speak out—not tell him—just speak out in a manner not unlike Alcoholics Anonymous, I guess, what you're feeling. And there were some people who actually broke down. I mean, they were talking and their throat caught and they choked; they couldn't carry on.

I felt a little odd because I seem almost like I'm callous, but I just said, "I'm sorry. I have no nightmares." I still have no nightmares. I have nothing that I could say that is a trauma. So those counseling sessions, if I remember—I would call those counseling sessions; I would simply call them comfort sessions. Okay. And it was good, because I think some people definitely needed that kind of, like a family away from family kind of thing. I think it helped a lot of people.

Q: And your friend tells you that you have been affected, whether you realize it or not.

What do you tell your friend?

I didn't say anything to him. I have a lot of respect for him. He's a great guy. But that was his considered opinion. I mean, I meet him at social events and we exchange a lot of emails, and the emails, obviously, are totally social. But we met and we started talking. I mean, we didn't talk, I thought, in that way, but I think the topic went from his wife, who has undergone a surgery and was in great pain and all that, and then we went on to other things. And we came upon how I think that there was another Pakistani psychologist or psychiatrist, I forget who the person—I think psychiatrist. And so the question was asked of me, and I said, "I don't seem to have any kind of symptoms," and all that. And he said, "Really, you think it had no effect on you. Take my word for it. It has affected you. How you will understand it, how it will manifest itself, I can't say, unless you come to me and I look into your mind." But that was it.

Q: So you have had no nightmares and sleepless nights.

No, I have none.

Q: How often do you think about what happened?

I think about it a lot, but not as a personal calamity or as a personal danger. I just look upon it as a huge, huge event that did not touch the life of just thousands of people. I think it has touched the life of one and a half billion Muslims. I mean, the event has. From that point of view, I think about it at least, at least once a day. I mean, almost no time goes by that we don't think of the horrific damage it has done to the cause of Muslims. I mean, it's like a snowball that is rolling down, and, it's terrible. So that way, I do think about it. And maybe my reactions, and when I do get, for example, more lively than I normally would have, in my discussions with fellow Pakistanis. I am less forgiving of us now, as I used to be, because obviously I'm critical of us because I love us. When I say "us," I'm talking about Muslims. But at the same time, I'm getting much more impatient, and I just feel like the lid of the Pandora's Box has been lifted. And God knows where it's going to end. I mean, that's my fear. So we do discuss it. Just yesterday we had some friends come over to our place. We were discussing these kinds of things.

We were talking about fasting, for example. I said I really no longer fast. And although there are many, many benefits to a lot of the things that Islam offers, but if you take those things out of context and you try to interpret them literally as they were brought fourteen hundred years ago, that is just the most stupid thing you can do.

The discussion was about how a lot of the Muslim community is forgetting about the rationale behind the rules and regulations, I mean, the thought process. They seem to be

more interested in doing those things because these things are going to count as virtue units. I don't know.

There's some equivalent of something called *sawab* in Islam. Like a measure of goodness, like you have measure of weights, some measure of goodness. So, the word is *sawab*. It's like *sawab*. But what happens is that if you offer prayers, for example, in certain nights of Ramadan, the last ten nights, the *sawab* units are more because this is the month in which the Qur'an [unclear]. It was a complete turnoff. I've actually heard it being blared over the radio in English, from Medina, because it was Arabic and English. Medina is the holy city in Saudi Arabia. You know that, right? Okay. Next to Mecca. And here is a learned man from Egypt, and this man is saying things like, "When you pray, each prayer is worth so many thousand times an ordinary prayer, and on these nights—" I mean, it's like a calculation, and it was such a huge turnoff to me to hear these things now, as if this equates to doing actual goodness.

So we were discussing those kind of things, and I said that when Muhammad came fifteen hundred years ago, when he appeared on the scene, he was a radical; a progressive. He took that barbaric society like a thousand years ahead of their time. Now we want to go back [unclear]? I mean, if he came today, he's not going to have a beard or dress like this, because he had a beard because everybody had a beard. [Laughs] I mean, razors were difficult. You didn't have Gillette. It's no big deal, but to be pious and grow a beard is ridiculous.

Just the other day I was exchanging an email with a friend of mine, and there are some people from our college in Karachi who are living in the Madeleine, Virginia, area. I have not seen them for like forty years. I did not see them since 1967, so that's thirty-three, thirty-five years. And I just found that a lot of them had become so conservative that I probably would have very little in common, on that level. You see, when you do become middle-aged, you're not going to discuss—I mean, I cannot discuss sports, regardless, because whatever sport I could discuss is not relevant here. I don't even like American football or American baseball, so what I'm saying is, we can't discuss women, because we are no longer in that age group where these kind of things, again, have any relevance. So, basically, you start discussing things which are the life beyond the next door, which is life after death kind of things. And we have just differed hugely now.

So it's a great number of people here, I would not be able to talk my mind to because they would just get very offended. Some of them are beginning to realize that we simply have to have a complete dialogue with the entire Western civilization. I'll tell you what I think it means, okay? There's a comparison. Let's say, how the Jewish people have become intermingled with the mainstream, and the Orthodox Jews are still like a world apart. What do they read? Their word, Talmud. Okay. Is it the Torah they read or the Talmud? I mean, one is the collection of rules and regulations, and one is the equivalent of the Qur'an. But in any case, there's a huge similarity between the Pakistani student, the mullahs, the way they read the Qur'an. They move like this. They have a cap and they

have the beard. And these Orthodox Jews, if you'd see the pictures, they actually move up and down and they are reading, again, in Hebrew.

In any case, the thing is that they have other nationalities. I mean, Jews can be East European, Polish, German, but I'm just lumping it as an example. Their women have married other faiths. They have intermingled. They dress similarly. Their metaphor for exchanging life experiences is common. Ours is still different, and we consider it as a great shame if a Pakistani woman lives and marries a Christian quote, unquote "white American." Why is this happening? Why is this going on? I mean, a certain percentage will marry and should marry, because this is a natural sequence. A tribe moves into a different part; they cannot keep on marrying among themselves. Some of them will marry. Some of them will marry among themselves. Some of them will interact more socially with the others. And to me it's a healthy turn of events.

I and my two sisters both were brought up in a very enlightened but fairly religious, but very enlightened and educated background. So my father would not just belong to the [unclear]. He was well-read and he wanted us to be well-read. My sister's daughters, all of them—she had two daughters and one son—they all married non-Pakistanis, and they're very happy. Well, one of them was not that happy in whom he married, but the children are brighter, we think, the two couples that are happily married. We have a wonderful time because there's an experience of two cultures that one can share with the other.

Well, my sister is a British citizen. They left for England about the same time that I left for U.S.A. So both her daughters married Englishmen. Her son married, came here and married a girl from Massachusetts, from Boston. The one daughter's husband was a very nice guy, but he had psychological problems. It was not anything else. He was mentally sick, and it ended up in a divorce. But the other two are very happily married, and I'm very close to them.

He's married to a Pakistani girl, but I guess she was born here. Either she was born here or brought here at a very early age. I forget which. But she's completely Americanized, and feels very comfortable here. But like many Pakistanis, she feels almost forty percent at home in Pakistan. Salmaan feels completely at home in Pakistan and completely at home here, because he kept coming and going all his life. So he feels totally at peace with both cultures, as I am completely at peace with American culture and Pakistani culture.

The sad part is simply that the last couple of years, my socializing itself has been reduced, for a couple of reasons. Number one, my physical problems took a big toll on actual physical movement, because if you have three herniated discs, walking becomes difficult. I was walking to office with a stick for months, then with a waistband and a stick for some time, and those kind of things.

So that, plus you tend not to make many new friends, simply because you're not doing that many kind of social things. But I do intend to. Yes, but when I do get together with them, the colleagues I have at Port Authority, I haven't developed friendships to that extent. Those people that I do have, I do not think they are liberal enough themselves, although they're Roman Catholics, my immediate colleagues that they could carry on a give-and-take discussion.

In other words, I could very easily criticize Pakistanis and Muslims and certain manifestations of the Muslims' practice of rituals and all that, but I don't think they can see the absurdities in some of the things that they do. So I would certainly not be the one to point out to them; it would not work. I mean, I can't simply sit and criticize one part of my own part—and they're not that well-read, either.

There are a couple of friends who are very dear to me, of this culture, but they're few and far between, and I'm unable to meet with them that frequently. This Thanksgiving we would have gone to one of them, but it didn't work out. We had to go somewhere else. But the three or four friends that I have, I have no problem discussing, because those are the kind of people that I would make friends—would have to be liberal and open-minded.

So, I didn't make that many friends, but the friends that I did make, I could discuss things with them. And they would understand very, very sympathetically. One of them is married to a Jewish girl who comes from—I mean, she's pretty liberal again because

we've been interacting with her for a long time, and Farsan [phonetic] is one of her daughter's friends. But she does have many friends of hers that we cannot see eye to eye at all. I mean, we have, in fact, had sessions in which the meeting broke up because—it was about in 1991, when the action against Saddam [Hussein] was being taken. And the discussion went on, of course. I have lived in Iraq, so I know what a terrible person this is, and most Muslims know that he's a real ogre. But the discussion went on to other things, and it almost never can stop at Saddam. It just swerves to also the Palestinian people. And they were very hard; their views were extremely hard about Palestinians and the righteousness of settlements, and we just could not see eye to eye. And so it actually became an acrimonious exchange.

I think what probably transpired was that, “Why are all the Arabs bent on—?” I mean, it was like David versus Goliath.

And I said, “Actually, it's the other way 'round. I mean, in reality. I mean, it's one nation. Don't go by the size, or by the numbers of the size because it's powerful enough to crush all the Arab states, annihilate them, in fact.” So that analogy, they did not like it. And I said, “That's all right. I can't take my words back because these are the facts.”

Rather, I went about telling them what I had read about the whole movement from Theodor Herzl to [Chaim] Weizmann to how the land was gradually bought up and how I guess it was the Balfour government that worked out all the machinations. But I think it

was [unclear], and of course, I may have made a remark to the effect that, it was like, “They were definitely stupid, and I have no sympathy with the Arab rulers. But do not say that you have faced insurmountable odds in the War of ‘67 [Six-Day War or Third Arab-Israeli War] and all that, because you were way, way too powerful,” I said.

And I think I may have mentioned an episode in Sudan, in which there was an uprising in the 1850s or 1870s or something. No, it has to be late 1890s, with Charles Gordon.

Anyway, there was a man who proclaimed himself Mahdi. That means the equivalent of the man that has yet to come, like this concept—messiah, right. Okay. And he just got a lot of support. The man was charismatic. He was very clean of character, and he was able to win a few victories, and people literally thought—and he probably thought—that he was invincible, that he was God’s chosen. And in that battle, at this time the British, although outnumbered, fifty to one or something, but they were prepared, and these guys were attacking them with knives and spears while the Britons moved them down with guns. And Winston Churchill, he actually took part in that. It is somewhere in his autobiography, or somewhere, he mentions how he shot a few Sudanese.

But the thing is, it really is not an equal fight. So I said something to that effect, and it offended them. But I don’t really remember exactly who said what before. I mean, the anger was also not like, for example, the anger you see in even more emotional people like Middle Eastern people, shouting at each other. They just got up in a huff and said, “Well, Lorraine, we’ve got to go.”

And we knew that they were very upset, and then we said, “Yes, we are leaving, too.”

That kind of thing. I think the damage was—some items are so taboo that people will lose friends.

Q: How do you feel about the media coverage over this past year of September 11 and related events?

The media coverage has been superb. The only thing that I have begun to realize as time goes by, again, more maturity and more cynicism, that there’s a whole rest of the world which you get no coverage on. Fifty percent of the newspaper, or sixty percent, is just the terrorists and the war against terrorism, and that’s it.

I’m not saying that it’s not an important event. It is. But there’s a whole amount that doesn’t even get printed, I mean, doesn’t get any kind of coverage, a lot of things that go on in the world. And there’s no doubt about it. I don’t subscribe to the fact that Jews quote, unquote “control” the U.S.A., but the media is just stupendous. I mean, you watch every face on the TV is a Jew, every face, every—almost, okay. And presumably he’s there because I’m sure that his boss is also that way, and the owners. It has simply got to be like that. I just don’t see any [Arabs]. And why should there be? I’m not saying in a complaint or anything, but why not? I mean, we are the newcomers, and we are the ones who came with the bad image, so why would we expect otherwise? But both sides.

I think there's a deliberate attempt to make it a rallying point for future political gains. I mean, this will become some kind of an icon, and I think they will have some kind of a new rallying point, a day, to constantly produce more patriotism, whatever. I think it. We feel, us, that is going to come. September 11 has not been declared—it's a working holiday. I mean, Port Authority considers it as a holiday, but a working holiday. So you do remember it, but you come to work. And I think at some point in time, it will acquire a symbol, maybe not as great as the Statue of Liberty, but it will acquire something similar to that. That's my opinion.

After my father died I have just no interest in going to Pakistan. I feel that I actually was a great patriot when I was a Pakistani. I did not just mouth my patriotism. I actually came to this country, went back, came again, went back, and spent probably the most productive part of my life in Pakistan, apart from my youth. I mean, after I came here I spent quite a few years there. And finally I got so disgruntled with the dishonesty that I found that on that—I don't know if I ever told you. One of my turning points came during hajj. I was a reasonably observant Muslim, but when I performed hajj, in '97, I think it was, it was first of all a physically crushing experience. I almost died.

But I also felt that, what is the point of three, three-and-a-half million people coming [to Mecca] every year? And they spend, let's say, a total of fifteen days of their lives, okay. So three and a half times fifteen is fifty million man-days, and the associated cost, I felt

that, those kind of energies could build you a nuclear power station, or a desalination plant. And I don't mean nuclear power station in terms of making bombs. What I'm saying is, you could do huge things with that, but our energies are directed towards the afterlife. In a sense, it's going to be as futile as the pharaohs. I mean, you are not living for the present. You are literally living for the future.

I don't know about non-Muslims, but most Muslims turn to religion as they grow old, because they are now seeing the end and they want to become pious and do all good things that they didn't do—pray five times, read Koran, go to hajj.

With me it was a different turn. I became disillusioned. And the funny thing is, that same thing happened with my father. He was a pretty pious man. His youth was very Western, extremely Western, extremely secular and elitist. Then in his late thirties and for twenty years more he became religious, but an enlightened and well-read religious person, a person who just did not perform religion, but he knew what it was. He became very disillusioned towards the end, because he used to say, "Islam is the best religion, and Muslims are the worst people." [My sixteen-year-old] is the kind of person who I'll say, "Pray with your mom." When she offers prayer and she asks him, he does pray. In fact, he used to fast also. But this year he's not fasting because he wrestles and he needs energy, and plus the workload is so huge. I mean, these guys work three hours a day after school.

He's in high school. He's in tenth grade, but he plays lacrosse and he does wrestling, and he's on the school varsity wrestling team. All I'm saying is that there's so much activity that by the time he comes home, I mean, he's tired, and then he puts in three, four hours of homework, which to me seems criminal, actually.

He's not fasting now. He used to fast. He kept a few fasts, but he's not now. I don't know if it answered your question. He is the kind of person that if I sat down and read the Qur'an—and by the way, I've been meaning to read each Qur'an all over again. I don't have time now. See, if I were not forced to continue working, if I retired I would do a lot of this—devote my energies to this kind of thing, reading the history and reading Qur'an with translation, with what are called commentaries, and really make some sense of it, productive sense. So, but I can't.

So let's say if I were doing it and I told my son, "Hey, sit down and read with me," he would. So he's malleable, and he's a very laid-back kind of guy.

I think he's quite happy. He's not that much at home in Pakistan because he hasn't traveled that much. He is like a typical American teenager. I mean, he goes to school. He has friends which represent, I mean, typical cross section, so he has friends who are, majority of them are, of course, white middle-class. But he has a friend who is an Indian; he's a Hindu. He has a friend who's Chinese. He has a friend whose mother is Persian and whose father is a white American, so it's a real mix. His friends often come here to

spend the night here in the basement. Four or five friends will come, six friends even, and they'll bring their own bags, sleeping—and he very often, a couple of times a month or once a month he'll say, “Baba, can I sleep over at such-and-such house?” Sure.

I am a very permissive father. The thing is that the value of “no” is enhanced if you use it sparingly. So it's not just a no. Second thing is that I remember very well how I was as a young boy. In fact, I feel sorry for them because they have a much more structured, supervised life than I ever had. And I was, in a sense, much more supervised than some of my cousins and friends, because they had larger families. I was the only son. So, no, I'm a very permissive father. But I'm also very lucky that I have good children. I know that I get very unfairly bad tempered with them, like snappish, but it's gone and we are mostly extremely chummy with each other. I clown around with Ali most of the time.

And my other two sons, they sort of will look at me askance. They say he is getting too many liberties, which he is actually, being the baby of the family. The thing is that when they were growing up, I was really struggling. I mean, I had come to this country for the third time. I had no money. I was in my late thirties and I had a rotten job. I was making hardly any money. If they had to have anything, it was a struggle to give them anything. And that was many years ago. Now I'm more or less reasonably established. So they see that this guy just, “Can I have this?”

And I say, “Yeah, why not? Doesn’t seem unreasonable.” But the thing is that if the guy is not unreasonable, why should I say no? They’re just these wonderful children; I mean, these unbelievably good children, so I’ve been lucky in that respect. So, there are no reasons for conflict. You see?

The reasons for conflict, yes, the only reasons for conflict that arise most of the time is the carelessness and untidiness of all my three sons. But it’s gradually improving. The elder one [Salmaan Jaffery] has learned through hard knocks. Now he himself is a married man, and he realizes how important it is to be neat and tidy. Ali is learning. The middle one [Mustafa Jaffery] stays away. I mean, he’s a New Yorker, and he’s the guy that is the sloppiest. But I don’t see him that often.

JUNE 24, 2005

Q: What are your feelings now, four years after this event? What is your personal feeling about the aftermath of 9/11, and the changes, if any, that you have seen in this country?

One is the effect [September 11] would have had on me as an individual, and that would not matter whether I was of any particular faith or ethnic origin. But the other thing is the impact that it had on the Islamic *umma*, the Islamic brethren of the community, as such. On a personal level, it did wake me up—as if I needed to be awakened—that life can be snubbed out in a second. I had made a resolution—and again, the funny thing is, you still

lose track of it; that life is so precious, that you should enjoy each day of it. I did a couple of things that I probably would not have done, except for 9/11.

I made a deliberate choice that I'm going to limit my social interaction. Gerry, you may have some idea, having spoken to me, my son, having visited my house a little bit, and maybe other people from India and Pakistan—the subcontinent—that we are an extremely social people. We may not go out to the beach that often, or do picnics or skiing, but every chance we get, we love to get together. Sometimes it becomes almost a social obligation, because so much of sand grains of your life that are falling are spent in inane things, like countless weddings, and this and that, celebrations, and I cut down on that. I said to my wife, “Tell them I've got a second chance in life, and if I feel like staying home and reading a book, I'm not going there.” Gradually, people have come to terms with it. So I have become less social.

As far as the effect on the Muslim community—I have, actually, a slightly different take than a lot of other people have. The thing is that the terrible thing that these people did—and, by the way, it's just an aside, that our president [George W. Bush] has done all kinds of stupid things, but he has not done the thing yet that he should be doing; that he should be asking countries like Saudi Arabia to actually condemn that and the other acts that are happening all the time in Saudi Arabia. Thomas Friedman [Op-ed writer for *The New York Times*] wrote a column on it; that how come many of your Muslim countries have not come and said, “Why this butchery of Shi’as?” I'm saying that there is a relationship

to what happened here. If these people are capable of murdering their fellow Muslims, how could they have any sympathy for a perceived unfriendly nation like the United States.

But the silver lining to it is that the world community, and especially the United States, is suddenly realizing that Islam is not completely a homogenous thing. There are many factions within it; many schools of thought; many ethnic varieties; many different takes, and a lot of those people, because of this horrendous act, are rethinking. You see unforeseen things happening, which would never have happened. There was a woman who led a prayer congregation of women, of prayers. A woman has never led this congregation, ever before, and she has been vilified, obviously. There is a Canadian woman, a lesbian host of a show, [*Big Ideas*], [Irshad] Manji. In fact, I spoke to her a few days ago, and she has written a book about what she finds not acceptable about Islam as it is being practiced [*The Trouble with Islam Today*]. Those things would never have happened ten years ago. Never. So it is giving a lot of people, who are questioning the blind following of Islam as it was 1,400 years ago.

So there are some good things that have come out of this horrible thing, in the same way that, I think, out of the horrible experience of Vietnam [War], the U.S. was changed in many ways for the betterment. The whole environmental issue became alive. There were a lot of things that the United States started doing right, as a result of the Vietnam War.

Q: You made the comment earlier that Americans have changed in their interaction, in their level of welcome. Do you connect that to the 9/11 event, or was it something that you had noticed previously? Has it been intensified?

I did make the comment that, over a period of time, I have seen these gradual negative attitudes taking on. For that, I think there might be a different aspect. In the '60s, America was such an economic juggernaut. I don't know if you recall a book written by J.J. [Jean-Jacques] Servan-Schreiber, and the title of the book was *The American Challenge*. It was basically a warning to the rest of the world, and Europe, how not to be swallowed by Uncle Sam. The statistics were literally frightening to the Europe of then. Whether America has squandered, or whether this is the natural progression of societies, the ebb and fall, but it's not that economic powerhouse. People are losing jobs, and I think—If you recall the 2000—what was it? The crisis? The meltdown, the computer meltdown of 2000 [Y2K]—in that period, hundreds if not thousands of Indians were hired to come up and work as computer consultants.

I traveled on the trains, obviously, as a commuter, and I could see a difference in attitude, a visible change in Americans who were here before that. I'm talking about a visible change of attitude in Americans who were born here, as opposed to people who were first-generation immigrants. That's a pretty fair and unbiased point of view, because I have experienced that kind of thing, also, myself. But after 9/11 there is definitely a pointed discrimination that one feels against people who look Middle Eastern, or who

look Pakistani, or who look like Arabs. I'm not condemning it. It's pretty natural, human beings what they are.

I have experienced it a couple of times on the train. There's always a possibility that those incidents would have occurred even if 9/11 had not occurred. Talking rationally, I would say that it's possible that I have colored it by receiving it, by perceiving it through my prejudice perception. But yes, I have felt people not giving me that respect that they would have given me, if I did not look like a Muslim or a Pakistani. I have seen other things happen, to other people.

Let me give you an example. You see some of these bad-mannered people with cell phones. You know, they talk and chat. Nobody would dare go up and tell a man who looks like he is an American—it doesn't matter whether he's black or white—to keep it down, or to keep it low. But I have seen it, on one occasion, a very ugly and abusive incident. There was a man who was very obviously a Middle Eastern. He was talking English with a Middle-Eastern accent, and by now even average Americans can make out a Middle-Eastern accent in English. One of the guys who was sitting around got up and said, “You f-ing jackass, can't you keep it low?” This would never have happened, if the guy had not been an Arab. Never. In fact, people would have beaten him up if he had done this thing to someone else. I have seen a Pakistani guy being beaten up on a train, and he did nothing. He got in at Metro Park, where there are a lot of Indians and Pakistanis who commute. Somebody pushed him, he bumped against somebody, and the

Pakistani guy was a young, slim guy. I saw this man just push him and shove him, and he said, “Why are you pushing me?” and the guy started beating him up. The Pakistani young man had the guts to say, “I’m not going to let you go.” He put on his glasses. I think they busted his nose or something. He said, “I’m going to make sure that I call the police,” and he did call the police. But there was not a single witness except me. I was the one who got up. Nobody had the decency to say—although fifty or sixty people must have seen what was going on. So yes, there have been effects, and I think it’s not just my impression. These things are happening.

Q: Anger.

Anger, yes.

Q: A great deal of anger.

Yes. You have to also combine it with one more facet. America was always less informed, the general level of education here, compared to other countries. It’s had a very hazy notion of the rest of the world, always, whether it was ‘60s, or—

Q: Isolation.

Isolation. Right.

Q: Mr. Jaffery, do you have something you would like to add to your video interview, something you would like to say today that's not connected to a question? We're almost out of time.

Actually, the thought that has come to my mind several times—You know this fiasco that's going on with the design of the memorial? As it is, we are designing the memorial by committee. It's not as if you had selected one genius, and he did it. I would have felt it would have been just fabulous if they had selected an eminent Muslim architect; a Jewish architect; a Christian architect—deliberately—and say, “We want to show that there is solidarity between these people. Let them design—” It was extremely important, I think, to include the Muslims, because there's no doubt in my mind that ninety-nine percent of the Muslims are ashamed of what happened. There's no doubt in my mind.

SALMAAN JAFFERY

DECEMBER 3, 2001

Q: So how has this affected your life? I mean, how has your life changed, if it has changed, since September 11?

It's changed significantly. I mean, I wouldn't want to overelaborate it; but, no, it has changed significantly, because I've thought about it a lot.

First and foremost, I lost my job. I mean, my job went away because the Winter Garden and the annex building were damaged. The Winter Garden was destroyed, which is that glass atrium in the World Financial Center. Merrill Lynch has not gone back to World Financial. My job moved to New Jersey, and then they don't have the budget. So that was anything. And at the time, I didn't know why, but it makes complete sense because sugar is euphoric and it makes you feel happy. So the eating patterns were, oh, junk food. A lot of junk food—chips, biscuits, ice-cream, cookies, you name it.

Then my wife came back to the city. We were together. We walked around a lot because we live where we were—

Q: Which you should say? I don't know.

Stuyvesant town, 20th [Street] and 1st [Avenue]. There's all those hospitals on 1st Avenue. There's Bellevue. There's—well, there's at least two on 1st Avenue.

But anyway then the armory is there, so that was a makeshift area where people were getting information about missing people. So there was this flood of “missing” posters. That's what made us really sad on an ongoing basis because we walked around the city, and we just kept seeing these faces and they were ghosts because these people were—I mean, I knew—not that it took a genius to figure it out, but I knew there was no hope. These people were kidding themselves. I mean, the building collapsed. There's no way. So even from the second day onwards, as far as I was concerned, these were ghosts. These were people who were already dead. So that reminder in your face, every corner you took, there was a face. That was very saddening.

But then something else happened afterwards, which was even more disturbing, because even beyond the day-to-day sorrow and the death and the trauma, things that affect who you are as a person are very powerful. So this whole question about who is responsible?

What does it mean to be a Muslim? What does it mean to be a Pakistani Muslim? What does it mean to be an American Muslim? Why are Muslims doing this? Are Muslims doing this? The terrorists were Muslim. I happen to be someone who was very soul-searching to begin with. I also know a lot about our history, and I'm a keen, keen follower

of foreign policy in the Middle East. I've been active, I've written, I've read. So this was a very, very big question for me, and that still lingers. It's continued from that day until today.

So now, there's a whole new phase of: What is my role as a U.S. citizen who happens to be Muslim? Are my values just? Can I justify the actions of people? Do I actually defend myself when people attack Muslims or the Middle East? How do I feel about where I'm from, et cetera, et cetera.

The first couple of weeks, I did not leave my neighborhood. I was afraid. I mean—no, I wasn't afraid. I wasn't afraid I'd be attacked. I was afraid I'd face someone who was belligerent, who I could not counter because it was such a moment of national grief. When people are upset, right, you can't say things to un-upset them.

Listen, for the average, uneducated person who's down the road, eighteen people who are Muslim and who are Saudis, who have the same complexion as me, blew up and killed five thousand people. If that person comes to me and says, “Blah, blah, blah, blah,” I can't engage in a reasonable discourse with them. I can't say, “Well, listen.” So I kept a very low profile, and, plus, there were killings in Texas and Phoenix. A Sikh guy got killed in Phoenix; a Pakistani was killed in Houston. A couple of friends got harassed.

Secondly, for the month and a half afterwards, I shaved every day. Whenever I went out, I'd keep a very close shave, which I hate shaving and I do have a pretty thick beard. I took no chances. I'm even ashamed to admit this—no, actually, I'm not ashamed. I was ashamed for a bit—for a week or two, I dressed as quote-unquote, “Yankee” as I could, like I didn't wear that black leather jacket or black jeans or black shoes. I wore shorts, my vest, my baseball cap, because I just didn't want to stand out too much.

DECEMBER 4, 2002

Q: Is there a way in which you are haunted by what happened?

Yes. Well, I want to be very clear on this. I mean, for a long time, I think I mentioned this when we spoke last, me and about ten million other people were haunted by the images. But the images fade, right, when you don't watch them on TV. So then we were haunted by the absence of the building, but that, too, in time fades, because the absence becomes part of the skyline also. Then you're haunted by feelings, right? Remorse, sadness, whatever, and those fade also, with time, because you heal.

But I will tell you that being so close in some ways is good, because it always reminds me of that day, because when I drive by the pit, or when I walked from here to AMEX for a meeting, I always have to go around the World Trade Center, and so if I'm talking to someone, I just stop talking. I sort of like absorb the moment.

So I want to be clear. When I say haunted, I don't mean that I'm losing sleep, that I'm emotionally distressed about it, but inasmuch as haunting means I think about it, I picture the building, I picture people falling—sure, absolutely. Not every day, but when I walk by it very closely, absolutely.

The other thing I think about all the time is weird thoughts. The buildings that are all around it, I wonder, are they still coated somewhere by ashes from the building, that weren't washed away? And if so, does that mean that there's a piece of someone, somewhere around?

And actually, one of the things I thought about was, people have thought this place is a graveyard, and I wonder if the collective dust of three thousand people went up in the air and dissipated over this entire sixteen-acre area and then over into Jersey and into Long Island. Part of me thinks that in some ways everything is dusted with people's souls, and there are people there. Nothing mystical, but just as a matter of fact.

The fact is that you have very fine dust everywhere, and I'm wondering, you know what? Could it be that I'm breathing in a minute particle of someone as we speak? Things like that I think about. I think I'm over the small stuff, like the planes. I don't jerk my head up when I see a plane anymore as much, but I still, to this day, because I've seen the image of a building exploding and people falling, I see those things in my mind. I didn't see

them before, because I had never seen that before. And so now I still, when I look at planes, I'll have a morbid thought. "Gee, what would happen if that plane—?"

I'll give you an example. When I used to smoke cigarettes outside of Merrill Lynch, I would stand there and I'd look up at the area where the beam of light—that whole area is right across from Vesey. I'd see a plane going overhead, and I'd just start daydreaming, for lack of a better word, saying, "What would happen if that plane suddenly veered down and hit this building right in front of me? What would it look like? Would it explode this way? How far would the debris come? Would it miss me?" Things like that. Not wanting it, but being sort of like, acknowledging the possibility that something like that could happen. I don't know. So, that kind of stuff. Sure, all the time.

We can talk more about 9/11 if you want, but I actually want to take the conversation in another direction. I can wait until you—

Q: No, no, no. Let's go.

I want to tell you about why it's important to me now, today. And that's that we had talked last time about changes in perception about people from my background following these events, and that you had asked me whether or not there was any backlash, or whether I felt—and the answer is, no. Personally, I still have not felt any.

For the first time in my life—this is what’s changed since we spoke last—my perception of the environment in which we live, I think nationally—not so much regionally, but nationally—is that, I was telling my father, for the first time in sixteen years that I’ve been in the U.S., I have thought very seriously about moving to the U.K. for a couple of years.

Why? Now, let me be clear. I’m not going native, which is that I suddenly remember my roots and I want to go back to Pakistan and live there. No, I don’t. I mean, this is my adopted country and I’m quite happy here. But the change in attitudes nationally about Islam, people from the Middle East, all those issues, and a bunch of things in the news which I’ll talk about, have made me feel very, very uncomfortable, to the point where just so that I can get a breath of fresh air, different perspectives, read a paper, The Guardian or some other European paper, and get a different op-ed [opinion editorial page], for those reasons I’ve actually thought very seriously about taking a sojourn abroad for a couple of years, just to get away for a while. And I’m serious about it. Of course, there are personal motives, professional motives. I love Europe. I want to travel. But one of the main reasons why that’s happened is because of the change in mindset, one. Two, part of this change is political. I mean, I’ve witnessed the American Right for about sixteen, seventeen years.

As a political science major, I also studied the conservative agenda for a long time, and I was young enough to witness a lot of Ronald Reagan’s administration here, foreign

policy as well as domestic policy; old enough to understand what it meant. And this country has always been conservative. This is a conservative, business-minded country. That's the reality. I think labor never won out here because again, at the end of the day, it's a conservative, business-minded country. The sixties were a blip. But I still think that now, when I look at the leadership of this country, I look at the likes of Donald [H.] Rumsfeld. I look at the likes of Paul [D.] Wolfowitz. I look at the likes of [Richard B. "Dick"] Cheney. These people generally alarm me and scare me. I think they are ruthless. I think they are insensitive, and I think that they could care less about people who are not American and not Anglo-Saxon.

George [W.] Bush, I think he's an idiot. But I think maybe his heart's in the right place, because I think he's sort of—I don't know. I don't know. The point is that I see this agenda of conservatism that is insensitive to its own people in terms of socially; but politically, even though George Bush, to his credit, has said all the right things about tolerance to Muslims, but I'm telling you that what I'm hearing is disturbing me. I'll make it more specific. Thirdly, Muslims used to always feel, educated Muslims, that we had, in Jews, friends, because at the end of the day, we have very similar religions, where our religions are Semitic in nature. Well, so is Christianity, but Christianity you associate with Europe, Northern Europe. And Judaism recently you associate with Europe, but still Jerusalem, Middle East. So you've got Christianity. You've got your Southern Baptists' conservative agenda. So first they were after the Jews, because the Jews killed Christ,

right? So that was the enemy. Jews battle really hard, make sure, work their way up, and make it into the mainstream, right?

And now what's disturbing is that now they're after Muslims, and you have this unholy alliance, ugh, between very aggressive, very conservative Jews, and Southern Baptists, because Southern Baptists have this apocalyptic vision of messiah coming, and so they support, unabashedly, anything that is pro-Israel or anti-Arab/Muslim. That's a perception. This is a perception that I have, or that many in our community have. And so we had this perception, and then you have people like [Marion G.] Pat Robertson and then [William F.] Billy Graham's [Jr.] son [William F. Graham, III] saying, "Islam is an evil religion. Prophet Muhammad was a wicked, wicked man." And it blew our mind, something snapped in me, because I'm not particularly religious, but I felt a deep, deep fear and deep pain, deep anger, very deep, because I'd never heard that before.

And I felt like this is just like when African Americans came up from the South to the industrialized North, thinking that you had the Underground Railroad and you had all these liberal people who had fought on behalf of them, of their rights in the Civil War, and that they realized that, you know what? Down there, people called them the "N" word, and up here people treated them the same way but didn't call them the "N" word. So what's the difference?

And I felt it the same way that people are now coming out of the woodworks, the real attitudes towards Muslims. I'm not saying it's all religion-based. To be fair, a lot of it is race. I mean, Muslims are dark. We're Middle Eastern. We don't necessarily fit in all the time. And a lot of it's just Muslims belong to a poor part of the world and this is America's time. America is a dominant power and you have people like Saddam Hussein and the Saudis, who are idiots, representing our religion.

So at the bottom line, I guess my point is that in the last nine months, twelve months, I've seen a change in attitudes on the political level, one; two, in day-to-day conversations about people. Even well-meaning people; someone at work asked me, "I'm just curious. Do you guys have a lot of fascism?" I mean, a very honest, open question, and which I really respect. I don't have a problem with it.

But the fact that it's being asked in that manner suggests that the question is being raised. The question being raised suggests that someone is telling people that, "You know what? This religion is about violence, intolerance, and killing." So all this stuff has made me really upset, to the point I don't even read the paper anymore. I don't. All I read is, every day I read Maureen Dowd or I read [Paul] Krugman, op-eds in the *New York Times*. I don't even watch CNN [Cable News Network]. I have stopped watching CNN completely. I think it's garbage. I read the *Times*. I'll read some pieces in the international pieces, the op-eds, but that's it, because the stuff that you see on TV, they bring on experts who give a perspective on Muslims, and they'll put up this token

representative from some Arab Anti-Defamation League, who happens to be one voice, and they have three voices against, and they're just a balance, and you come out with a totally skewed perspective.

Okay. One other story that makes this more real, what I'm saying. So, all this is happening. I have this gap in perception. The country's becoming more conservative, more intolerant, and then I meet my friend. The friend of mine—this is today, Tuesday—last Thursday. This is a very interesting story. He's thirty-five. He was born in Buffalo, but he is of Indian background, Indian meaning the subcontinent, South India. Father came to America, went to Harvard [University], educated family. I met him in Poughkeepsie, New York, in 1987, when he was a head-banger. He had hair down to his shoulders. Shall we say had a lifestyle that was interesting, did a lot of kinky things, played heavy metal guitar. Inspired me to learn how to play heavy metal guitar. I play guitar, so. And then all of a sudden he changes his life. Something happens. He meets someone and he accepts Christ in his life. Okay? No problem with that. He straightens his life out, ends up going to Colgate [University], which is my alma mater, so I follow him there, because we're friends. He's older than me and I end up going to the same school.

We were housemates, and then he graduates, has a very successful career. Goes to business school. Guess what? I also go to business school. I went to his wedding. He sends me cards of his kids, so we're in touch but we haven't seen each other. So, he pops up in New York and looks me up and says, "Hey, let's hang out."

And I've known his views. He's a very good person. I respect him a lot. But he is, and he considers himself, a born-again evangelical Christian. So naturally we started talking about terrorism. And the good news is that we had an open conversation, which is what I expect of him. But he said a couple of things which betray, in my mind, which show you exactly what Christians are being taught.

So he's like, "You know, it's very tough for my wife and me to—Salmaan, you can appreciate how when you have such an overwhelming number of people who are blowing up things, who are Muslims, that we question—we know Islam is a great religion, blah, blah, blah. But if eighty percent of Muslims are terrorists or aggressive, then what does it say about the religion?" Something like that. Very well-articulated question, a fair question, but again, the subtext was that someone in his Bible studies, right, brought that issue up.

Next point he says, he's like, "You know, you have to understand that from our perspective," and he was very respectful. He was like, "I know people are angry, so they vent against Muslims. Don't get me wrong." But he's like, okay, take another example. He's like, "Oh, you know, many of us believe," which to me is also a keyword, right, which means you believe, "many of us also believe that the Qur'an teaches Muslims to kill infidels." And I could not believe this shit. So that's another thing he said.

So, of course, I explained that—well, I'll tell you what I said. So we talked about that rationally, he and I both. Then he talks about a political view. He's like, "Well, you know, I definitely support George Bush, that we should make the country more secure, and we should, you know, kill off all the terrorists. And Iraq, I mean, we should just take care of business," and blah, blah, blah. So the two religious issues and a political issue, which we talked about.

Before I address each one, what I want to say is it took me back many years to my childhood, because when I grew up, the perceptions that we had of Christians abroad were always that they were troublesome because they were always trying to preach to us, "Convert. Convert. Convert." Because I went to missionary school, by the way, and we had Bible class. Never a problem, but we always thought that Christians hated us because they thought that our religion was very violent, and we always were told that Christians have these misgivings about Muslims because they feel Muslims kill everybody, and we couldn't understand why. Then yesterday, or a couple of days ago, you may recall, P.B.S. [Public Broadcasting Service] had a show about the life of the Prophet Muhammad. I caught some of it. I'm going to see it again at some point.

There was this other show on P.B.S. about religious attitudes across the country. So it was separate from this P.B.S. documentary, and they were interviewing this preacher. He was like a preacher—his name escapes me—who's basically going around saying, and

this is almost verbatim, he says, “Oh, Muslims? Love ‘em. Great. Warm people. Problem is their Qur’an.”

And he said the exact same thing my friend said, which is where I made the link, because to me this means that this is part of the literature and the discussions that evangelical Christians are having about our religion. I’ve also seen websites, by the way, in the past. I’ve seen virulent, very hateful websites with cartoons, anti-Muslim cartoons in which our prophet is exposed as a cheat and a fraud, very aggressive anti-Muslim. I mean, it’s one thing to not agree, be agreed. It’s one thing to aggressively go after. So I get this. This is what’s happening. You have two mainstream preachers who have come out and said, “This religion is bogus. It’s an evil religion, and Muhammad is an evil person.” Okay. I mean, how dare they? Imagine if someone has the balls, or, I mean, it’s wrong, but to say, “Oh, Moses. Fake,” whatever. How dare they?

The other thing that I told my friend when I was responding to his question, I said, “You know, what’s sad is that you don’t understand that every Muslim—like Jesus is such an essential part of our faith. I mean, you cannot be a Muslim if you do not believe in Jesus.” Like in the hierarchy of prophets, right, Moses, Noah, Elijah. We have the same prophets, right? It’s like Muhammad is number one, for obvious reasons.

Well, actually, you know why? Because he’s the last. We believe it’s the same word of God all through religions. Same message; it just happens that Muhammad is the last

prophet. But anyway, so we have Muhammad and then we have Jesus. Literally, he's number two. I said, "You know, you guys don't realize that for us, Jesus is a huge part of our religion, yet, for obvious reasons, Muhammad is nothing to you guys, because he came after your religion. So, what's really sad is that," I said, "in my opinion, I think you guys are much more aloof than us. We are more accepting of your faith than you are of ours."

But anyway, we also agreed that on matters of faith, it's all opinion, at the end of the day. I mean, we laughed about it. I said, "Look. We can agree to disagree and we can't argue people's beliefs." I said, "The important thing is, right, let's focus on the common ground." I said, "The reality is that you are very pious, and as such, you probably raise your children in a manner that's probably very similar to the way I'm going to raise my children. Whether or not your kids believe in Jesus and mine believe in Allah, it doesn't matter. The fact is that we'll probably teach them the same things, right? Don't do drugs. Don't kill anyone. Don't hurt anyone."

So the evening was great, but I'm just telling you that to me it was, in my perceptual map of what's happening around me, it was very timely. Overall see change in attitudes, politically; also in sort of social commentaries and in articles. Daniel Pipes [American historian, founder of Middle East Forum and Campus Watch] is another guy. My god, I mean, this guy is just slandering Middle East left and right.

Tom Friedman is more thoughtful; he's intelligent, Tom [Thomas L.] Friedman [columnist for *The New York Times*] is actually very good—very thoughtful pieces on the Middle East and the role of Islam in modernization or not. And then, see, you have this anti-Islam venom coming out in the media, and then my friend comes up and asks me these questions and then I see this thing on TV.

So to me there's been a triangulation of attitudes that make me feel very angry and upset. That's, I guess, the point of what I'm saying, and I think that is a direct outcome of 9/11. But not just that. I think it would be letting people off the hook if we attributed 9/11 to this. 9/11 allowed, created an atmosphere where people felt more comfortable voicing these otherwise very extreme viewpoints. The point is that they've always been there. They've always been there. And so that's why, as much as I am of the belief that in this country I can do whatever the hell I want, because I'm really good, it makes me think about, "You know, at the end of the day, am I just a frigging immigrant who's a Muslim?" Like when people are alone in their rooms, when you take away all the varnish, all of the politesse, what's supposed to be said - - when they're in the rooms, in their bathrobes with their wives, what do they really think?

I don't know.

I mean, part of me says I don't really care, as long as they treat me equally. On the other hand, I'm entering a corporate career now. I want to have kids, and it concerns me a little

bit. It concerns me. So that's what 9/11 has sort of transformed into for me. I don't like it at all.

Q: What do you think of this impending war with Iraq?

I'm conflicted. I'm conflicted because I personally have no love lost for this man, Saddam [Hussein]. I think he's an evil bastard. I think he should burn in hell and blah, blah, blah. The reasons for those personal beliefs are that as a Shi'a Muslim, this guy controls his country, Iraq. Iraq is fifty-five percent Shi'a. People don't even know that. People don't even realize that he's had an iron grip on this country for thirty years. He oppresses the Shi'a majority. So, little bit of kinship there.

Secondly, he killed over two million Iranians and used gas on them and the Kurds, right? So, these are not secrets. Everyone knows this. What pisses me off is Americans don't take responsibility for the fact that they gave him gas. So it was okay for him to kill Iranians with gas, because, you know what? Iran is the enemy. But all of a sudden, "It's okay that you killed Iranians. Oh, but you killed the Kurds. Oh my god, you butcher, you monster. You're so bad." Oh, and by the way, acknowledge who gave him the gas. You did.

Okay, so that's one thing. Secondly, you're talking about democracy. You don't want democracy there. You know why Americans don't want democracy there? It's because if

he's overthrown, guess who's going to come to power? Shiites, in a democratic election, because they're the majority. You think America's going to tolerate Iran, Iraq, two Shi'a states back to back? No way.

So, where's the conflict? I personally don't like this guy. I think they should cut his head off. On the other hand, what I don't like is I don't like this war-mongering by the U.S., because I don't see, as a U.S. citizen now—the first part of my conversation was as a Muslim, a Pakistani, whatever, a Shiite, whatever it is. As a U.S. citizen who pays tax dollars, I don't see a compelling national interest yet. I just don't see it.

Or, I feel the Bush regime, government, is just out to wage war, and they're just giving us bullshit excuses. Look, if you're going to do it, then just go and do it. But don't feed me—don't insult my intelligence by saying, “Oh, yeah, there's proof, but we're not going to show it to you.” That insults my intelligence.

So there's a conflict. Conflict is, he should go, or someone should shoot him because he's an evil person. But I wonder if, if our tax dollars are well spent, or at least from a democratic standpoint, is Bush flying in the face of popularity? People don't want it. I think it's safe to say it, from all the polls and demonstrations. People are at the very minimum ambivalent, or don't want it, and yet I think he's trying to inch closer. So, that's why.

I'll talk to my Jewish friends about religion, casually, like, "So what's Sabbath like? What do you guys do?" Very open, because I'm very interested always. And I've had one or two discussions where I've just maybe vented a little bit, but otherwise, no. I'm very careful.

I don't know. I just don't want to talk. I think, with these things you just don't know what people really believe, and so it's just not worth the risk of saying something that will offend someone and may affect their perception of you.

It's interesting. It's on my mind, not because I want it to be, but it's thrust in my face. How and when? Whenever I travel. Right? I mean, it's a joke. Look. Honestly, I swear, I'm personally not offended by it. I'm not offended by being singled out for checking. It's a pain in the ass, but I'm not offended by it, because you know what? It's always been the case for me. Forget 9/11. People forget. I mean, terrorists have been around for a long time. I was always checked at Heathrow, any airport. So that's nothing new to me. What pisses me off is, don't call it random. "Oh, you're being randomly selected." Hello? Don't insult my intelligence. This time, I went to Phoenix two weeks ago. And it's a game now. I stand in line and I see people ahead being checked, and I say to myself, "Let's take wagers. Will I get checked or will I not?" And nine times out of ten I win my own bets. I usually bet that I'm going to get checked, and I do.

There was at least once that I wasn't checked, for sure, at Newark. So I was in line. It was a Continental flight. It was like two days before eve, so that would have been December 2, December 3. And I was flying out, and eight people ahead, someone got pulled out for checking. Guess what? He was Indian. Okay? And he was dark-skinned. I could tell he was an investment banker, because I saw his bag. I saw his clothes. I've been there. I've been in the industry, so I knew he was a banker. And they made him, they put him through—very polite. Very polite.

Excuse me. I misspoke. This was on the way back to Newark. This was at Phoenix. This was at Phoenix. So, December 4th. And there were two guys. They were actually both Indian or Pakistani. One was Indian, one was Pakistani, maybe. So I said, "You know what? For sure I'm going to go." And mind you, I always wear a blazer, collar, [unclear] blazer, because I want to look as respectable as possible. And I always shave, unlike today.

And I was like, "Maybe I won't get pulled over."

And the moment I got up, "Sir." [Snaps finger] So, and I actually for the first time, I actually made a very sarcastic like shrug of the—for the first time, because I was thinking, maybe I'll get away this time, but I didn't.

Well, first of all, you're singled out. Okay? And for any person, if you've ever read any of the stories behind sort of racial segregation or the Holocaust, I mean the whole emotion is there's an indignity of being singled out. Right? Why am I being singled out? That's the first reaction. So, first part of the process is being pointed out in public and being asked to step aside. So that's one.

Two, you're then asked to—I mean, it's so funny. Before I continue—I know the drill so well that I had all the moves down even before they asked me. And he jokes, he's like, “Oh, you've been through this before?”

I'm like, “Yeah.”

So you're singled out, one. Two, you're asked to separate yourself from your luggage, and in front of everybody they will go through your things. Actually, unlike normally, very detailed. They'll look through, they'll open your garment bag. Sorry. What's it called? The toiletry bag, and look through things. So they do that. Meanwhile, while that's happening they ask you to stand on the side. They'll pat you down, ask you to open your legs, put your arms aside. So they check you physically, between, on your thighs. Then they take that wand and they sort of wave it all over you to make sure you're not carrying anything. Then, they ask you to pull your shirt up and show them your belt buckle, and ask you to open your belt buckle because it's metallic. I mean, maybe you're hiding something. So you have to show your belly button. Then they ask you to sit down

and take off your shoes. So that's the process. And then they let you go back on. So, every time, that's the process. The shoes, every time.

It really does make me feel—I've started to feel very uncomfortable. Again, not personally. I don't walk around looking at people saying, thinking that people are looking at me differently, because to be honest with you I have certain advantages. Right? The advantages I have are my own educational background. I associate with people who are more educated. Frankly, I dress and I talk a certain way. So, I recognize that I avoid immediate prejudice just by virtue of the way I dress and the way I look and where I work.

I work on Wall Street. I work for American Express. So, I recognize all of that, and I also recognize that my complexion, by Pakistani standards, I'm on the fairer side. So it's not, it doesn't necessarily jump out in your face that I'm off-the-plane immigrant. So I recognize all of this, so I'm not paranoid. I would like to believe that where I'm at now and my perception of my environment is the result of slow and deliberate deliberation over the last year, because it's been a lot of different pieces coming together. You need that distance, right? First three months, no one knew what the hell—it was like gut reaction. My thought was, "You know what? People are scared."

But now it's been a year and three months, and now I'm seeing, in my mind, I'm seeing the pieces come together. If there's one take-away from this, also is this—people coming

out of the woodworks and attacking my religion makes me feel very angry, because again, now I say to myself, “If I weren’t educated, if I didn’t have the opportunities in life that I’m blessed to have, if I were poor and I had no prospects and I was sitting on the road or in some café and I heard about someone saying these things about my religion, I would take up a pitchfork and go outside and fight for it,” because I would have nothing else to do. I would feel very defensive. “How dare you talk about my values like that? You think you’re better than me?” Of course.

So it makes you think about why people behave irrationally, why people, people who are poor, who don’t have access to jobs, or who have nothing better to do, now you know what rouses up people. I’m an educated, rational person, and it made me defensive. It made me angry. So I think myself, if I had nothing going for me, I could see how this would lead to mutual mistrust and escalation. This is how it happens, by the way.

INDER JIT SINGH

JANUARY 20, 2002

Q: Just to get back briefly to the day of the eleventh. So, you saw it out of your window

Oh yes.

Q: What did you do over the course of that day? Did you watch it? And then, as you were coming home, what were you thinking? Did you watch TV a lot? And the day after, when you stayed home, what was that time like?

You know, it didn't cross my mind. For a moment, I could not understand why anyone in his—well, right mind, obviously, he's not—but anybody with a mind, do this. Because it just makes no sense. And for Bush to say that we will go after him, no matter where—I would say that's perfectly okay. Then to say that any country that harbors him, we'll go after that country—that's fine too. I see that. There's no problem with that. But I think for him to make the kind of statement—I didn't expect that Americans will react, although I'd seen it after [Ruhollah] Khomeini's taking hostages and so on—I did not expect that Americans would go after other Americans, just because they look Middle Eastern, or they are Indian, whatever, or Sikhs or Muslim. Either by religion or by race or wherever they come from—I didn't quite expect that. So that was a little disappointing. I didn't expect Bush to feed it by some of his unpresidential statements like, “We want him dead

or alive.” In other words, he had made the judgment, and we’re going to kill them all.

And I think that fed a certain irrational behavior. I didn’t expect that. I didn’t expect that.

But it is an attack on America, there’s no question about it.

Q: Besides the fear of harassment and the outreach that you’ve described in the Sikh community, have you noticed any other changes in the community since the 11th? Any other ways that it’s been affected?

Walking around the streets, it was a little—one had to be a little afraid. One had to be a little careful. I know a kid—a Sikh kid—who was chased by people. You know, and he had to run away from them. So things like this happened. People were attacked. And that was not good. And I am not sure that even the police, and others, were really that understanding. So, it was not that we could have expected much protection from them. In spite of the fact, that the Newsweek had published a picture of a Sikh physician, a doctor—he’s a surgeon and, as a matter of fact, I know him, young kid—who was one of the first physicians giving help at ground zero. So he was there. And while he was coming home, he was also harassed and attacked and so on. And that, to me, is very strange behavior. I had not experienced that in this country. I know it happened in India, and I’ve seen it in 1947 a little bit, and I’ve seen killing of people there—but I thought Americans were a little bit above that. I know that Americans interned a lot of Japanese during the Second World War, and I think that was dumb. That was foolish.

It stemmed out of our history. And I don't see that—how one can justify repeating a mistake when you know it's wrong. We've now admitted it was an error, we've tried to compensate and so on. Why repeat a dumb thing, just because it was done fifty years ago? And that is what many people seem to have been advocating. In fact, the early proposals of the security act—the homeland security policy—is that Bush and the Attorney General [John Ashcroft] tried to suggest and push—I thought it very bad. You know? Anybody, any immigrant that you think is not the right color skin, you're going to arrest him and put him in jail. Don't have to tell him why he's arrested, don't have to show him any evidence, don't have to give him any legal safeguards—that's certainly not the American way. And we have to recognize that the country is made up of immigrants. You can't just base this on what your looks or accent might be from, your religion might be. That doesn't make any sense. So I think the country was caught in a bind. That was the first time that such a major attack on the mainland had occurred. And they had to do something. Bush was a new untested president. He had to do something to show that he was a leader. And so they made policies, or recommended policies that were absolutely foolish. The only saving grace is that they have not really put them into large-scale practice. They have, I think, arrested many thousands of people. And some perhaps—lots of them without reason. You know? If there is sufficient reason, get a man, arrest him, try him—there are ways to do it. But all that does—that kind of policy—it really fosters war hysteria. It makes citizens behave in manners that's not right. I think if people here sometimes discriminate or harass people or kill people, partially it is because politicians have made dumb comments. Dumb statements. You know, when you start talking about

dead or alive or, we're going to get him, no matter what—in other words, the law does not apply to them. That these people are evil people—they have no right to live. And that is not the way. That is not the way. And that's why I think congressman and others also made dumb statements. That should never have been allowed. That should never have happened. And I hope that it doesn't happen.

Q: As it became clear that after the 11th, that Sikhs were going to be targeted by ignorant people as—you know, Osama bin Laden's followers—did you change your behavior at all?

I put a flag on my car and a flag on my lapel. If that reassures the people out there—somebody, in fact, asked me. He said, “You have a flag on your lapel,” and I said, “Yes, it's my one concession to all the idiots out there on the street, who think that just because I have a turban on my head, I'm a follower of Osama bin Laden.” That's foolish. But you know, it's not the first time it's happened, to some degree. It has happened before, when—during the Iran-Iraq war. Again, they thought Sikhs were Arabs. More so, when in 1979, when the Ayatollah Khomeini took those hostages in Iran. And you had pictures of Ayatollah flashed on the screen every day. And that guy had a beard and a turban, and therefore, anybody with a beard and a turban was that. I usually wear a black turban or a blue turban—maybe blue to work—it's conservative colors. A couple of days I wore a maroon color. Why? Perhaps, because perhaps these idiots out there on the street will not associate maroon with—you know—Osama bin Laden does not wear maroon. So,

behavior—and of course, be careful. Don't walk around alone at night. People have been chased by hoodlums.

Of course, I said, the first couple of days that I went to town, I saw not many Sikhs with turbans on their heads. Some of them cut their hair. Some of them—what they did was, they got those polo caps, you know, the baseball caps, and that's what they wore. Many of the taxi drivers, that's what they wore. Many of the Sikh taxi drivers put together a group to give free taxi service from ground zero to hospitals, to doctors and to patients and to people that were found. And that went on for a number of days. And the newspapers did record it. Television did too. I wish they had given it more prominence. That the Sikhs were running a free service and food as well as blood, as well as taxi. And these were uneducated Sikhs who were running it, and many of them were wearing baseball caps. So there was a major change there. Many of them did get afraid. And many of them were products of what happened in India in 1984, and they didn't know what was going to happen here. They didn't realize that America does not have such lawless behavior, usually. But that, you know, I look at what happened during civil rights movements, too—to the blacks—and America does have pockets of very irrational behavior. So, I don't know. It's funny. I'm not afraid to be out there. But there's a certain change. To me, this sort of a thing should not have happened. I've lived here for forty years. Why should my neighbor suspect me? Why should I have to justify myself? Why should I have to prove anything? Right?

My colleagues know that I am not a Muslim and I think they are understanding of it. My students sent emails and things. So in some ways the relationship is better. Some of them even know the harassment problems, and so on, that occur. I mean, we have many sites on the computer—Internet, that tell you harassment cases and so on. There's one Sikh coalition, I think, they put out my stuff too, and they have, what, 260 documented cases? And a lot of our colleagues are knowledgeable enough to read these things. And to talk about these things. My concern is not those. My concern is, you know, the guy I meet. The guy who delivers my newspaper. The guy who—the cab driver who'll drive me out there. What do they think? You know? And somehow we never know what they really think. And many of them don't know much better. They are uninformed. And I suppose the relationship there is affected to the extent that I would not wander out alone in areas where I might encounter some of them. You know? At this time, at this kind of evening in Manhattan, I might walk from NYU to Penn Station. Not now. Now, I take a cab. No. Now, is that really because people have changed, or is it because I have changed? Their fault or mine? I don't know. But I'm not about to find out. You know?

The first month or two, yes, it was a story a day. You know, cab drivers being chased by others. Their property, their shops, being broken into. Threatened. As I said, one kid was chased by a gang of kids and he ran across and jumped over a turnstile and—he figured—ran into a subway. He figured, well, if I get arrested, so be it. That's better. You know? That's what he did. And I know him. He works on Wall Street. In fact, his job was on the World Trade Center. He was about fifteen, twenty minutes late to work that day. His train

was late, and he was walking, and he saw it. You know? And he stayed out. And that's when he was coming back, he was chased that day. Now, for example, for people to be tying somebody down on an airplane, which they have done, or for a captain to refuse to take on a traveler—he's cleared security. He's done everything else, but I will not take him because I do not feel comfortable with you. These things have happened. They're not happening now, but they did happen within the first few weeks. That's not right. That's not right. I know a Muslim pilot—he's a pilot for the Bangladeshi airline. His sister is a lawyer and I know his sister better. But he was flying from Michigan back to New York, to visit his sister, and he couldn't get back. Because the pilot refused—he was a pilot himself. He showed his credentials. He had flying credentials. They would not take him. And a Muslim? They would not take him. That's rather dumb. I mean, if [Timothy] McVeigh bombed the FBI building, should we hound up all white men or women too, for that matter? I don't know. Should we do that? Doesn't make any sense. Nobody would approve of that.

We have two temples here in Long Island. One is in Plainview—Plainview is next to Bethpage about ten minutes from us. A little north and a little east. The other is in Glen Cove. Glen Cove, you probably know—this is exit 40, that's exit 39, and further north. And there are two temples here. Here there have not been that many problems. These are fairly prosperous people, well to do. Suburbanites. The neighbors are also somewhat polite. And they have political connections, too, to the mayor's office—mayor's office and to the local congressman and so on, and we have invited them, they have come and

so on. So we've done a few things. We've had a candlelight vigil here at Eisenhower Park, and the Sikhs are part of that community. The whole large community as well. But we have Sikh places of worship in Richmond Hill, in Queens. That's where most of the cab drivers are, and the construction workers are. And they don't have any language skills. And they come from India. And they are very suspicious of police, and authority, because of what they have seen in India. They don't trust the police. They don't trust the police. They have trouble and problems. They don't have the language skills and so there are issues. That's where the problems are. That's where people get beaten up and so on. That's also the place where there are the local bars, and somebody has had a few drinks too many and then he see a lone Sikh going by and he attacks him. There are the economic problems—the financial—you know, the recession—and there is the anger over the perceived damage to the World Trade Center, the perceived connection to Osama—all things come up. All resentments surface up. So that's where the problems occur.

Q: Is there—is there generally, in the past—has there been a lot of communication between the—Richmond Hill's more recent immigrants, less educated people, and the people here [in Long Island] who are more educated, English-speaking? Is that something that's come out of the 11th?

That's right. That's right. It's coming out.

Q: Is there any friction there?

What happens is, people who have made it, they always look down on those from the wrong side of the tracks, in a sense. And that's normal. That's normal in any society. You don't deal with the whites in the shantytowns. Same thing happens here. But I think this has come out of it, and that's good. Some of these young Sikhs who are born and raised here, sons of affluent people, they have set up a couple of blood drives, a health fair, for them. They have started classes to teach them English as a second language.

They had started some of those things earlier, but now, with more urgency. They help their young children with homework. They set up programs like voluntary service. These are things their parents would never understand, but these young kids are doing it out of their own time and money and—you know. Out of their own pockets. So they are doing things. So it's a good—it's good for our community. It's good for them. And it's good, I think, for the country, in the long run. So we are doing it. And I think things are changing for the better. But the viciousness of some of the responses really surprised me, like the killing of the guy in Arizona. That surprised me. But then, it shouldn't really. I mean, look at how many random killings occur in this community all—every day. Some kid finds a gun, goes to a school, and shoots up people. You see, the thing is, we also become a little hypersensitive. If somebody now, when I'm driving, raises his middle finger or makes an obscene gesture at me—is it because I've got a turban on my head? Is it because I'm a foreigner? Or is it because I was just, maybe, driving too slow for him, or

didn't do something right? You know? I'm an ordinary man, so I do mistakes. I do make mistakes in driving. Or, I may not have made a mistake, he may just be in a hurry. A lot of people are like that. So, in my paranoia, I may think that he is doing it because I am an Indian. He may be doing it because he wants me to get out of the way, you know? [laughs] He's got to go somewhere. How do you know?

MARCH 2, 2003

Q: Dr. Singh, as I mentioned before, this is the ongoing story of your life and how you've reacted to September 11. So if we could—just let me know, to start out, what's been going on with you over the last year. It's been, I guess, thirteen months since we last talked.

I think last time I met you it was just after 9/11, and we talked about the fact that out in the streets, people were suspicious, and there were not many people to be seen with turbans, and most Americans couldn't tell the difference between a man with a turban and a follower of Osama bin Laden. In other words, they see a kind of so-called terrorist.

And things have changed. People have become more knowledgeable because of the many things that have happened and many things that have been done in the programs and projects that Sikhs have been active, like candlelight vigils and visits to churches and

libraries, and talks about Sikhism and so on, and press coverage and so on. And that's to the good. That's good.

There have also been other incidents that have not been always pleasant. You still find people in small pockets of America who can't tell the difference, and they don't recognize that Americans come in all colors and religions and shapes and sizes, shades and hues, whatever. I am a Sikh and I come from India, but to them any brown-skinned person looks like perhaps, could be from the Middle East. And even if that were the case, not everybody from the Middle East, not even every Muslim from there, is necessarily either a terrorist or a sympathizer of terrorists.

Or, that doesn't mean that he necessarily loves this country any less because of the color of his skin is different, or that he has an accent. We speak with an accent. We don't necessarily think with one. You know? And that's what people need to know. Now, partially it is our fault, as I've indicated elsewhere, that we have been here a hundred years and we proudly say that, and yet if our neighbors saw little of us, that becomes our fault. In other word, there are fences around us, and our neighbors have not been able to come through.

But then there are also some things which are plain, that defy common sense, like the example that happened a few months ago of this one Sikh who emerged from a manhole cover, and he worked for the New Jersey transit system, I think, for the train tracks and

things, track maintenance. And as he came out, he was arrested in the middle of the night, because the police said they saw a man with a turban coming out of a manhole cover and what were they to think? He must be a terrorist.

For god's sake, if you think about it for a minute, there has never been a terrorist in this country who wore a turban or a beard. Osama bin Laden might wear one; 99.9 percent of the Muslims don't. The only people who wear turbans and beards, in general in this world, are Sikhs. And if I were a terrorist, the last thing I would like to do is to draw attention to myself. It wouldn't make any sense. There are people at airports who still like to think that any man with a turban, well, they've got to look under the turban, and I don't see the logic of that. To ask a Sikh to remove his turban publicly is like asking a woman to remove her clothes publicly. It just doesn't make any sense. If something beeps, you can take a man to a private room and you can inspect the turban; no problem there. If it doesn't, there's no suspicion. There's no reason for it. There's no beep. There's no alarm anywhere.

Well, why would you want to do that? Because somebody said to me that you could hide plastic explosives under the turban. Yes, you could, but you could hide plastic explosives in a jacket lapel, shoulder pads, in the linings of bras. Huh? So you don't ask them to remove those things in public. You don't ask me to remove my pants or jacket in public. Why should you ask me to remove my turban in public? So there are some dumb things

that people do, not necessarily vicious things but just stupid things. And they still happen, and they should not.

When we spoke last time, the war in Afghanistan was already happening. Since then, the Homeland Security Department has been created. We've been moving towards this war in Iraq. What are your opinions on the recent developments?

[Laughs] I want to say something which might land me in more trouble than I want. I have difficulty understanding what the Homeland Security is doing, really. I mean, the color-coded—the colors are pretty, but I don't know what I'm supposed to do with them, quite honestly. Alert citizenry? Yes. Citizens should be alert to what things are around them, much like a New Yorker has to be alert about who's around him or her when you're walking down the street, particularly isolated areas. And that is true. Beyond that I don't know what really is one to do with a roll of duct tape or plastic sheeting. I don't know. I don't know what that Homeland Security is doing, except making people anxious. And to raise their nonspecific anxiety level, I'm not sure is a good thing. It's a nonspecific anxiety, because there is no definite known predictable tracked to a particular place, area, whatever. So it's making people anxious in a nonspecific manner, and that's perhaps the most difficult to deal with, and then people react in manners that's not good. That's what I'm afraid of. I don't know if that answers anything or not.

I think the war appears inevitable, and I wish it was not. War appears inevitable because I think America is at this time quite determined to wage war to oust Saddam Hussein, to depose him; not merely to disarm the country but also to depose him. And that- -I don't know. I don't know whether we should or whether we should have the right to do so. And then, at another level, I'm not sure if it's necessarily good or bad for that area. What President [George W.] Bush says, that it will lead to a perhaps a reorganization of the Arab mindset and reorganize that whole area into a more liberal democratic geographical thing, maybe it will. And maybe it will destabilize everything. I don't know. There are wiser heads, I imagine, who know, the specialists who know. And I'm not sure anybody does.

I again go back to—I think that if we can somehow contain Iraq without war and establish very clearly that some behavior—and the lines are drawn very definitely—that some behavior will not be tolerated and war will result, and then contain it, I would think that, to me, is preferable. The fact that Saddam is evil, yes, we know that. But so is just about everybody in the Middle East, you know. I don't think there are any virtuous people, leaders out there anywhere. And I think that's what's needed, is ways to contain him, and I think that's possible. That's been possible for the past, since 1989. It's possible, even more possible now, because they are destroying the weapons and they can be made to destroy the weapons, and there's no reason why we need to go to war for that, because war could destabilize everything, and that's not what we need.

The country, I suppose, supports the president, particularly in times of war. I recognize that from the fact that *The New York Times*, I think this morning, reported that over 70 percent of the people think that some of the hijackers who attacked the World Trade Center were Iraqi. They're so poorly informed. In other words, the lines have been so beautifully blurred by the administration's war hysteria—no, war efforts—that people do not even know where the facts are. What are we going to war for, and who are we fighting, for what reason? It's one thing to fight people who attacked us. It's another thing to try to contain Iraq. It's the third matter altogether to fight for a regime change and to impose our will on what the geopolitics of that area ought to be, and I'm not sure that we have the right or the authority to do so.

We do have the power, yes. But power does not automatically translate to a moral authority. It does not translate to that, and I'm not sure we have that. But I suppose in politics, moral authority comes after the fact. If you win the war, then you have the authority. If you lose it, you never had it. No? And we are not likely to lose that war, or the battle. Let's put it this way. The battle for Iraq we will win. The war for that area, I don't know.

Q: You mentioned last time that you thought that the changes in America were basically temporary and that America remained a country where people would be judged on the work that they did and who they were, rather than their ethnic background or religion or whatever.

Ultimately, America remains a very open country. The fact that I'm here talking to you and saying these things in the middle of an imminent war, that can only happen in America. I could not do that in India. I think if I did that in India, I'd probably disappear very rapidly.

Q: So the continuing erosion of civil rights and immigrants' rights hasn't shaken your belief system, really?

Not entirely. Not entirely, because there is a debate. There are enough people protesting this. There are even judges, like the judge who said that democracy does not survive in secrecy, or something like this, in a federal trial of people they have arrested, so-called terrorists they arrested. So there are enough people who don't like this, and they will always protest. So it may take a while. There may be setbacks to some degree, but I think the country remains more open than the rest of the world put together. There's just no question about it. And more responsive to what people will or will not do. I mean, if Bush can win this war, impose his will, and transform Middle East into a democratic liberal new Middle East, people will forgive him anything. He could be crowned the king forever. [Laughs] If the law allowed it.

But if he loses it, heaven help him. If the economy does not recover, if the war bogs down, if people are getting killed, Americans, if there's more terrorism here, Bush may not survive the political process.

I'm just reminded of the fact that most people, no matter whether they're Americans or Indians or Chinese or whatever, they're pretty ignorant. They don't read very much. They don't know world affairs. I'm sure most Americans don't know where Iraq is, or what the difference between Iraq and Saudi Arabia is, for that matter, or Iran or whatever. They have no idea, and this is the way most people are. So in that sense, I'm not surprised. But I'm always surprised that Americans don't know, because Americans, even the poorest American, has access to a television and some news on the radio or TV or newspaper or whatever, and has the basics of education, a little bit. That's not the case in India. In India a man cannot have access to a paper, cannot afford it, cannot read it if he can get it.

That's not the case here.

So, I have confidence that Americans will come back to their values, and I also realize that as people they get a little bit—the pendulum swings too far. This time I think it's swinging a little too far. Patriotism does not lie in unquestioning knee-jerk approval of whatever the leaders tell you. I think patriotism really lies in doing your own thinking and putting up your opinion. That's my view.

Q: I'm curious about—the last time we talked, the Sikh community was sort of still in crisis mode, it seemed, dealing with the immediate ramifications of the negative attention that you got after September 11th. Over the last year, how has that played out? What's been going on in that community? I'm interested both in the more recent immigrants and the more assimilated.

The tension between new immigrants and older established ones, that's normal and to be expected, and I'm sure it has happened with every, in every culture and every group of immigrants, and we have that as well. But I think 9/11 did bring us a little closer in the sense that we recognize that we all are in the same boat. The man on the street who heckles me, for example, does not realize that I have been here forty-odd years, longer than he's been around, period, and that I've gone to school here and I'm as much an American as I could be. In fact, this is the only home I know.

And he doesn't know that, anymore than when he looks at a new arrival who came here six months ago and is now driving a cab. The average American doesn't know; to him, both look the same, you know. We both look the same. We both are from a part of the world that he suspects, that he's not sure of where it is and he doesn't like very much. The economy is bad and he wonders why don't these people go back home, because, "Maybe if they go away, I'll get the jobs and things will be better." And that's not really the case. In time of economic trouble, immigrants are always in trouble, and that's the case now. Economy is bad and the immigrants will be in trouble. They don't realize that

the country is made up of immigrants and the country's economic might, financial strength, cultural diversity provides it. If the immigrants went home, this would not be a better country. You know? That's what I'm saying. It will not be a better country economically. It will not be a better country in any manner.

But the average American, you know, he looks at the fact that he lost his job and his pension benefits or whatever, and these immigrants are working and driving cars. Maybe if they went home life would be better. It won't be. It won't be.

I mean, the government can provide us more security, but what can they provide? They can't live with you. You've got to live in the community and depend on the community. Ultimately, it's your neighbors who save you, and it's your neighbors who will burn your house down. Right? It's the neighbors who are going to lynch you, and neighbors who will protect you. So you've got to build those bridges.

MARIUM RIZVI

This interview was conducted by Meriam Lobel for the 9/11 Tribute Museum. I was an intern from January through June of 2018 at the museum and was tasked with organizing, editing, and audit editing the museum's oral history materials and transcripts. I came across Marium's story and instantly knew that I had to include her in this thesis. At the time of the interview she was a middle school history teacher in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and she discusses her interactions with her students regarding September 11 in education. Her family history is also important in terms of understanding what went on in the creation of modern India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

The hard part of working with interviews that you did not conduct is not being able to ask follow-up questions. And because this interview in particular (as with the Tribute Museum's other interviews) was created with museum programming in mind, some follow-up questions might have not crossed the interviewer's mind due to the aims of the programming, time constraints, and a slew of other factors that affect an interview.

NOVEMBER 12, 2013

I'm originally from Pakistan; I was born in Karachi, Pakistan in 1986. My parents were born there, my grandparents, and then my father and my mother, their whole values on education, everything was about education. So you know, it was not exactly an opportune

time in Pakistan to be focused on education, so they moved, we immigrated to America. And we actually lived in Queens, in Flushing, all over Queens, when we immigrated first, and then we finally moved to New Jersey. And when I was in school, especially during my high school years, and my eleventh grade/twelfth grade years, I had this wonderful history teacher that just showed me this worldview that I didn't have before. And throughout my life actually, I really enjoyed history because I had a history. The Pakistani history that my mom would tell me and my grandparents would tell me about the Partition and the British and that, so I always knew history, but when I came to school it was this brand new history. The World War One, World War Two, the Civil War, American Revolution, I had never heard that before and I didn't have anybody that knew it, so I was learning two histories and it kind of shaped my identity. You know this culture mix that I was kind of, you know, figuring out where I was from and what I could be.

Q: When your parents and your grandparents were talking to you about Pakistani history, were they telling you the facts or were they reading you books or were they telling you what happened to them at that time?

My grandma lived through the Partition, so she was telling me you know her experience through the war. They are originally from Bangladesh, which was originally part of India, and so the war came to them first and my grandmother actually had a sister who was— her and her husband were actually captured and killed during the war, so we have a lot of

stories like that where you know the tensions between the religions, the tensions between the ethnicities. And my grandparents had very vivid stories and we would just listen to them, and my mom also had stories, they were stories when there were two wars in the seventies between India and Pakistan. And you know, them hiding under the tables when the bombs are falling in the streets, so it's one of those things where you can't imagine that happening ever when you know, you grow up here in America, in New Jersey, in New York. So hearing it from them, that firsthand account, it also gave me this appreciation of what you could live through.

People have this perspective based on their experience, so it was all experiences of the wars. Because there was a lot of war going on during the Partition itself when my grandparents were alive, and also the wars during the seventies that my mom, not much my father—my father is a little more quiet, but my mom and my aunts—I have a very big family, and so they would all tell us the stories about when they were younger, what they would do. They would tell them to hide under a table when the bombs were falling, so there were no bunkers, you know, nothing like that it was just, 'Okay go under the table.' And my mom would joke, she would say she would grab—that was her chance to eat all of the candy, [laughs] because no one was looking, everyone was running around. It's amazing how lightly—because it's just kind of a way of life, it was just happening. So it helps you understand places that are war torn, those people get used to it. It's that desensitization that you get.

Q: It's sad that people get desensitized.

Yes, very much so.

Q: It may be helpful that kids can just sort of keep a sense of normalcy.

It's amazing, I mean, traumatization can happen so quickly, but I guess it's all how you approach it. They've got a different mindset when they're in that situation so.

Q: Were your grandparents in Bangladesh first and then left Bangladesh to go to Pakistan?

Yeah, during 1945, so Bangladesh was known as East Pakistan and Pakistan today was known as West Pakistan. So they had to leave East Pakistan and come to West, because that's where the majority of the Muslims were going to, to the West, and that's where they settled, eventually in Karachi. And that's my mother's side. My father's side is from the northern part. It's called Islamabad, the capital today, and Pindi [Rawalpindi], which is right by the Afghani border. Very different cultures. Karachi is more of a city. Islamabad is a city too, but where my father lived is more, you know, conservative kind of village like, and then yeah, my grandparents they moved. A lot of people lived in India, everything was India, but they had to move where the Muslims were because the separation was really about the two ethnicities.

Q: Did they move in '47 or they moved in '71?

In the forties, my grandparents, yeah. The seventies was when everybody was in West Pakistan. We still have family in India and in Bangladesh, but a lot of them moved, and the ones that did stay, some of them are there, but that one great aunt that I had, they were taken and you know, put in a room. It was a—it's a hard story, because no one really talked about it until I asked, and then I did a project about it in school, because we had to study our ancestors and I focused on her because the story was such a big deal to me. I don't know why at that point, my sister is named after her, so I guess that's why I focused on it. Like, who is this lady?

Q: Was that when you were in high school or in college?

In high school, in eleventh grade. Yeah, we did a family tree, because everyone is talking about where their ancestors came from with Ellis Island, and I was like, 'Well, my parents didn't come from Ellis Island. I came in the eighties on my own on a plane to JFK,' so it was another way there I could find myself. Because it's hard when you are born in one country, and then you come to a different one and you grow up in a different one. I was raised very conservative, very much to, you know, the Muslim culture, but I grew up in America in a very heterogeneous society, but I was being raised as, you know,

as something completely different. So I had to kind of reconcile my two cultures and kind of find a balance between the two.

Q: Do you feel like you've found it? Or are you constantly finding it?

I think I'm content with my assimilation and also my mixture. I think when I was younger I was more confused, especially during 9/11. It was more of a confusing time. But I think I've grown into it, and I've kind of accepted it that you know, I am who I am. I'm both Pakistani and I'm both American, and I found my own little way of being both and I don't make any apologies.

ON HISTORY AND TEACHING

My grandmother, also she was, you know, at that time women would just get married very young. But she had plans to be a lawyer. She wanted to study law she was very in to history. And my grandfather, you know, had a lot of experience in history. His brother actually has our family history all the way back to like Persian times and he could trace it back. So, we are very historical I guess in our family, so I guess it just comes from that—it stems from it.

Q: Do you think you transmit that level of history to your students?

I hope I do, well I think I do. They think it's a little weird 'cause I know when they are laughing at me, 'cause they'll look at me like, 'You get so excited Ms. Rizvi when you say this.' I was like, 'Because you know it's you know great.' We were just talking about the Reconquista, because they're finishing up the age of exploration and we were talking about how you know, how during the Reconquista there was a purge of anyone that wasn't Catholic. And in that time, the early Catholic tradition was you couldn't touch money, you know, it was a lowly thing. So it was all the Jews and the Muslims that were the bankers and the merchants, so when they kicked them all out, Spain's economy collapsed and that's why they are no longer powerful anymore and now if you look at them all these things have happened. And I got so excited I guess, and they are like, 'wow,' but I think also when they see how excited I get and that I care about the subject then they take more value in it.

And I especially see that with my 7th graders this year, 'cause I taught them last year. They do more. They actually do the work, they actually pay attention, and they are engaged. So it's very important for a teacher to love her subject, because if you don't, one: what are you teaching for? Because then you are not happy. And two: the students pick up on that, so if you don't love your subject, how do you expect your students to love your subject? And I tell them the first thing, 'I'm such a dork about history, I love it, so you are going to love it too.' No, I don't say that, but I tell them, you know, 'cause a lot of them come in and they don't like it. And a lot of times it wasn't taught the right way.

I don't use the textbook. Never. Because textbooks become outdated within a month 'cause everything is happening everyday, so I use a lot of primary sources and secondary sources. A lot of primary, a lot of firsthand accounts, because those will always be relevant. You know, you can always get a good account, and plus, history is a series of perspectives, there is no one history so your perspective is the same as mine, it's not right or wrong, it's just a part of the story. And so we do a lot of primary, which is what the common core now wants as well with New York City. And I use a lot of online sources. So the big history project that just came out from History Channel, it's huge, and it's such a great resource because they read something and then they watch a video that's coupled with it and it helps them understand it on a bigger perspective. So I love it, I could talk on and on and take up all your tape if you just ask me about history, so it is very important to me.

Q: That's fantastic. Well, it sounds like you are finding ways to make it relevant to them.

Yeah, it's important because they're a little bit detached. You know, even when we talk about things, like, I have a very big West Indian population. So when we talk about, you know, the Spanish coming to the West Indies during the Columbian Exchange, even the Atlantic slave trade, or even 9/11, it's very detached to them because they're so far away from it. You know, with 9/11, my students were born after 2001, so they don't really have an attachment to it, only the stories they've heard. So it's tough to get kids to care

about something that happened so long ago by people they don't know, but they are ways. You got to just be creative about it.

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I think for me and the teachers that are around my age at the school, or even the ones that are older than me who saw it and lived through it and I mean, I wasn't even there but I was you know in the vicinity and the impact came down to us, absolutely. It's a different attachment to it, because we felt a shift in our life, because we knew a time that things were very different. I don't know how to ever explain it, that shift, that you go from pre to post, there was just something different like your life did change there is a different air about everything. And the students, I guess whether they knew it or not, they always lived in that shift. They didn't live in a pre-9/11 world, so they can't really understand that attachment that we have, I guess. But they hear stories from their parents, they hear stories, they see the video and the footage every time the anniversary comes about, and plus, they hear the aftermath, the wars and terrorism and you know, all these things that

go on. But for them, it's hard for them to form an opinion about it, or form a viewpoint about it, because they're getting all this information from all these different sides and so it's hard for them to kind of sift through what is the truth, what is perspective, and what is my opinion on all this. And I guess you know, for them they also don't understand the amount of cultural impact it also had. They see something on the news and they'll kind of take it for literal and they'll take it, so it's hard for them to kind of have that attachment to it. We talk about it during the anniversary and we do a little bit of it in class, and it's you know, a lot of them are just like, "Yeah, my mom told me this or this happened to my mom or my dad was there," so yeah, they are a bit detached from it. Some more than others, you know, but it's tough because they were born after the fact. So they always knew a time where this is reality.

Q: Can you, I know it's hard to say exactly what the shift is. Can you say what you perceived what some of the differences before and after?

I know for me, being Muslim, being someone who was kind of—that looked like the other like the people who did it, it kind of made it seem as if I did something wrong. And I never ever, I never doubted my ethnicity, I never doubted who I was until I saw what happened, but I also remember 9/11, but the first Trade Center bombing. And I remember I was in second grade, and a boy had turned around to me after, you know it's first grade, first, second, and he turns around to me and he asked me, "Are you a terrorist?" And I looked at him and I said, "I don't know, what does that mean?" So as a first grader I

didn't know, and I went home to my mom—and my parents come from an area in Pakistan where, if you were the minority sect of the religion, you could be persecuted and you would be kind of disenfranchised. So my parents grew up, you know, my mom especially, you know, you don't tell anyone your last name, you don't tell who you are, you don't tell your religion, because, you know, you got to protect yourself. So immediately, she said, “You know don't worry about it, you're not one it's okay.” So my parents always grew up in that fear, but us being American, it's like, “No, this is who I am, it shouldn't matter.” So I definitely felt that shift where I had not kind of hide. I look back on it now, I was like I'm so silly but I guess being fifteen, being that age that age when 9/11 happened, you are still kind of immature in your thinking. So for me this shift was really just this sense of, “Did I do something wrong? Is there something wrong with me? And am I doing something that's hurting other people?” I kind of had to reconcile what happened, and also what I was. And so it was kind of like, I guess I went through like an identity crisis per se, but I guess that's all personal because I don't know if anybody else felt it or it was just me, but yeah, there was this definitely this kind of weird shift I guess. I don't know how to explain it ever but, you know, and the little things. You know with the airport security and everyone kind of being on high alert. We have these alerts now, that you never had and just a sense of safety. You know I always felt safe, I always felt like nothing could ever go wrong and now you are kind of like, “oh this could happen” and it was strange. And being fifteen I guess I was kind of immature in the sense where I thought, “Am I going to be taken and detained like the Japanese internments in

1945?” Because, you know, again, I was always making connections with the history and I was like, “Is this what’s going to happen to us because we did something wrong?”

Q: Does your school do anything on the anniversary of 9/11?

We do, we have extended day in the morning, so we talk about positive behavior and anti-bullying and all that. And on the anniversary of 9/11, we always allocate that one period to just having a discussion. So I know for me, my whole thing is, in order for students to remember or to actually have value, you always have to talk about it, you have to keep it, you know, you have to keep talking about it whether they were there or not there. So what we do is we kind of open it up to the students, and we say, you know, ‘Today is—does anyone know what it is?’ And we kind of have them tell us, and they know what day it is, and then we just say, ‘What are your experiences when you think of it?’ And so we really just have a full on discussion and we hear what the students have to say, and they usually tell us what they’ve heard and some of them have had you know, firsthand accounts because of their parents or siblings or someone else, and we just have a discussion about it. And then we as teachers, we speak about what we were going through, what we had to do, or what we experienced. And for the most part we get that one period to kind of discuss and just talk about what happened.

And they have a lot of questions, because they see the footage and they say, ‘Well when the plane went down,’ and they ask about what happened and then they see conspiracy

theories on the videos and on YouTube and they have a lot of questions, 'cause there is so much information out there. So for me, as a history teacher, and it's one of the things that I think I've developed as a result of having that experience, where I was kind of so confused after 9/11, it's so important for students to understand bias and, you know, opinion, and what's fact. Because I had so many opinions and biases and everything coming in to my head that I think it really skewed what I was thinking.

So I know as a history teacher one of my rules and one of my philosophies is I don't tell them how I feel. I don't tell them what my opinion is, because as a teacher, it's not my place to tell them what I think. It doesn't matter what I think. It's what you think, it's how you form your own worldview. And that's something I learned from my teacher, having that worldview that you kind of reconcile all of these perspectives and figure out what you want to do. So when I have them in my class, during that anniversary, we really talk about, 'Well, what's fact and what's bias? And what do you think? What do you think is fact? What do you think is happening?' And a lot of them you know, they do come to that the same conclusion about what happened and they realize that you can't blame one group, you know, one whole group for a few people. And how devastating it was, how many people died because of it and the impact it has not only on, you know, the state and the world, but where you are in New York. You live here, this was your city.

I do a lot of discussions, so that's one way we do it. Last year we had some time where we actually watched a documentary, the whole school watched a documentary on it, and

they were—it was just kind of watching it and seeing the footage—not that they haven't seen it, but I guess getting those firsthand accounts and also interviews that were given by first responders or people that were walking in the rubble. So that's what we have done so far, but I've thinking more about doing like a full—some type of lesson and some type of activity with them using primary sources because that's what the common core is focusing on for social studies and for history and using images and quotes and putting it together somehow and having them deconstruct them and having them really understand where the person is coming from. So I think those are my next steps for when I teach it next.

RYAN PATEL

I wanted to interview Ryan, my younger brother, because we have a five-year age gap between us, he's an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, and he's more moderate politically than both me. I figured that he wouldn't remember anything from September 11 because he was only three, but I still think what makes his interview important to include is the uncertainty he expresses about the future.

DECEMBER 4, 2017

Q: You were about three years old and I was about in the third grade when 9/11 happened. And so I remember kind of what happened but I didn't understand, like, the gravity of the situation, other than it was extremely sad at the time.

Right.

Q: But can you tell me and describe to me that day, if you remember anything about it?

I don't remember seeing anything on TV, like, visually, but I do remember picking you up with mom, because they ended up canceling school that day due to the fear of another terrorist attack. So I do remember the drive there. And I do remember picking you up. I

know I remember seeing mom's face being visually distraught, but I was—I never remember what was actually going on. I didn't know who was doing what, I just remember going with the flow, really. I was only three years old, so there really wasn't anything visual for me to remember. But I do remember going to pick you up and just—it wasn't a normal day for me because I'm so used to—with my routine as a three-year-old, it was different, so that's all I remember. But I do remember mom being visually distraught, and just being—it was just a hectic day, to be honest.

Q: What was your first—not your first, but one of your earliest understandings of what actually happened on 9/11?

When I figured out, like, what actually happened? I would say, like in elementary school. Definitely when it was brought up in class from time to time, especially on, like, the anniversary they would talk about it. I think around like first grade or second grade, I started realizing what actually happened, and the magnitude of how rare that occasion, how rare that attack was, especially on the homeland. And yeah, that's really when it started coming about. And obviously as I grow, as I grow older, I definitely started to learn more about how impactful that was. In my life and also other American lives too. And how that affected policy, and everything. So, yeah, definitely—having 9/11 being brought up every year, especially in elementary school, when, like on its anniversary and stuff, teachers would talk about it, so. My memory comes in when President Obama promised to pull troops out of Afghanistan. And I remember a huge wave of support for

that, and just having the media—knowing that the media was, like, pushing against that or against Iraq and everything. I honestly don't remember too much about the politics behind it. I just remember we were just going to war to fight the terrorists, really.

Q: How would you say that it affected you? Because you said it affected you and the lives of other Americans too.

People started to realize that terrorism—or when, pretty much what happened was, obviously with the terrorists that—as a brown person, people are gonna stereotype me as someone. And I know, especially, one story that really resonates with me is when my dad was driving back down on 9/11, he told us a story about how he had to pick up batteries for me, and um, a cashier at whatever store he was at, Home Depot, was talking about—just pretty much how—what was it? So pretty much, came up to the counter and then the guy was talking about how, “Oh, are you one of those terrorists or whatnot?” He has a better rendition of it.

Q: You did mention being brown, and we're both visibly not white. So while you were growing up, like I guess when you were a kid, do you think that you were discriminated against by anyone that you knew, or your community, or anyone in general? Just because of how you looked?

Personally, I felt as if I wasn't discriminated against at all based on the color of my skin or my ethnicity. I did have several kids in my elementary school and middle school where Indian American and I felt as if we weren't discriminated against at all, being brown. There were at times—well, actually, if you think about it, like, people would ask about, like, certain questions about my heritage and whatnot. And obviously that's not a discriminator, but certain questions about, “Oh, why don't you wear a red dot?” I remember being asked about that. Just certain things like that, about how if I don't follow their version of what I—of what they think I'm supposed to be. Oh yeah, and also if I eat curry. That definitely is, I would say, somewhat discriminatory. So honestly, if I think about it, there are certain things, there are certain occasions where, you know, my—the color of my skin, like, brought up questions for them as to why I didn't follow their stereotype. With ignorance they also ask if I “speak Indian.”

Q: You look older than me even though I'm five years older than you, and so do you think now that you are pretty much an adult, you're nineteen years old, do you get discriminated against, or like weird looks, or like anything? Given, like, the recent election and the climate of xenophobia, Muslim ban, all this stuff, especially because you're in Michigan right now, and Michigan does have a [crosstalk] large Arab and Muslim population too—

I'm a second year at University of Michigan, so there is a huge, diverse population, especially in the student population. There are huge organizations for Indian Americans

and Muslim Americans. And since I've been here I've not been discriminated at all. It's very inclusive. But definitely when I'm going to an airport, is where it brings certain questions. I have a beard, so our parents tell me to shave my beard due to the fear of me being selected for a random check, or anything like that. I think now, I don't feel as if I get any looks per se, but in the airport, especially, considering 9/11 and the increased security and T.S.A. [Transportation Security Administration] and the Department of Homeland Security, all of that stuff being formed, I do actually have to be, not careful, but I do have to be aware. There are certain times where people do—would glance at me, especially in the security line. But other than that, I honestly don't feel as if I'm being discriminated as an Indian American.

This post-9/11 world is all we know. This is what we grew up with. There isn't something we can compare it to, to differentiate it from. It's just something that we've just accepted, as like, there's gonna be this stereotype as long as radical Islamic terrorism exists. It's just—I'm not too like—I don't know. I think we've just continued to keep that stereotype, because as I said before, that's what they have accepted to know is that, like, “brown people, oh there's a good chance that man could be a terrorist,” like, I don't know. It's just—I don't see a world where we're able to grow out of that stereotype even if I.S.I.S. or any other terrorist group dissipates, honestly. I don't know what to tell you.

PIYUSH PATEL

OCTOBER 15, 2017

Q: Could you tell me the story of the day after 9/11?

September 12, 2001, two friends of mine and I, we drove back from Milwaukee to Lakeland, Florida. Well over 1,000 miles. We drove for twenty-three hours. That's because we were there in Wisconsin and then we were going to fly out of Milwaukee, and when we got to the airport we realized all the flights were grounded. We realized, actually, that it would take a day or two for the flights to resume, and we decided to drive back home. So we drove back home. I bought a toy for Ryan, at that time he was a little over three years old, and so I stopped at a Lowe's to buy batteries and I asked one clerk where I could find batteries. And the clerk goes, "Why? You wanna make a pipe bomb?"

I was shocked. My first reaction was going to be very bad, but the clerk was six inches taller and a hundred pounds bigger than me, and muscular, so I didn't want to get into any altercation that would result in physical violence, because I was going to lose. But after I got my bearings, I said, "Americans come in all kinds of appearances." And a few minutes later he came back and apologized. And I learned a lesson, that when you diffuse a situation like this, and you acknowledge why the other person is angry—because I did

say that, "I knew it's because of yesterday you want to take it on the first brown person you encounter, right?"

And he goes, "Yes sir, everybody's frustrated."

I said, "So am I." And so I learned a very good lesson, again, not because of my wisdom, but because I could not react right away because of his physical stature, but then I learned that this kind of dialogue helps better in terms of diffusing situations and understanding that that person is not bad, it's just he's reacting badly. But if you knock some sense into them in a very nice way without telling them that they are evil, most people would realize what a bad thing to say or to do.

It's also animal instinct, right? When you see somebody that looks like the bad guys, that's the first thing, fear. It's very natural. Sometimes you have to disarm them with a smile or giving an indication you're a friend not a foe.

Q: Have there been any other instances where you've been discriminated against in such an overt way?

No, I don't call it discriminated against.

Q: Or when someone singles you out [crosstalk].

Yeah exactly, right. And first reaction. Maybe like that, that happens all the time, right? But it's up to you to disarm them with—I mean it shouldn't happen, and that's when the education and awareness and all these things come in. But if we just categorize them as bad people, then it's a non-starter.

Q: What were your feelings towards the police in India? How did you feel about law enforcement back in India?

Law enforcement back in India was very corrupt. Also inept.

Q: Do you think it's still that way?

I mean, I don't live in India now but yeah, in general. But this was my firsthand experience. You would avoid law enforcement, even as a friend, like a plague. You don't want to do anything with law enforcement. And also, in general, law enforcement was also seen by general public like occupying force, because the mentality of the law enforcement was, “We are ruling over these people.”

Q: What—Did your feelings towards law enforcement, did that change once you moved to the United States?

I was surprised, first of all, at how courteous and how service-oriented police officers were. I was just, because I, over there, police officers would, even in a normal conversation, would let you feel that you are part of the ruled, and they're part of the ruling class in India. The way, the condescending manner in which they talked to you, they bully you, and in general if you show your connections, your power, that's when they'll calm down and they'll start giving you just a basic respect. So if you're well-dressed, you speak in English, if you're in a nice car, then they'll be deferential to you in India, because then they'll know that you come from a very well-connected or socioeconomically or educationally belong to the elite so you're not to be messed with. But otherwise, they would be as I said, this air of occupying force and “We are basically enforcing the law over these people.” And they would try to find any possible ways to basically squeeze money out of you. If you broke a traffic law, it would be all about, “Okay, give me some money.” In general. Not all police officers were like that, but I would say vast majority were like that.

Q: To what extent do you think that that can be seen in the United States today, especially after 9/11?

The police officers? I think very little. There is a night and day difference between the law enforcement in the United States and in India. In general, I believe the police officers here are to serve and protect. When I see or hear about all these cases of police brutality, and discrimination, I see that as an exception, not as a rule.

Q: But do you think that these cases are indicative of a larger problem with the United States' policing structures?

Yes, absolutely. I mean, whatever comes to surface is just the tip of the iceberg, but in the larger context, it's nowhere compared to other police forces in the developing world. Not just India. So we cannot paint it with a broad brush and say that law enforcement in the United States is biased or racist or corrupt, whereas in India I can at least say they are corrupt. Because it's more than fifty percent in India to a varying degree of corruption. But over here, I think by and large, they are great people. [Pauses] Actually, most people who come to this country from the developing world, when they first have an encounter with a police officer, they just find it so refreshing that even if they're getting a ticket, how courteous the police officers are and explain the things.

Q: How do you know this?

Because [laughs] I have had my fair share of traffic tickets. I've had my car stolen a couple of times, and how the law enforcement treated me.

Q: And how much of that do you think was, I mean, the fact that—dependent on the fact that you speak fluent English, that you were a graduate student in New Jersey, that you

have a higher degree, how much of that do you think is from your class background? Or your ability to speak English?

I don't know. It may be a factor, but when I got a speeding ticket, when the police approached the car, he didn't know that I was a graduate student. He didn't know whether I spoke good English.

Q: I mean he must have when he gave you the ticket and pulled you over.

Yeah, but when he approached me first, he said, "Sir, may I please have your driver's license, registration, and insurance card?" And I said, "Wow, he's going to give me a ticket but he's so courteous."

Q: But that's what they generally say when they pull you over, "Can I see your license and registration please?" Or, "Do you know why I pulled you over today?"

Right, exactly, but the interaction is extremely civil.

Q: Right, but—

And in India it would be like—anyways. So that was my frame of reference. I'm just trying to explain that to you. So my context was totally different, and here he's just following the law.

I don't know, Kyna. I have had friends who were pulled over and the police officer pulled a gun, because they fit the description of a suspect, but as soon as our friends complied with the police officer's instructions and diffused the situation, they were told why they were being pulled over and what was happening, and then they went on their way. Unfortunately, I don't have this same experience like some of the victims you probably have in your mind—

Q: I'm not trying to compare that. I mean because those are different situations and different contexts so I was just trying to understand to what extent you would maybe feel similarly or differently to a lot of the discussions around police brutality that we have today.

But I also say that sometimes there are some legitimate cases of police brutality. There are some very, very bad apples. And if we didn't have body camera, we would have never known of some of these things. I grant you that. But there are some legitimate use of force situations. For example, Ferguson case, I think it was absolutely necessary use of force by the police officer. This guy had robbed a shop, assaulted a shop keeper, by the way, he was a Patel. Did you know his shop was burned down? So nobody talked about

that victim. And then he charged the police officer. Nobody talks about that police officer who lost his job, who had to resign from the workforce. He had to flee the town to save his life. I'm not trying to defend the bad apples here, but we cannot lump all the police officers or all the police shootings into one category. I think the bad police officers should be dealt with and in afterlife they should burn in hell. I have no issues with that. All I'm trying to say, please, every time a police officer uses force against a minority, don't just jump to conclusions that this is racist or police brutality.

Q: How do you think your overall community, however you want to define that, has been affected by 9/11?

See, this had never happened before, that America was attacked on its main land, especially civilians were killed like this. That was mainland or otherwise. And so the reaction was extremely, extremely high- intensity. But at the same time, there may have been some things in people's minds, that, "Oh, these people may not be as American as we think," or things like that, but overtly I haven't experienced anything else.

Q: What about within this Indian American community that we belong to? What do you think their reaction was when 9/11, especially because, yeah we're perceived to be brown and mistaken as Muslim or for other nationalities or ethnicities. But specifically, how do

you think the response towards people of Muslim backgrounds in our community has been? I mean "Indian American" also includes Muslim people.

Right. We are not going to have perfect world, but I still think that United States in general handled it really well.

Q: Can you outline why?

There were a couple of attacks on Sikh people after 9/11, but they were isolated. If you look at the reactions in India, if one community does something, then what is the backlash? So compared to that, there was nothing. If you look at what happens in other parts of the world. Again, this is not a good situation in the United States, but we should just keep it in context of the greater perspective.

Q: Why do you feel like you can compare the situation in India versus the United States like you just did?

That's because these are the two countries that I know well. Plus, these are the two largest democracies, plus these are the two countries who have some legal common bond or legal system in terms of common law, and these are the two countries that have embraced plurality in general and have diverse people, diversity in both countries. But if you look at the interactions, United States is much more civil and law enforcement is much more

effective, and the incidents of violence as a backlash are a lot fewer than there are in India.

Q: That's correct, but there has been a documented spike of violence against people perceived to be South Asian or Arab or from the Middle East after 9/11, and especially after the election.

Oh yeah, and actually Trump's dog whistles, especially Steve Bannon's ideas and issues have created even worse situation because the worst of the people has come out and has come to the forefront, no doubt about that. And actually, some of the rhetoric that they have used has emboldened some of that behavior of overt discrimination and hatred. But overall, still, the United States is way better than any country I know.

Q: What does the word "solidarity" mean to you? And how would you define it?

So in the context of Lech Walesa, it's a different thing, solidarity, or solidarity in terms of German reunification is different. And solidarity in general means being one. No, I didn't understand your question, but I'm just trying to answer the best way I know.

Q: So, like, what personal feelings would you ascribe to the word "solidarity"?

Solidarity to what?

Q: In general! I mean, just because we feel—because we're part of a group that I guess is now a little bit more hyper-visible in this day and age, right? What do you think that means for people, or for yourself, to have that kind of empathetic connection with other people who have or haven't been discriminated against?

I don't see myself as a victim of discrimination.

Q: Well, not victim, but I mean people—

Everybody gets discriminated against. And so, assuming a white person is privileged and somehow that person hates people of color, assuming that, that's also racism and discrimination, isn't it?

Q: Wait, say that again?

Without knowing a person, and that person happens to be white and just thinking that that person has—is a product of white privilege, or whatever, he or she has achieved because of white privilege, and that person thinks of people of color as somehow less than them, just assuming that, that this is how that white person has achieved, that's also discrimination, I think, and bias and racism.

Q: I would agree with the first two terms maybe, I wouldn't agree with the last one.

Which one?

Q: Racism. Because the way I think about in a broad example is that this is a settler country, right? White people pushed out Native Americans from their land, killed them, subjugated them for a really long time, forced them to assimilate. Constitution was written by white people for white people for the most part, granted now people apply it to everyone but, still, there are certain nuances in that document itself that weren't supposed to apply to people of color, right? And so racism, I feel can be a much more institutionalized or structural thing, that white people generally benefit from in these ways.

In the past.

Q: Well, I mean even today. And yeah of course what you described that is discrimination and prejudice, yeah, but this is all besides the point I was trying to make. What I really wanted to get to when I was asking you about solidarity, though was—

But, sorry, let me answer your statements first. Or respond to your statements first. Show me any country that was formed without any violence. Show me. Even in common law, the criminal laws were written to protect the properties of the privileged from the poor. If

you look at the white-collar criminal penalties for white collar crimes, versus the physical violence type of crimes, there's a huge disparity. So it's not just the United States, it's everywhere.

Q: I know this is everywhere. This is a huge problem everywhere. But I'm not trying to take it out of the context of the United States—

Humankind is trying to make progress, and we have made a lot of progress. Look at your own background, Kyna. You are also a product of privilege.

Q: Yeah, I'm not denying that.

And just because of that you had an advantage of either genetics or social status, or the opportunities that you had. It's not your fault, yeah we have to understand that and we have to eradicate the system so a person is of course judged by the content of his or her character and not the color of his or her skin. We also—I also agree that there has to be meritocracy, but it has to focus on equal opportunity and access. But our [unclear] is never ever going to be equal. And when the outcome is not equal, it is going to create a privilege or an advantage that some people think rightly or wrongly, as an unfair advantage.

RIFAT HARB

NOVEMBER 1, 2017

Q: Would you describe yourself as a religious person?

Yes. Yes. I'm religious. Usually, as a Muslim, once you—I mean, I'm religious in the sense that I'm a practicing Muslim. I've done Hajj, I pray five times a day, it doesn't mean that I'm better than anybody else, it just really means something to me because I lived the non-religious lifestyle up until, I would say, my last year of law school. I was not religious at all. And there was a, an experience that I had, which was not the usual, “I was so suicidal and I had this traumatic experience and all of a sudden I found the right path.” I didn't have any of that. Mine was the exact opposite.

After I got a job after law school and I started doing well and I realized that, not all, but most of the things that I really wanted were kind of there. I found a void as to trying to explain what is next. I still had not gotten married at that time, but I was really doing well, in this sort of American lifestyle. And I do not regret it, because it kind of made me who I am, but I just realized that there is more to life than just that. And then, one day I found myself at Barnes and Noble, and I was reading a lot of books during that period, and my last book, I remember, was *Tess of D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy. And I was

looking for another book, and it's funny because it was a completely different world and we don't do that [laughs], go into Barnes and Noble to look for books. And then I saw the Qur'an, and I said, "Wow, the Qur'an in English. It's funny, I don't think I ever really read the Qur'an in Arabic." And I said, "Really? I didn't read the Qur'an in Arabic?" And I was like, almost thirty years old at that time. Of course I read the Qur'an, meaning I would read pages and verses and things, but I never read—never really read the full book from front to back.

And then I said, "Well it's funny, because this is, like, the one book that Allah wrote—or sent his messenger. So, shouldn't I read it, to at least kind of see what message it has?" And when I started reading the Qur'an, I just really felt that it answered me on a level where that sort of spiritual void that I had was all coming together in perspective. And I just felt that, if I can't stop myself from, you know, getting older, if I can't stop myself from—and stop life from taking me in a certain direction, because that's fate. And it's funny because *Tess of D'Urbervilles* is a book all about fate, and that was kind of the theme in that book. So it was very fitting that at that point, I started to really look for something that is higher than me, and it really does make you feel a lot better when you realize that you can try your best and you can do everything right, and hit or miss, but at the end you acknowledge that there is a power higher than you.

And the irony is that I grew up feeling that that position was so superficial and almost—I didn't look at people who were religious in a bad way, but I just always felt like it was an

easy way out, just like, always blame it on “it's not your responsibility.” But then, I realized that religion is multi-faceted, it's not really about this or that, it's not—you could—there's a verse that I read in the Qur'an that says [Arabic]. The true fear of Allah are the scholars. I was really thinking about that, and I'm like, “Why would it say that?” And the more I read about it, I realized that the reality is the Qur'an addresses people who are very simple and addresses people who are very sophisticated, which means that you could read the same book and as a scholar, you realize that the sun is there, the moon is there, the universe is there in a way that you cannot possibly explain as a scientist and as an educated person, you can say, “You know what? I can't really understand it is really sophisticated.” And yet a simple person could look at the same universe, and appreciate it because they have—the Bedouin who lived 1,400 years ago, have verses that talk about his camel and the tent and the sky, and by the same virtue, that person could become a believer.

So I said, “You know what? I think I'm going”—now I'm starting to really get closer to Islam from a position of—I don't want to say power, but I felt that I was young, I was doing well, and yet, that was for me, the best time to acknowledge that in a lot of different ways, I'm weak and I need, sort of—maybe not weak, but I need that spirituality in my life. Because it keeps you focused. It gives you a direction. When I think now about experiences I've had, I can always explain them in the context that you do your best and something will happen that might not be within your control, but that's okay if you

accept that you have only control over the things that or the decisions you can make. And that makes life a lot easier.

That also applies to even my position on certain issues, like there was a time when I would think about the death penalty. I believe in the death penalty. Do I believe in certain things that were very intellectual and very academic and I could really flip sides, my position would flip sides depending on the mood or depending on certain confounding factors or variables that would be involved. When you have religion as the base, it really makes it a lot easier to kind of have a position. And I think I enjoy being religious now even more because I became more—I belong to a very small group of—I hate to say that it's small, but that's the reality. In today's life, there's a new Islamic movement called *tenoureen* [phonetic] or enlightened Muslims, and enlightened Muslims look at religion as being something more about how to make your life positive, not negative. So it kind of looks at all the good things that religion offers you and takes you away from, “This is haram, this is no good, this is forbidden.” And scholars of the enlightened movement say there are only fourteen things that are forbidden in the Qur'an. Everything else is not forbidden. So, you go into books and books that were written by Islamic scholars, and you find out that they are a waste of time. And the reason that I say that, is because they are really trying—their entire sort of project and justification for what they do is trying to control people's lives. You can't do this—you know, music is haram. Women cannot drive. These things are not in the Qur'an. What's in the Qur'an is all the good things, that, you know, you're supposed to be good to people, you're supposed to be helpful, you're

supposed to be good to your family, you're supposed to be good to your parents. So you know, not trying to make myself look good, but my parents now are in need of being taken care of. So that's where you become, or you show that you are a good Muslim, by really taking care of your parents.

My kids, I try to kind of do the best that I can for them. I live in a neighborhood where most of my neighbors are not Muslim. Almost ninety-five percent of them are not Muslim. They're Christian or Jewish or whatever the case may be, and they are very close to my family to the point where about a year and a half to two years ago, we started thinking when my son was born, we were thinking about moving to a bigger house. And the other option was to build another floor in my house. And my neighbors went nuts when they found out that there's a possibility that I was—that we were going to move. The reason I say that, is that you could be—you could fit in as a Muslim, in any society. But the rigid form of Islam is something that I personally do not accept, even though, like I said, I consider myself to be a religious and practicing. Maybe for ISIS or for Al Qaeda I'm a bad Muslim.

So the question is, what form is the correct form of Islam? And people usually say my form, and the other person says my form, but there is good and bad in life. You can't say that, "I see it that way and you see it that way." There's only one way to be nice to your neighbor. There's only one way to help a blind man across the street. You can't really say, "he's no good, I'm not going to help him." It's cannot be built into religion. You can't

justify—some clients of mine, they would do something called credit card hiking. They would steal money from their credit cards and they would say this is not stealing because it's money from the government or the money from credit card companies. Stealing is stealing. There is a universal right or wrong. So I really feel that if you have that in life, and that form of Islam, you could consider yourself being religious in that sense, not the sense of the fanatics. Because I, personally, think that there are groups that you see now that are called “fundamentalists”—they're not fundamentalists. We have fundamentalists! Don't get me wrong. But you see what is referred to now as “radical Islam,” these are terrorists. They're not—they don't have anything to do with Islam. If you kill one, person—there's a verse in the Qur'an that says, “If you kill one person, it's as if you killed the entire universe.” Because you cannot, as a person, be justified. Even if you're gonna act as a country, you don't make that decision. There has to be an Islamic country that goes by Sharia Law. You can't individually decide, “You know what? I don't believe in this, therefore I'm gonna take an action.”

Yesterday, at about 2:59 [P.M.], I was driving by the West Side Highway. And I was trying to make it to my Brooklyn office and at 3:05 [P.M.] there was a terrorist attack there¹. Now, if this person—if I happened not to be in my car and I happened to be walking and he hit me and killed me, he would have killed another Muslim. So, how could you justify that? There's really no justification for it. And that's why it bothers me

¹ On October 31, 2017, Sayfullo Saipov drove a rented truck down a bike path in lower Manhattan and crashed into a school bus, killing eight and injuring twelve cyclists and pedestrians. Saipov is originally from Uzbekistan and came to the United States on a Diversity Immigrant Visa in 2010, which is currently under scrutiny and reform. He has ties to I.S.I.S.

when people like that say that they do it in the name of Islam or I.S.I.S., Allah Akhbar, etc. It has nothing to do with Islam. I felt like I really had to explain that, because the connotation that comes with religious positioning now is a negative connotation. It's automatic! It's almost like you always have to explain and apologize, and you really shouldn't.

Q: Your kids were born and raised here, right?

Yes.

Q: How did you—how do you feel that they're different just because they're from the United States? If at all. Versus you—because you grew up in Palestine and then moved here when you were eighteen—

Yes. Well, the reality is there is a kind of saying that I really like that says—and this is a saying by a caliphate, his name is Ali. Ali [Last Name] is like the fourth caliphate after the prophet and after his reign, that's when you had the Sunni and the Shi'a and the whole war that ensued. So, he said, "Raise your kids for a time different than yours." Which means, that you have to always take into context that this life is constantly changing. And I'll give you an example on that, which is something that I had to kind of even talk to my wife about.

About four years ago, three years ago, my son who is thirteen now, he was ten. And for his birthday, I said, “I think we should get him a phone.” My wife said, “Are you crazy? Why would you want to get him a phone? He's only ten. You know, when I had a phone, I got my phone when I was like twenty-five.” And I laughed because my wife was missing something, that she kept everything almost at a standstill, and she compared herself with him. Meanwhile, so much has changed with technology and with kids, good and bad, that nowadays for a kid to have a phone, it could actually be a good thing for you as a parent because you know where they are, you can call them. If my son is going to walk to the soccer field or to the park, I can know where he is. My wife was comparing him having a phone to her parents telling her that she could not have a phone because, whatever the case may be. Maybe it was expensive at that time, maybe it wasn't available at that time. So you always have to compare, but yet, you don't want to fall in that trap of saying to your kids, “You can't do this because we didn't do that. You can't have this because we didn't have that.” You want to look at the basic—what I consider, I guess the core values that you want to teach them, when it comes around it, you have to admit and you have to accept that it would be different than what you probably would like. Because that's the way life progresses.

I think we are more involved with our kids on an interpersonal level; we're constantly talking, and I feel like with our parents it was more like about the basics. Like it was to get you food on the table, to make sure you are enrolled in school [laughs] nowadays I think we deal with more complicated issues.

But you have to keep the basics. Like, I have to always talk to my kids about Palestine, you know, when there's a demonstration, something happens in Gaza. I wanna make sure that they're involved, that they know what's going on. But yet, it's not just Palestine, because I don't want them to feel like it's them against the world. I always want them to feel like they could go to an event that involves helping people because of a hurricane in Haiti. So the universal values are the universal values, and you want to make sure that they understand that Islam is not really especially—now it's a fight, almost, to try to always make the kids understand that you should not believe what you hear. Because sometimes it's a fight between you and the media. You're trying to explain to them that this is not correct, and this is not accurate, but at the same time when they go to school, they are kids and they also, they want to try to fit in. They don't want to feel in any way—that they are belonging to a bad group. So it bothers me when an event happens and my son's first question is, “Was he Muslim?” Because like for him, it's like almost—he feels like he has to explain that to his friends.

Of course, politically, that's becoming even more difficult now because obviously, we have to also explain that we are at war with the president in a different way and that's kind of difficult because my kids grew up during the Obama years. So everything for them was, “The president is good.” You know, it's something to be proud of and they wanted to be president but now I don't know, I haven't asked them that question again

[laughs]. If my daughter wanted to become president, I'm not sure if she wants to anymore. That's sad.

Q: How do you—because your kids, you said that your oldest is thirteen, right?

Yes.

Q: And that's a couple years after 9/11 happened, so they haven't lived life without 9/11 happening. So how do you—I guess my question is, how do you see the difference between how they think of—because I mean, they're kids and they're growing up versus you were aware of what was going on at the time. How do you say that those experiences are different: growing up in a place, and then—

The thing is, my kids probably do not really know, like you said, life before September 11. They grew up at a time when being Muslim is a tense thing. My wife is hijabi, she wears a hijab, so she could easily be targeted. When she goes, for example, when my wife goes to Florida, her family lives in Merritt Island, which is a very white bread part of America. She stands out without her political views being known. My wife grew up here, she speaks English without an accent, so if it wasn't for the hijab, her and my kids would not—nobody can really say to her that they're Muslim or not Muslim. When we got married, my wife didn't wear a hijab. She chose to wear the hijab. And by the way, the hijab is really just like an ethnic thing more than a religious thing.

My kids do realize that sometimes their mom gets a certain look when they're in Florida. Maybe in New York and New Jersey, that's not really an issue because there are so many hijabis that it's normal. So I know that, psychologically, with it becoming more aware of it, because they now talk to me about it, and they talk to me about having to always defend Islam. Not always, I mean they're still kids, but it comes up. There were comments made by some students, for example, my daughter's class once—sometimes jokes were made. My son once had—one of his best friends, they started calling each other names and jokingly, the other kid called him a terrorist. And it was a joke, it wasn't intended in any bad way, it's just a fact that he knows that he's Muslim and Palestinian. And my son was not offended, I think he was like maybe eight or nine at the time. And he mentioned it to us jokingly at the dinner table; of course, for us, it means a lot more as parents and it's bothersome, but the reality is that you cannot shield them from the outside world. At some point I felt that it would be proactive to actually talk about it with them. Maybe it helps that I have my views, which kind of makes it easier for them to really accept that this is really not Islam. I have a strong view on that.

I kind of did not feel comfortable sending my kids to Islamic schools. And to my brother, who is a big fan of Islamic schools, I said, “It bothers me, the fact that I feel like the kids who go to Islamic schools feel like they—it's them against the world. They are so isolated and they kind of, I think, end up having some probably psychological impact, because they feel like they're different.” And I truly believe that humans are not different. They

could have different characteristics, they could look different, but the more I talk to people—maybe it's the fact that I went to school here and the fact that I had my best friends, Americans who were Jewish or Christian, and I worked with them. I know that the goodness is in people regardless of who they are, and I'm not really saying that just to say it because it sounds good, but it's true. And I look at a lot of Muslims that I don't like and I disagree with, but I'm also thankful that there are a lot of mosques that teach the right Islam. There is a movement now to say, “We have to also look at ourselves and say, 'what is producing these fanatics?’” And you can't always blame it on foreign policy, because you also have—I have to understand the psychology that somebody would—I cannot see, I don't even wanna call him a human being, that guy that does something like yesterday, how he can justify it. And I'm Palestinian, we have the right to be more aggrieved than anybody else, you know? So if somebody tells me it's American foreign policy, that's crap! If you have a problem with American foreign policy, then go and fight the American military somewhere. Don't kill innocent people, because it does not follow.

The struggle that I think that my family and I go through is trying to really give the right—not to fit in as much, but I mean, we happen to be—and I think my kids are too, and my wife as well—we have strong personalities. We're not in any way intimidated or try to fit in or yeah. And always as a human being, you want to be accepted, and there's nothing wrong with that. But not at the expense of detaching ourselves from our religion. Not at all. Like I said, my wife wears the hijab, so that's a mark right there. But it truly is something that—of a struggle to try to kind of say there is a true Islam that is not what is

portrayed by Fox News and by certain outlets that make it to sound like it's a terrorist religion. But yet, at the same time, look, you have to be realistic and say, "But why are these crazy guys coming from certain groups?" And the other day I made an observation: I haven't heard about a terrorist from Turkey. I haven't heard about any explosions or any mass shootings or any Turkish national driving his truck through hundreds and thousands of people. Even though Turkey is a Muslim country. And the reason that that is not happening is that they practice a different kind of Islam and they are not also victims of occupation and oppression. It's a combination of the two. So it's not Islam, because Turkey used to be an empire, but again, you never hear of Turks going around the world, terrorizing people, so it can't be Islam, right? Food for thought.

Q: What was your initial reaction after the events of election night?

Well, I mean, I think Hillary's book "What Happened" [laughs] sums it all up, you know? I honestly—I think I spent a few days after the election thinking that I was dreaming. I think maybe I thought I was dreaming because I believed in the goodness of the American people. Not because of anything else. These things happen, people can choose whoever they want, but I really didn't think—and I always made that argument, that—in fact, President Obama made that argument, he said that he bets on the American people, that they will elect the right person, somebody who is fit for the job. And I believed it, and very recently I was asked a question, "So why would you think that the American people elected Donald Trump?" Of course, it was not a popular majority, but still, for

whatever political system that we have, electoral votes or whatever it may be, he was elected.

And I truly believe it wasn't about economics. I don't think that that middle class in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin really believed that Donald Trump really was their savior. He's anything but their savior, I mean, he's the epitome of the obnoxious rich. So for people to say, and even the pundits, "Look, you know, the middle class, and blue collar workers, they're really hurting," and all that stuff, even thinking that that is true—and I do think that that is true, that they were hurting, obviously that's a fact—they would never elect Donald Trump. The reason Donald Trump was elected, in my opinion, is that he was preceded by Barack Obama. And there was a period of reckoning where racism, however suppressed it may have been, came up and bothered a lot of people, that, "Look, where's this country going?" The president, the President of the United States is a Black man, how bad could it be? It could get a lot worse than this! And the reaction that we got from those states that do not have diversified populations, those guys really freaked out.

The slogan that Trump came up with, Make America Great Again, was devilish to the point it meant so many things to so many people, okay? And that's the reason that now we have the rise of the right, of the Nazi right, because they felt energized that now somebody is really—wants to make America great again. And for a lot of people, they thought it was naïve and whatnot to think that, but it showed in election night. There was no way the experts were gonna be so off on their predictions if it was not for a factor that

could not be measured on paper. I mean, nobody predicted that Trump would win. It wasn't like, "some people think this, some people think—" it was—everybody was convinced that Trump would lose. So if that is the case and he's down by five or six points on election eve, then there is a confounding factor. And that confounding factor is racism. There is no—economics had never been a confounding factor. People—Clinton was elected a similar time, but that's when people felt that they could relate to him, because he said, "The economists are stupid and I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that," and people believed in his ideology from an economic perspective. But with Trump, he didn't really have an economic plan, so you can't really say that. So did I predict it? Absolutely not. Could I have really thought that it could be possible? Again, I believed in the goodness of the American people. Unfortunately, you can't say that that applies to all Americans.

I've become more of a psychiatrist than a lawyer. People come to me sometimes and ask—they have this sort of anxiety and panic and fear of what's next. And everyday, about next, like today, now talking about the diversity visa just because this guy that did the massacre yesterday in the city was an immigrant who came here with the lottery visa. Now Trump wants to ban the lottery visa. I also practiced when September 11 happened, which meant that I represented a lot of people who were detained. Every day I would have two or three new cases for people who were picked up. But at that time you kind of felt that there was, I don't know if I want to call it "justification," but you could understand it, because you felt that it was so horrific. The whole collective consciousness

of this country was shocked, so there has to be a reaction. And I kept on telling people, “Look. If this happened in an Arabic country, and foreigners of a certain ethnic background were responsible, I guarantee you they would be rounded up and executed.” Let's be realistic. So for the government to go after people who were overstays, and to question those that were without papers about their ties, to detain them until they figure out who's here and who's not, and after that we have what's called the NSEERs, which was like a registration system where people would have to go and acknowledge that they're here legally, which even though the ones who were here illegally have to check in with immigration, and to me it was kind of like a big electronic concentration camp where they know who is who. And the people that were without papers there were obviously put in proceedings and immigration removal and deportation.

But the problem with the recent events is that it came kind of like against the round of play. Like Obama was going in the right direction like, “Let's work more on being accepting of each other and coexist and be welcoming to immigrants and doing good to one another.” And then, you know, turn 180° in the opposite direction and start going after these imaginary enemies: Mexicans, Muslims, and we're not even talking about ISIS, we're talking about American Muslims. So that was shocking in a way, because you kind of felt that you couldn't really, not defend it, but couldn't really even explain it to some clients. Of course, there was always—personally, I always believed that that was something that, like I said, was going to be rejected and it was not ever going to be accepted as part of life, and that Hillary would win things would go back to normal, and I

don't think they would go back to normal because he's already started this movement of hate and confrontations. But it definitely affected the community in a way, not just legally like I said, just kind of that anxiety that is chilling to families.

I was talking to an attorney, a friend of mine, yesterday. He's a former prosecutor for immigration but now he practices within the Latin community. And we were talking about how we've become psychiatrists, and I said to him, "You know, even though we're complaining now, at the end of the day, for us, it's really an academic issue. We still kind of—for us it's professional, we deal with it, but you can't really even begin to put yourself in the shoes of a father who is here without a green card, who has—and this is a real case, for example that I have—that has five kids, one of them is autistic, and panicking because he really wants to make sure that his son continues to be treated. So at this point, for him, it's not about a green card. It's really about the health of his child. And when they're hearing about being rounded up and deported, so being Muslim and not having papers and having medical issues for a child, it's really just a nightmare.

To have to deal with that on a daily basis, I have two very busy offices, so every day I hear a story that in and of itself could be reduced to a book because it's so tragic sometimes, where you feel that families are being broken up. To add to that, the travel ban, which clearly is unconstitutional in my opinion and the opinion of many judges, it brings so much acrimony into a legal and social fabric of our society, that it's just, you cannot explain why. 'Cause it certainly does not accomplish anything, I mean, people that

are nervous about certain things are not—they might psychologically feel better that Trump is doing this, but in reality they're not safer. It doesn't change anything. Nobody—People that committed the acts of September 11th were not Americans, Muslim Americans. Muslim Americans—maybe there's like one or two incidents where somebody—San Bernadino, California, was an isolated incident. Other than that, there really wasn't American Muslims, you know, somebody was a nut job. So what happened last week, you really can't control lunatics from doing horrible acts of terror. But from a legal standpoint, it became the new norm. We deal with that every day.

Q: Where do you see the United States generally after talking about all of this discrimination and xenophobia, towards the end of Trump's four years, how—

Well, I hope I hope you're not right, in that he will not finish four years, because that's really my hope. I hope—I'm not gonna lie, my only dream now is—two days ago I was so excited with the indictments, that I was more upset with the guy yesterday, just because he diverted the news from that. So deep down inside, I hope he will not finish the four years. Not just—It's not about me, It's the next generation; how bad is it gonna be for them? Because four years will do a lot of damage. I mean, for us, I'm forty-nine years old, I feel like at this point I've seen everything. I've lived through the occupation in the West Bank, Israeli discrimination and the 1948 borders, so it doesn't really—and as an attorney I handle enough jail cases that I've seen almost everything. But you feel like it could get worse, and you're thinking about this, the past about ten months, we are almost

on the brink of war with North Korea. People think it's not real, but it's real, because it could come from either side. You're dealing with two crazy people, here and there, you have very, sort of, almost hysteric state of domestic affairs where people are on the edge on all sides, and you have that tension with certain people. One of my brother—one of my kid's, I guess he's not in the same school, soccer mates that are on the same soccer team, we knew his family for a long time. We're friendly with them, but I knew that they were Trump supporters and since that time I feel tension. That didn't happen before, like, you could vote for Romney or Obama and it really would not affect your friendship. But I felt that even with—on a personal level now, it left a mark on certain relationships. I hope it doesn't really get to a point where it already has in some states—what happened in Virginia, where you have these, now, Nazis that are coming out of the woodworks and all of a sudden they have a position. It's sad to see the U.S. going in that direction after the accomplishments in the last hundred years.

OLA HARB

MARCH 17, 2018

Here's the thing. The retaliation that happened against Muslims that over that period [after 9/11], it happened mainly against Muslims who are or families who have women that wear a hijab, which is a sign that this is a Muslim family. And of course, I heard some Indian families who were targeted because they cover their head and they were misunderstood for the longest time, Sikh families were also targeted because they were misunderstood for being Muslim and they were killed and they attacked their temple in Wisconsin or Minnesota somewhere up in the north.

But anyway, we personally did not feel any discrimination because we are not—we don't go to the mosque we don't go pray, I don't cover my head. So those were kind of like—even though many people knew we're Muslim and I always make a point of telling my kids always make a point—to my students that we are—that I'm Muslim and that's who I am. Because that's who I am and I got something that I don't want to hide, it's something I'm proud of. But then I remember that night—I have to mention this at the time—when Jalal¹ worked as a state attorney, an assistant attorney at the city attorney's office here in Bartow, and the state attorney himself, his boss, called our house. I

¹ Jalal Harb is Ola's husband, Nabil and Rami Harb's father, and Rifat Harb's cousin.

remember where Jalal was standing and talking to him in the kitchen, and he said, “Are you and Ola and the kids okay?” And Jalal's like, “Yeah, we're fine. Thank you.”

“I want you to know that I heard that Muslim families are being targeted or whatever. I want you to know that if anyone not comes to your house but to talks to you or says something or whatever, I will make sure that I personally prosecute those people. I want you to feel—I want you to know that we love you and you are welcome and you are part of the American family. And don't know you ever in any way feel threatened, blah, blah, blah, I want you to know that I'm 150% percent behind you and law enforcement in Polk County is behind you and any other Muslim family.”

That made us feel good. I mean he didn't have to do that, but it made us feel good and we did feel—I mean, I always feel good about being here about being—I've never felt discrimination in that way. I haven't personally. Now, if my children have, I am not at least directly aware of it. I hear about it later. If that's the case. But I don't really think that they even felt that we're directly targeted, but you know, it's like Nabil and his ideas of his identity and the general environment of discrimination—in general, not specifically against Muslims, but also against Muslims and also against Blacks and also against Indians and also against any non-white American family, there is that. There is unfortunately that discrimination, whether explicit or implicit, it's there. That's it. I've heard of many families being targeted and attacked in mosques. But I personally didn't feel it. I know my sister in law was once not attacked but yelled at and scathed about

speaking Arabic. She lives in the Palm Beach area. And she was in the line at the store. I can't remember where it was, and she was talking to her daughter in Arabic, and a woman behind her said, "Don't you be speaking that foreign language—if you don't speak English, if you can't speak English don't live here go where you came from." Well, she felt intimidated and didn't say anything. I, on the other hand, would have let that woman know what she was talking about. I wouldn't have hesitated. I wish she had done that to me. Oh, I wish she had done that to me.

But luckily and unluckily, no one ever tried that with me [laughs]. People always look at me and asked me, "Where are you from?" My cousin who's a comedian—you haven't met Amar. And you should meet Amar one of those days. Amar is my cousin—actually, his mother is my first cousin, he's my cousin's son. He got a law degree from University of Michigan, but then he decided he doesn't want to be a lawyer. He wants to be a stand-up comedian. And he speaks specifically of the Arab immigrant experience because he himself was born in Jordan, but his parents and his mom lived here. So he talks about his parents' experience being immigrants and his family. And he pokes fun at us, which is pretty neat because it's a great way to deal with that. I'm sure you've heard other immigrants' stand-up comedians, they would kind of expound on that. Oh, I don't know, I brought up Amar and there was something that he said that I thought was—oh no, because he goes like, "Anytime someone asked me, 'Where are you from?' and I say 'I'm from'"—he's from originally from Pennsylvania, from Philadelphia. So he says, "I'm from Philadelphia," and they look at him and go, "No, where are you *from* from." And

he's like, "Where I'm *from* from?" And then he kind of like makes it hard for them. But *from* from means really originally from. Like, "Don't tell me you're from Lakeland, you don't look like you're from Lakeland. Where are you from?" People would ask me—a lot of people would approach me speaking Spanish. But that's that.

Q: The next period I wanted to talk about a little bit was—the way Bush handled this aftermath and how it kind of bled into Obama's administration too, and how he dealt with everything that Bush left for him. And just this War of Terror period—anything that you have to say about it or you would like to share.

I think Bush handled everything very poorly. To me, the source of all trouble is Saudi Arabia. Obviously. The majority of the people who attack who did the 9/11 attack were Saudis and they were bred in Saudi Arabia and then Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we helped them. Inadvertently we helped them so that we can—in the eighties, President Reagan helped Al-Qaeda or helped Bin Laden, all those Muslim dissidents in Afghanistan to push away—or not Muslim, but what's the word that's used? Islamists. To push away the Soviets, the Soviet Union expansion into Afghanistan. So in order to get rid of one evil, we created another evil. That's how it all started. And everyone should and needs to know that.

So we created and we recreated the monster [laughs] like Frankenstein said. But then we forgot about this monster and let monster kind of brew. And then the Saudi regime and the Wahabi Caliphate regime of extreme Islam and madrasa mentality and very conservative, very closed Islamic teaching in Saudi Arabia kind of empowered those people. And then also, those people turned on America after they were done with the Soviet Union. They turned on the Americans, Bin Laden and his group, Al-Qaeda. So basically, what happened was, what I'm trying to establish here, is that when we were ready to face the terror in 2003, we faced the wrong [laughs] the wrong address. We went to Iraq, which was anything but religious. Saddam was very secular and wanted his country to be secular and for secularism, even though he was he was Sunni and there was majority Shi'a. He did not give people a lot of options, which unfortunately, it seems like the thing—it works better [laughs] for than them at least, than giving them democracy. We want to give them democracy, and they didn't know what democracy meant. I remember my dad telling me that they can't expect people to go to sleep and wake up democratic after they've been oppressed. And that's what Bush did. Bush went to liberate Iraq which I have no idea what that had to do and it of course all turned out to be the wrong address. And there's no [weapons of] mass destruction, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So to me, that was very ill-handled in a very ill manner and it led to more trouble rather than solutions.

I'm talking about the Middle East, but I'm also wanting to talk about here because it really also hurt this country in a way that we lost so many American soldiers for not the right

cause. I don't want to say it's the wrong cause. It is the right cause, but it's not the right—it's not the right target. We target the wrong people because, as we see eventually, and lucky for us and for the Middle East, ISIS came out of Saudi Arabia as well. No one can deny that. Because again, that mentality of the Wahhabi Islamists' culture and education led to ISIS eventually as well. Now, there are many political forces that kind of do their thing in the Middle East. I'm not going into that. But I don't think that Bush handled it well and I think it just snowballed on us and on the whole world. Unfortunately. It didn't solve problems, it created more problems. Whether in Afghanistan, or in Pakistan, or in the Middle East, or here. Because we are still suffering [from] the unfortunate terrorism leftovers. I mean, a lot of it is becoming more in a different manner now and different kinds of terrorism, but either way it started a pattern of terrorism in general, I think. Or increase, rather than decrease, or solve that problem. And it's not a problem that can be solved that easily. It's too complicated.

Obama signed up for this. He basically took a mess and tried to fix it. And is not one that can be fixed easily, that involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said we're going to pull out. Obama inherited what he signed up for. It was his decision, he wanted to bring in change, it wasn't anything that could easily be brought on. So he was kind of stuck in the middle of that. And eventually, he ended up having to maintain rather than change it, which is very sad and ironic. But that's what happened. And then our cousin or uncle, Trump, comes in with another whole dialogue or idea to approach that. But I don't really know. I have no idea what's going on now as far as our involvement in the Middle East. I

know we're fighting ISIS. We're helping fight ISIS and maybe we are a bit successful, but I do see a lot of complication and a lot of things, bad things that might happen or hopefully will not. It might, I don't know. But I think we're still, for very obvious reasons, but we're still very closely allied with Saudi Arabia and that's the wrong way to go I think. But then there are so many other forces in the Middle East. There's your Saudi and there's your Iran and there is your—all kinds of a mess that even people that live don't understand.

Q: I mean, and then there's oil—

And that's the obvious reason [laughter], that's an obvious reason, yeah, exactly. Although, although, we have worked hard, and Obama, I have to give him credit for trying to do that, for our independence and energy independence. But it's not—I mean unfortunately, now we're back to probably—not point zero, but we're back to where we're kind of regressing rather than improving in that area. With Trump's idea of not really looking at alternative energy sources rather than sticking to coal, back to the 1700s of coal and oil. So we're probably back to where we started. In that field it's terrible.

Q: Well, since you brought up Trump, what do you have to say about him? The Muslim ban, anything about this climate—

Conundrum.

Q: —this conundrum where everyone seemingly is xenophobic—well, not everyone, but it feels pervasive.

I don't think that this is Trump's worst contribution to this country.

Q: What's his worst one?

I mean, what I want to say is that Muslims are not in the forefront of victims of Trump. Trump's whole idea of demonizing anybody who is not—I don't know what, because if I'm going to say immigrant, but everyone is an immigrant here. I don't know.

But anyway, basically, his contribution, and I hope that ends sometime soon, is that he is turning the country into us versus them all the way, not just with the Muslims and Arabs. I think we are a byproduct, we are not the main product of that. Or we are not the main victims of that. I don't know what to say about him I mean he doesn't know what he's doing. So how can I sit here and I mean, there are so many problems in his person and in his leadership and his premise altogether. The man as a businessman he doesn't know what he's doing. He is up to here, because he obviously can't retain his own cabinet. So I think it will take a while for us to be able to truly assess his effect on this country. And me, as an American, first and foremost, I don't care about being Arab or Muslim in this

case. I feel that I am as an American being disserved. He's taken away my American life—not taken it away, he can't really. But he's affecting the environment.

And I can't—I mean, I do attribute that to him, and I don't know if it was something that was there, an implicit—and covered it, and then he just helped do this cover and opened up Pandora's box. He could have—he might be the reason [for] just opening the box but not necessarily creating what's in the box, and it probably had been there and brewing this whole time. But to have a leader—I mean, it's all about leadership in this country, and we all believe in that. So when you have a good leader, you can actually put aside these discrepancies and differences between people. When you have a not good leader who would capitalize on those, then that's what happens. I think that's what he's doing. I'm not saying that he created all of this, I'm just saying that he facilitated [laughs] the environment that we live in now, and I hate that. And I hate him for my kids—my own kids and my kids in my school—to grow up in this.

But we thought Bush was the worst and we thought Obama was going to bring the change. Well, I guess it wasn't bad enough for him to make a difference on that change. Maybe it had to—it took—sometimes, I like to look at things, bad things, from a positive perspective. So maybe it takes Trump for this country to actually move forward and find out what's wrong with it. Because look at all these women and all the women revolution that's taking place here in this country. Look at teenagers who are out in the streets, who are walking out of classrooms, who are going to D.C. to speak up. Our eighteen-year-olds

having been insignificant and not voting for so many years and so many generations even, that it's time for them not to wake up, but to be woken up, and they have been. By, I think, maybe Trump. Believe it or not, ironically enough, is a good phenomenon. He is a good thing to have in this country because of him, a lot of good things are going to happen. I see that happening. I hope you do too, because it really can't get worse, and it is that turning point in this country's history, that we're going to only get better because it just [laughs] cannot possibly be worse. And I can see that. I can see the seeds of all of that. And I just now hope that a good leader can pull it together, and it could be a younger person. I don't know. Does that make sense?

Q: Yes, definitely. I was actually going to ask what you feel most hopeful about in general. Whether it has to do with this country or—

I'm very hopeful. I mean, as bad as it is, I'm very hopeful. Because I on a daily basis touch base with kids, with seventeen-year-olds, and these are the decision makers, you are the decision makers. So these kids are going to vote in one year or are voting this year, the seniors that I don't have but I see every day, and this whole Parkland movement not that—now, we had [laughs] the Trump and sexual harassment. Trump is part of it. And sexual harassment, you know, caused that to lead to the women movement, and women asking for their rights and for improving their circumstances in life altogether. And then this event with Parkland, having these young kids come out and say, “Enough is enough.” This is where hope is. And I can see that very clearly and I'm very happy to

see that. Because, that's how you—that's how it happens. It has to get worse before it gets much better.

RUPAL PATEL

MARCH 15, 2018

Q: Did you think people interacted differently with each other here after 9/11?

After 9/11, here people are ignorant. They cannot differentiate people in the sense that whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims or following other religion, because religion is a private thing here. But at the same time when I say ignorant they—usually when somebody from here, let's say, generally speaking, a person who is from India. When you ask them what kind of religion is mostly—what kind of religion person follows and people follow in the U.S. or Britain, then rule of thumb is they'll say Christianity is more there. But here they don't think of it like that. So what happens is let's say “India? I don't know whether they're Hindu or Muslim.” Yeah, India is secular, so they can pick and choose like that. But Pakistan is mostly Muslim country, correct? So are some other countries that are completely, I mean, majority religion is Islam there. You can say Bangladesh, you say Pakistan, you can say Afghanistan. Those countries have minorities too, but then they don't think of it.

The first time, I remember, somebody came—when our neighbors came and said that, “Oh, we don't mind if you wear burqa.” And I was like, “Okay, thank you for saying that.” But I wonder has he ever seen me in burqa to come up and say that I can wear my

burqa now? So I know that they are ignorant. They don't know who is who. So if they think that—so in that sense, they would just label everybody who is not like them that is fair or white or Christian. So anybody who was during that time—instead of asking they would just assume that everybody else who is not Christian, any non-Christian is Muslim because we have brown skin. I mean, at that time people were ignorant.

Q: What about after the most recent election?

In Obama I think the—yeah, I don't think it was as much racism, it was more like Democrats doing their own thing and Republicans not liking it. Before that, when Republicans were in power, then the Democrats were not liking it and people are used to that kind of politics. But no matter how you put it all these people were—Yeah, they stick to their views and values and such. But there's the—the bottom line is they are still trying to do good. Even the other half is not feeling that great about it but it is—everything is reasonably good. I mean, when you're trying to make a decision and you have so many people to work with, there are going to be people who are not gonna like whatever the final decision is. So when you have two parties there's always tug of war and that is fine. But with Trump? It is completely different.

When Obama came to power it was like yeah, his views are different. He's a good human being. He wants to do certain things his way. And that's given, he's got elected he's going to do it. He is trying to bring a change in U.S. So, yeah, the people who are set in their

ways are not gonna like it and that's fine. But that did not disrupt the whole country like Trump has done in the recent year right after election and that is what it's just like the—I said I'm not going to talk about it. So that's that. But when you look at Obama he has a wonderful relationship with his wife, his kids. He feels for—when you have a good heart, you try to do good. You cannot do anything and everything that you want to do to—but he's still tried in some—I mean when you try you're going to make mistakes and some of the opposite party magnifies it. That's that. But it was still all good when you talk to Republicans and Democrats. It's just petty fight kind of thing but, if something happens to U.S. they are gonna get together and work together. With Trump it is not the case. He has added so many negative factors under his presidency. He plays with people. He plays with everybody to get his way and I wish his way was reasonable for U.S. Then we're in good shape. But no, he's thinking about himself. That's about it. He's got to win his way and he's going to be the richest person after he gets out of office because that's what his focus is. There is—he has disrupted the whole country like crazy. He's dividing the country for sure. And for what? So somebody else can take over and take advantage of it?

This, now, is not good. If you're talking about Trump election, I don't like it. It is ripping the whole country apart. People to people and it is diver—I mean he is taking that human—the core thing, that basic human to human and humanity—he's making sure that he's taking it to very different level by making people fight by the way he interacts.

Trump is not a good person. And that's that. I don't like him as a human being. I don't

know him personally, but the way he treats women, the way he talks, he doesn't respect human beings at all. I've got nothing nice to say so don't ask me about him.

And in his language, he's a shitty person.

NABIL HARB

JANUARY 8, 2018

Q: Okay, so I know that—again, for the record, the Oaks School was a very small elementary school in Bartow, Florida, and it was a predominantly white and non-denominational private school. So it was very small and again, a lot of white people, but in class sizes that were twenty children or less per grade. And me, being one of the handful of brown people in our class, I immediately recognized other kids who weren't white, although I feel like a lot of the people didn't really make too big of a deal in terms of differences and stuff because I really didn't think too much of it, and when you're a kid you're not always aware of this stuff regarding race and religion. You're made to be aware of it at some point or another. So my question is, can you describe a moment when you realized you were different? And it doesn't have to be elementary school, it can be at any point in your life.

I would say one of the biggest things was when I left [the] Oaks after sixth grade to go to public school at Lakeland Highlands Middle School [L.H.M.S.]. And that was a jarring

experience because it was much bigger and obviously much scarier. Public school, my tiny brown self, also gay, walking into that prison-looking structure to see all these kids was horrifying.

And I remember, one of the first people that I met was this kid named Colton, who ended up inviting me to—I think it was the second day of school—he was very Christian and invited me to F.C.A., which is Fellowship of Christian Athletes. And he said that I should come, that it would be really cool, and that they'd have donuts. And I remember saying, “Yes, sure I'd come,” because I didn't know what else to do, and I didn't know anyone else yet and he was being very nice to me, so why not? But I remember going home and feeling really nervous, like, for some reason my parents would feel weird about that because my family is Muslim. And I ended up talking to them about it and telling them, “Well, I got invited to this thing, but it's for Christian people, so I don't know if I should go.” And my dad was like, “No, you should go! You should go! Go with your friend, it's not a big deal, just go check it out. If you like it you like it, if you don't you don't have to go again.” He encouraged me to give it a try.

So I did, and it was very uncomfortable, but not because anyone made me feel that way, but it was just so not right. I couldn't sit in a room talking about Jesus and hearing people talk about Jesus like that, because to me it just sounded like nonsense. I would've been much more used to hearing something about Islam, and even then I would've been slightly resistant because I've never been that much into religion. But I remember that

was weird, and it was a moment where I was acutely aware of my Muslim identity and the fact that that was very distinct in a context like that. Because no one other than one other girl I'm still friends with, Neshat, ended up being Muslim and identifying that way, so I felt pretty alone in that. And then also that's where I started becoming aware of race things, was at that school. Because kids were so much meaner. Race and sexual orientation things, because obviously those get nitpicked and you get ridiculed for that and so on and so forth. But I would say that F.C.A. "incident," experience, was probably the most—when I was first acutely aware that I was much different than a lot of the people around me. It's stressful.

It's like you gotta figure out how to survive in it. At least that's how it felt like for me, because it was very scary. And it felt like I walked into a food fight scene out of a movie almost, where everything is flying in front of your face and someone's yelling at this person, yelling at that person, these people are friends, these people are not friends, and you should hang out with them and you shouldn't hang out with that—and you figure those things out as you go, especially on day one where you're just like, "Oh, Jesus, where do I go?" And I couldn't find my classes, I remember. I was just so small in that school and it was so big and the kids were so terrifying. I ended up doing what most young gays do, which is befriend the cool girls, be in their favor, which involves being an absolute nightmare to most people around you, which is what I absolutely became. So that way I could at least be in the favor of these "hot" cool girls' eyes so maybe I could get a pass so all the cool dudes wouldn't fuck with me. You know what I mean? I was

hoping that would work, and it mostly did, but there were a couple times where I was, I got—you know, it's unavoidable, I was gay. Like, come on. It was obvious to me when I would look in the mirror and be like, "Geez, alright, let's do this I guess." I even have a fake—I'm not one of those gays who had like a straight voice and a gay voice, like I just talked the one way, and I was not doing myself any favors by doing that. It was an interesting experience. I think it solidified some pretty bad behavioral things that I had to iron out once I got to IB, like in high school, because I was like, "Wow, you can't be friends with people like this, and you can't maintain friendships acting like this." And the hierarchical, dog-eat-dog sort of idea about how you're gonna subject people to you being terrible, god forbid they subject you to them being terrible—you know? I realized that didn't work and I had to move on. I also think it had a lot to do with assimilation, too. I think that my behaving that way was in essence assimilation. It felt like I was working myself into this way of acting that was mirroring how a lot of people around me were acting. And I wasn't so aware of that until recently, really. You're instantly supposed to reckon with these things immediately, you know? And you're just like, "I'm just gonna be quiet and not say anything and see where this goes," or yeah. And then, I don't know. Middle school just happens. It's three years of "wow."

I mean for me, it felt like two because of the one year I was still at the Oaks. And it was different because it was sixth grade and a lot of new kids came that year. They were trying to get some kind of government benefit by labeling themselves as a charter or something like that. It was also some kind of last-ditch effort to keep that school

financially—I mean it wasn't financially floating, it was actually sinking the whole time apparently, come to find out. But yeah, they tried whatever they could. They really didn't want to do that, but I think that they felt that they had to do that. And of course, in the end they shut down after that year and that was it. But it was funny because I was still intending on leaving anyway. I was very excited to go to public school because I thought, “That's where the normal, other kids go.” I was ready to be a part of that, but I didn't know what that meant. It was a lot. But yeah, I mean, I did make some good friends in middle school which was important, some friends who carried over to high school, like Hannah and Leena, although not so much now with Leena. Who else? Oh, Kerry, obviously. And Neshat. She was a friend of a friend; I was really good friends with this girl Katelyn, and then Neshat was Katelyn's other really good friend, so then I met her through Katelyn, and then we both kind of realized—because we never had any classes together. I never had a single class with Neshat, which was weird. I don't know. Maybe she wasn't in the advanced or accelerated program or whatever, but either way we never had a class together, so I never would've met her otherwise, basically. And she was also Muslim. Her family is from Bangladesh and I remember during Ramadan and things like that, we would go to the library together during lunch instead of being in the lunch room and they would let us do that. So we bonded that way and then we became pretty close, but it fizzled out during high school and after. But she's living here again so it's nice to catch up with her. But that was important, she was someone, kind of like a point person for me when I was like, “This person gets it. She knows what it's like.”

I meant that she, like with things pertaining to Islam or haram, for instance, she gets things like that. And for the record, haram is kind of a universal shame word for sinful things that you might do. Anytime you do something bad your mom is like “That's haram!” Like, “Shame on you!” sort of thing. It doesn't mean “shame on you,” but that's what you should feel when that's said to you. And so it's almost like I didn't have to explain things to her. We shared this cultural religious knowledge together that was nice. She also didn't eat pork at the time, so that was obviously, “good, you do get this.” Things having to do with holidays and things, she knew when they were and I knew when they were and we would greet each other as such, which was nice. Yeah, it was things like that; I felt that she understood growing up in that household, understanding the expectations that are put on you by Muslim parents, and to be fair, her parents were more religious than mine. My parents were not really that religious. My dad isn't at all. Barely. And my mom goes back and forth. She'll like try sometimes to be a little more religious and talk about Allah here and there, and I usually don't buy it. I'm like “ugh, come on mom.” It's probably because she's getting older, I feel like people do that when they get older. They get older and they get more spiritual or something. Maybe they have less to do? I don't know. But yeah, so I just appreciated that and her. It was kind of like a safety sort of thing. Like I'm sure you must've felt that way with other Indian kids and things like that. I'm sure that was kind of like an “oh, I know they won't make fun of me for my food,” which other kids would do.

But there was also this other guy, his name was Taher, and he was in my grade. And his dad, funny enough, is—was Palestinian, I should say, and he died, he had a heart attack sometime when Taher was a kid, and my dad and Taher's dad were friends a long time ago back in Israel and Nazareth when they were younger. And my dad remembers when his dad died, it was sad. He ended up moving in, or staying with his mom, who is white, so him, his older sister, and his older brother kind of dropped their Arabness. Like they all had Arab names, like Taher, you can't get rid of that. And his last name is Hamid, but they never knew Arabic, they didn't really identify as Muslim at all. I think they identified more as Christian. And the rumor was that their mom—I know I'm talking about peoples' families on here, whatever, this to me was relevant because I was interested in it—apparently, their mom kind of took them away from their Palestinian family. It didn't seem like it was a malicious thing, but it happened and they stopped kind of keeping in touch with all those people. So they mostly—they were white passing, and I think they just kind of went with that through the rest of time. Because Taher was regarded as cool, very popular, and I remember eighth grade year, we had superlatives that people voted you for, and he was voted most popular for guys and I was voted most talkative. Also, red flag for a gay kid.

I remember he knew that I was Palestinian, I think he knew vaguely that our parents knew each other back in the day, and he was always very nice to me, very cool to me. And we weren't friends, but I remember we would have gym together, and gym is, I'm sure—I didn't experience it as a girl, I'm sure it was still equally as horrifying as it was

for guys. Specifically being, again, a young gay kid in literally a locker room setting, like “This is not right,” like, all the alarms were going off in my head, like “uncomfortable, uncomfortable, nervous.” And I remember in gym class he was super nice and it made me feel a lot better because again, it was very hierarchical. When other kids would see Taher be nice to me, they would kind of not mess with me as much, or they kind of knew, “I guess I’ll leave him alone,” because they wanted Taher to think they’re cool. We were animals back then. Literally, a pack of nasty dogs. It was pathetic. But yeah, those were the only people I went to middle school with that I felt could have understood me. I mean Neshat more than Taher for sure. But it was important to have those—I didn’t feel like totally alone, which was nice. That was important.

“HOW DO I BE NORMAL?”

But yeah, it wasn’t until middle school that I remember getting Islamophobic comments. Like, I don’t remember people saying anything at the Oaks School for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. I don’t remember teachers saying anything, I don’t remember being made to feel weird there, I don’t remember other students saying anything about it. But I remember when I got to LHMS, it’s when “towelhead” comments started getting thrown around and other ones that are horrific and involve slurs that don’t apply to me, you know what I mean? You know what I’m talking about. Horrible, horrible. Anyway, that’s when that started coming up. And you know what’s funny? I actually want to talk to Neshat and I want to ask her next time I see her what her experiences were. I wonder if she—because

she was and still is ridiculously beautiful, like everyone has always been like, “Oh, Neshat!” So she's always gotten—everyone was like—all the girls wanted to be her friend because she was beautiful and all the guys thought she was hot. So I wonder how much that shielded her from Islamophobia or if that still did happen. I'm not really sure, I'd have to ask. I'm curious. Because I know me being young, a boy, gay, and small, I already felt like I had a target on my back, and then I felt like I had two and that they merged and got bigger and brighter. Because I was like, “How do I be normal? How do stay away from this gay shit and then also stay away from this Islamophobic shit?” I don't know how to—trying to walk a straight line. So that was an interesting change. And again, I don't know if I'm blocking stuff out or if I really didn't get anything at The Oaks School, but I don't remember anyone giving me any grief about my identity then. I'm trying to think where else it went and other instances. I mean I don't remember teachers saying anything.

I remember watching—because also, there was Channel One which was the school news that we would watch in middle school and watched throughout high school as well, and I remember seeing stuff on there about the War on Terror because they would do little news updates. And I remember that making me a little bit uncomfortable, because I was like, “Oof, I don't want this conversation entering this room for fear that it reflects on me or something. I want to avoid the conversation all together. I'm not trying to talk about the War on Terror, I'm not trying to talk about 9/11 or Islam at all.” I wasn't trying to change anyone's mind, I wasn't trying to enlighten anyone or show them what Islam was,

I was not one of those kids. I was fully avoiding the label and trying to not identify that way. And I think about if that maybe—because I feel like there could have been several factors that led me to not being interested in religion and push me away from it all together, and I wonder how much being gay had to do with it, how much assimilating into American culture had to do with it, how much my parents not being religious had to do with it. Probably all three.

Q: You mentioned the War on Terror; that's a good segue into my question about the War on Terror. I mean I guess you kind of already touched upon it, but I was going to ask what you remember about Iraq or Afghanistan, or the US invasion on Iraq and Afghanistan, all of the things that have happened as a result of that, Abu Ghraib, Chelsea Manning exposing—Wikileaks and all that stuff. But also I remember in high school still not understanding why we had gone into Iraq at all, other than “Saddam Hussain is a dictator and he doesn't like democracy so we're trying to make the world democratic by getting rid of him.” I guess the way that it had been explained to me was just, “Oh, well if those terrorists are trying to kill us...” And I'm like, “I don't think they were Iraqi.”

Nooooo. [Both laugh] Not until we did what we did were they, you know? They weren't Iraqi and now they are.

Q: Yeah, so I remember—and I think I talked to Ryan about this too, was not—because you said weren't trying to have a conversation with anyone about Islam, 9/11, any of

these wars or involvements in the Middle East or anything going on there for that matter, but always having to deal with it in certain ways, or always seeing it around. And I was just wondering, how'd you reconcile with that? How do you remember from like middle school or high school, having these kinds of forced discussions around it?

I always did feel like I was in the shadow with Islam, 9/11, wars in the Middle East. I had to—it felt like it was a responsibility to distinguish myself from it, like separate myself from it if I was going to claim anything about my identity. And same with being Palestinian as well, because that has its own separate context of being profiled as radical prior to, much prior to 9/11. And that was actually, funny enough, the first thing I was aware of, was that I was Palestinian and that I was different, because I was friends with Jonathan and Evan, and Uzi is from Israel, which is their dad I should say, who is really good friends with my parents. And that was the first time I was like, “Oh, wait. My Arab identity manifests in this way because I'm from this specific country.” But then as I got older, after 9/11, it was a whole wash. Now it's me and everybody else from that area, we're all going down together. And I remember actually knowing a lot about—by the time we went to or invaded Iraq, wasn't it 2003? By the time that happened, I remember being up on it and knowing. I remember knowing about weapons of mass destruction, because my dad was very interested in those things. He was always watching it, constantly watching it. Always talking about George Bush and Dick Cheney, and for god's sake, Donald fucking Rumsfeld.

Anyway, and so I remember knowing about that, I remember vividly when Saddam Hussein was killed and seeing those images. And I remember knowing that—I remember feeling that that was wrong. Distinctly having that feeling. And it was funny, because being American, when we would go back to Nazareth to visit family and things like that, we'd always get comments about “our friend Bush.” Like, *my* friend Bush. And my family would be like, “So how's your friend Bush doin'?” Obviously with knives in their voice, and I'm like “he's not my friend.” I'm in early high school or middle school, he's not my friend, you know? And I always got that underhanded tone for being American, and I would've gotten it even if 9/11 hadn't happen and Bush wasn't doing what he was doing in the Middle East. But I think that was a way that being American in this place is now problematic, but being Arab in my home where I see America as my home is also problematic. So it's not like I couldn't fully win, I mean, I wasn't ostracized for being American or anything like that, but I did—I was made to feel like I had to answer to that and that I had to live up to some kind of standard in their eyes because I was benefitting from this War on Terror. Which I still reckon with because I don't know what kind of cost benefit analysis we could do there, but as an American and as an Arab. But I mean, that's not for this interview. It's cost, cost, cost, cost, cost.

I remember being aware of these things and knowing about the politics around it and knowing that I felt like actively uncomfortable because of it. It was an interesting time. Very weird to grow up with that going on. Because it wasn't the forefront of my thinking

then like it is now. I wasn't so actively thinking about being Palestinian and being Arab and having a Muslim family. And I think that's because I appreciate it now and I really like it now and I'm trying to make up for lost time, for all these years that I was pushing it away and trying to take these labels off of myself, which is impossible. So it was bizarre to think about it so much then, but it wasn't because I wanted to think about it at all. It wasn't because I was interested in thinking about it. It was because I felt like I had to be aware of that so that way I knew how I was being seen by other people. Because that's also a big part of being that age. You're already worried about your body, you're worried about what clothes you wear and how you look, and who you're friends with and all this dumb shit, and then here you are, you know, brown or anyone who's marginalized, I mean, even kids who are Latinx or Black, you know what I mean? We all have our separate issues, like you being Indian. We have to grow up in these times self-conscious as our human selves, a body that does biological nightmarish things, and then on top of it you have to reckon with this other identity where all these things are getting thrown on you and you're not ready to conceptualize these distinctions quite yet. At least I wasn't. I feel like a lot of people aren't. Like you're just a goddamn kid, you're supposed to play, you're supposed to have fun. And I know you're supposed to be insecure and these things are part of growing up, but I don't think all that trauma is necessary. I think obviously racism and shadeism¹ and things like that really hammered onto us, and affected how we grow up through these things.

¹ Shadeism, or colorism, is a form of discrimination based on skin color; typically, lighter skin is considered more desirable and a sign of wealth.

Q: Do you think, of course it's specific to the day and age we lived in, continue to live in, but I still have a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that 9/11 is such a flash point. Because people who were not there when it happened—I guess we're only now more cognizant, so definitely people ten years older than we are who were in their twenties and older and saw what happened, they weren't sure if this was going to be how big—the aftermath was going to be big and it turns out it was so huge and it dictates so much of how we do things now, how we see ourselves as brown people, how brown people are generally perceived to be, or all these labels and things like that. I don't know, not that it's unfair, because everything is unfair and you can't choose when you were born. That's unfair by the very nature of it, but you can't control it so I guess that's fair because no one can control it. [Both laugh] But I don't know, I just think it's so weird and bizarre. Do you feel that way?

I definitely think about being Arab and Muslim at this time, existing around and coming to be—or growing into yourself at varying stages around that time is very interesting. I remember—how long ago was that, seventeen years ago? Because I remember going to visit—we visited New York City in August of 2001, before school started that year, we went and stayed with Rifat and Tal'aat [phonetic], his brother, and I think Rifat was married at the time and they were living in their apartment. I forget where it was. Anyway, somewhere around there, it might have been Jersey City. Anyway, we went, and I remember hearing about them talking—after that happened one of the first things

our family was thinking about was, “Oh my god, what about Rifat and Tal’aat? Are they okay? Were they there? Were they nearby? What's going on?” And we heard from them they were fine, but I remember, now that I think back on it, them going through that and me going through that—and I know they lived there, so that was much different because they were geographically affected by it and their work was affected and everyone's lives were completely changed in their routines and everything, whereas that wasn't the total case for us here at all, because we could still go to work and stuff. I think about how he was a man by then, he was older, he had grown up, he was done with law school by then, and I was still so young. So it is interesting. And actually, this interview is making me think of more questions I have for other people too, like wanting to know how him and his brother, Rifat and Tal’aat, worked through that, living there specifically, that's so rough.

All the way down here in Florida we'd get stuff. It's funny, my dad's sister lives in South Florida with her two kids, and she gets so much Islamophobic reactions than we do here in Polk County, which is so weird. My mom and I maybe once when I was a kid, maybe, but we never—my mom has never been given shit for speaking Arabic in public or to me. And I don't know if she has relatively lighter skin, and maybe people don't see that as Arabic right away, because I know my aunt in South Florida, she's lighter than me because, for the record, I'm brown, like, darker brown, kind of on the darker end of not non-Black Arabs, and she, her, my aunt, her daughter, I think maybe twice or three times have been yelled at by people for speaking Arabic to each other in public because they

obviously, I mean you look at them and, “Oh, they're Arab, like duh.” Tan skin, really dark long hair. Or Middle Eastern, I should say. I don't know why they would face more Islamophobia down there. It is more, technically more liberal down there by Miami and Boca and things like that. It is weird. It's pretty Arab down there, there are a lot of Arabs in Delray Beach. There's a lot of Arabs down there, and then there's a lot of Arabs in Tampa. Those are the two big hubs in Florida, and it's funny because I wouldn't expect that. I mean there's Arabs here in Lakeland, but almost none of them are hijabi actually. I can think of only one family that I know of, and we're actually very close with them. Their mom and grandma are hijabi. Other than that, every other Arab family that I know, none of the women are visibly Arab or Muslim. Most of them are very light, very, very light skinned, so you honestly wouldn't even know if you saw them. Or at least you wouldn't expect.

I'm trying to think of some of the comments that I have received about being Arab. It's funny, because often times, and this is something I've been reflecting on a lot, it's kind of been disturbing me a lot, but I haven't felt more overlooked than when I have been overlooked by a friend, you know what I mean? In terms of identity and things like that, like when someone forgets essentially that you're a brown person or that you're Arab or that you're Muslim or that you're Palestinian, they forget these parts of your identity because they're so close to you that they assume, “We're just the same, we have the same issues, we think the same, we laugh at the same things, so we go through the same things and we've got the same base.” But that's just not true. And I can stomach other people

being racist to me, random people being racist to me, because I got a couple comments in New York, I got some in Boston. Coworkers would say terrible things about other Muslims in front of me and then I would get the whole, “Oh, but you're American enough, so you're fine.” Like I got the pass because they know me and because I don't have an accent and because I'm not praying all the time, so I'm safe in their eyes, which was so annoying. But yeah, that's kind of been the hardest thing, is with close white friends of mine, just feeling like—and it's never an aggressive thing, it's always this sort of slight sometimes. They just make some kind of comment or just go off the cuff about something, forgetting completely that I'm sitting here, I'm of a different culture, I'm of a different mindset than you and you have no idea of how the things you're saying affect me based on that, because you've forgotten. It happens with being Palestinian, and it happens with being Muslim, where people just completely forget that I have these other things that inform how I think and how I feel and how I see myself. And it's very, very disappointing, and I'm currently, even as a young adult, struggling with how to talk about that with close friends. Trying to be visible in my entirety instead of the things that are in common. I want to be seen for my differences as well, and obviously I don't—I am different from you, we are both friends, we're close, that's why things work. We understand each other, we have the same sort of lingo, we have shared knowledge about certain things, but at the same time I'm bigger than that. I'm bigger than just our friendship and the things we share. And I'd like that to be recognized. I don't think that's crazy. And I'm sure you feel the same way too. It's an interesting thing, having white friends, and I often think about how I—like, what's the best way to maintain those

friendships while keeping myself mentally stable? I know that sounds harsh, but it's like, after a certain amount of time, there's only many times I can explain something to someone. There's only so many times I can be like, "Remember this? Remember that I am this thing that you keep forgetting for some reason?"

I just listened to, and I told you this before we started this, I listened to an interview with Ta-Nehisi Coates and he talks about how as—this whole Harvey Weinstein thing that's happening right now, as a man, he had this urge to be like, "I'm not like that. I'm not like that. I'm not a man like that, I've never done anything like that to women." He was saying that he understands that he's inseparably tied to the things that men do because he's also a man and he benefits from that, and he was saying how he took women coming forward and actually being like, "This is what sexual harassment looks like, this is what we deal with," for him to really understand. He knew that catcalling was a thing. He knew that women were demeaned and were treated differently, but he didn't know how big it was, and so he talks about how he related back to when he first wrote *Between the World and Me*, talking about being a Black father and a Black man in America and how he had to do all of this explaining so white people can understand. This horrible Harvey Weinstein thing with his male privilege was showing him, "Oh wait, being in the role of the person who explains things is a valuable thing." It kind of made him think of all the questions white people had, he understood them a lot more because he was at first like, "Oh, I don't want to have to explain all of this to them, it's annoying. I wrote it in the book, read the

book, it's all there. Why do I have to do all of this extra labor?" But he understood that sometimes you really just have to tell someone and be like, "Look, this is it."

And so I think—I just listened to that today and have been thinking about it since. Maybe it just takes being the person saying, "Look, I'm going to go out of my way to just explain this to you, just so you know." Maybe there's nothing wrong with that. Maybe that is—because a lot of time people are like, "I don't want to go through that extra labor," which is totally fair. I was just saying, there are only so many times you can tell someone the same thing or explain your identity to someone else, but I still think that communication is important. So I'm trying to employ that in my relationships with my white friends, whereas when I'm with you, obviously we're different, we're not from the same place and we don't have the same religion and we don't speak the same language, but there's still that shared people of color experience. You deal with your own microaggressions and things that people will come to you with as an Indian American woman and I have my own set of things I get, but I think the fact that we separately deal with that makes us be like, "Oh, I deal with it this way, she must deal with it in her own sort of way." That's the underlying—and I know it's a bond that most people of color can have. I remember Hannah and I too. And she's from South Korea, a completely, totally different context, but still being a woman of color, she gets that. So I always feel that safety, like, "They're a person of color, they get it for the most part." We're kind of going to get what we go through and that we have been through things and that I can hopefully expect, and I have been let down so many times, but hopefully expect that it's kind of safer. That I won't get

microaggressions about my race and it's expected that I don't do that them too. We're not going to be racist to each other, hopefully, which, again, has blown up in my face with a lot of different people, including Arabs. For Christ's sake, come on. But yeah, and that definitely cannot be said about white people, you know? It's very interesting, especially in this post-9/11 time.

“IT’S LIKE NO ONE IS SAFE”

Q: I feel like with—just putting the label “post-9/11” on something, it still applies, but I think the farther and farther time progresses away from September 11, 2001—I'm not saying that things aren't still dictated by it because clearly foreign policy and all these other things affecting stereotypes and affecting how people interact with other people, so not to say that it's divorced from that because it's not. They're not mutually exclusive, but there has been a type of sea change, or not sea change, but shift in the way that people interact with each other after Trump got elected, during his campaign, this whole—all of these discussions about safe spaces, political correctness, this and that and the other, I think it was taking place and occurring well before Trump was in the spotlight too, but at the same time it's been amplified because we have all of these white nationalist groups, these neo-Nazi groups coming out of the woodworks, not just here but elsewhere. Also with ISIS and their development and expansion and with Russia and all of this stuff happening there and their involvement with certain things and then so many other

unrelated things, it's a shit show.

It was like there was a fire going and Trump came and just made it bigger. Like that's all that happened. Obviously 9/11 set the stage for how everything would go after that, and then obviously issues with Black Lives Matter, police brutality were coming to light before Trump was even a thought for the candidacy. But he came and just made it so much worse. So haphazard, so haphazard. First of all, Twitter can't be a thing anymore. I don't get that, I think it's so horrible, I think if we go to war because of a fucking tweet, I don't know what I'm gonna do. I really don't know what I'm gonna do, like, that's shameful. Is that what the history books are going to have? An Internet comment— [sighs] anyway. God. We'll never live this down. We'll never live this down. But yeah, with the Muslim ban and the wall, he's just over everyone. He doesn't want Arabs over here, he doesn't want Mexicans over here, he doesn't like Black people, you know what I mean? He's just destroying all of it. It's like no one is safe. And at least I can't take it personally as an Arab [laughs], no one's safe so at least it's not just me, whereas with George Bush it kind of felt like it was just us. And then poor Obama.

Q: Poor Obama?

I struggle with thinking about him, because I know how complicit he was, obviously, in what went on and what he helped perpetuate in the Middle East. But the more I read the

more it opens up as a much more complicated situation from his end, just in terms of—I don't know, maybe I'm completely wrong, and I'm totally fine with that too, but from what I understand currently, just the politics situation is difficult to work your way out of or back track out of that situation once you've inherited this really entrenched ground war, is what it was. It was not, like Vietnam style—and now worse because it's lasted longer than anything we've ever been entangled in.

Going back to Trump, it's been a much worse time. Much worse. It's crazy. And I thought, or I kind of considered maybe it's because I am reading more now, I'm more aware now, maybe Islamophobia isn't on the rise, it's just I'm reading about it more now [laughs], but like no, it is. All of this is getting worse. Everything is on the rise. It doesn't matter. So it's difficult, and you know, it's interesting because on the one hand you feel oppressed, but you see so many people talk about it and who show support, which is nice. He can talk about a Muslim ban, he can try to institute that as best as he can, but I still see so many other Americans who completely disagree with that and think it's a horrible thing, it's nasty. So that in the end helps make me feel better. Because I'm always trying to not work myself into a hole, like a depressive hole of “fuck this, nothing I do matters, everything is crumbling down around me. If I succeed or fail, Trump is still going to do what he wants to do no matter what.” But it's nice to see people not buying into that, and further, to see some people back track their vote, like, “Oh shit, I made a mistake.” Which I'm open to thinking about giving them a pass [laughs]. I'll think about it. That's the nicest thing I can do I think, at this point.

But yeah, I don't know how to—I also worry about how people I'm around are complicit around all these things and really tacit, invisible ways. I mean, even thinking about people who voted for Trump, like having people who I have known for a really long time and finding out they voted for Trump, like, you just put your fingerprint on these issues now. That's what it feels like to me. I don't know, some people would say that I'm over exaggerating or I'm generalizing too hardcore, but it's like, you made a pointed political decision, and you're gonna have to live with the ramifications of that. And so do I [laughs]. And I'm living with that right now, we're all doing that right now. And if I have to deal with this, then you're going to be held accountable to your shit. But yeah. I don't know. It's weird, but it's also hard because now I can't divorce my Arab identity from my Palestinian identity and being Muslim in the context of Israel. Because it's a different context than anywhere in the Middle East. Obviously it's a “Jewish state,” also having a lot of orthodox Christians who are Arab who live there as well. So it's—I like that—I've always loved that that was a thing, that Jews, Christians, and Muslims always lived in Palestine, because I just think that's so fascinating, and I wish I could've seen what that looked like in it's pure form. I wish I could go in 1945 and see what that shit looked like and then leave before it got hairy.

But yeah, so it's hard for me to think about that, because I also have a lot of—my family is close friends with a lot of other Arabs in town in Lakeland, and some of them are from Egypt, we know some people that are from Syria and other places. So, I was always—

being Palestinian even in the context of hanging out with these other Arabs, that becomes a highlighted difference as well. So it's interesting to think about how that branches out in those spaces alone. And I also think about—I guess I should say that I think about how now being Syrian for people makes them think about their Arab identity different than I would as a Palestinian and how there are vast political differences in those movements that happen in Palestine, in Syria, and also progressives in Palestine are very different than progressives in Syria. And same with radicals, which is a weird thing to think about because at the end of the day, we all get painted as the same thing in Americans' eyes, like living here. But it does make it harder to navigate those relationships, especially with Arabs. I've always had fraught relationships with other Arabs around me. They've always been much too conservative for my taste. And obviously I'm gay, so I have a lot of expectations right there, which are not often met with other Arabs. And I don't want to be one of those people who are like, “Arabs are inherently homophobic,” which is not true. But you know, I mean I guess I deal with homophobia from everyone, it's not restricted to anyone one group.

Q: What do you remember feeling on election night?

It's funny, I don't remember any details about that day prior to the night itself. I remember feeling anxious. I usually feel anxious. I even felt anxious about the Roy Moore election, and that doesn't really affect me because I'm not in Alabama. I'm always anxious around elections. I guess it's just the finality of it? But I remember being specifically anxious

about this one because of all the factors that were going into this election and all the issues that were being talked about and how they were being talked about. It's funny, I also remember with the election with Mitt Romney and John McCain, I remember all three of those elections the most. I remember Bush a little bit, like, Gore/Bush, like barely. It was a while ago. Yeah, I remember that, and I was like, "Wow." And that's the biggest memory I have of that. I don't remember Clinton being our president, really. Like I don't have any memories of that, but I think that's where my political memory starts, at Gore/Bush 2000.

But yeah, I remember for Trump, for that election, I went—I didn't go anywhere, I actually was in my room with Jonathan, and we were like on our laptops watching the results come in together anxiously. And we didn't really know what to expect, like it was kind of coming a little bit neck- in- neck through most of it, but I felt very anxious. Because I knew. I think so far, it's kind of what I expected, what we're dealing with right now. I didn't see total collapse quite yet, which is not what we're dealing with obviously, but I did see what we're seeing now. I did expect for racists to be emboldened, and I expected a lot of the xenophobic shit, I mean he was talking about the wall for so long, he was talking about the Muslim ban, he's tried to follow through with those things. I remember that stuff.

I also didn't feel that good about Hillary. I didn't think she was going to be good for the Middle East either. She has a really bad track record for being super militaristic and I

don't trust that. And either way, I knew it was going to be a mess, because again, I didn't really trust her to handle any of this conflict well. She's very much a "carry a big stick" type of lady, and I still voted for her. I wanted that. I still wanted that over what we have now. But I don't know, I guess it's hard to think about what could've been. There's literally no use. Especially now after finding out that Hillary had the whole DNC bought and sold, for Christ's sake, give me a break.

It's nuts. It's nuts, and it's only a matter of time before people start influencing our elections. That's all we've done for so long, is just influence elections or just outright choose who's going to be the leader. It never works out well.

So, I remember that deep-seated anxiety I shared with most everyone else regardless of race. I mean a lot of white people were very upset. Not most, of them, apparently, not most of the voters, but most of the people that I was around. I knew that it was going to be bad for Arabs, because again, I said, he had already talked about a Muslim ban, so we were like, "Great. Here we go," and then it happened. And then things with Syria have been a mess, and he's been horrible about that too.

And that's another interesting thing, kind of going back to the differences and the political ideologies based on nationality when it comes to the Middle East, because being Palestinian, I'm very wary of the West's military intervention into anything that happens. That's how Palestine became Israel, because of the West's, and specifically Britain's,

military influence, and I think that has really made me think much differently about the U.S. Because I remember when Donald Trump did the airstrike in Syria against Assad, someone I know who is Syrian was extremely about it, was very happy that he had done that, that he had taken a violent step. And this person was very thrilled with what they saw, so much so that they said something about being “Team Orange” or something like that. It was a mess. It was an absolute mess! Because how in that moment can this militaristic action make you foam at the mouth so hard, that now you're talking about how you like Donald Trump. Is that the same—you share a common interest around missile strikes? So it's like, oh dear. That is to me a deeply, deeply problematic way. And her whole family felt the same way, you know what I mean? Because the way that they see that, it's like, better that we kill Assad—anyone else other than him. My end, and a lot of Palestinians I know and other people from the Middle East are like, “Okay, well, not Assad, I get that, he's terrible and no one's trying to defend that, but who would fill that gap? That, we cannot be sure of.” Because Egypt was a hot mess as we saw. A hot mess. And Syria is even more destabilized, is even more decimated, and we already know they're a stronghold for ISIS, so who do you think—the second highest ranking power is ISIS in that country behind Assad. If Assad is gone, there is an obvious replacement. So that's an unfortunate thing for me, but it's interesting to see where the values lie in different Arab Americans in the States. Because it took an effort like that for them to, at least in that moment, and I don't know where they're at now, we don't really speak for reasons relating to this kind of logic, but so I can't speak to if they still are talking about “Team Orange” or whatever, my guess is not. But still, it's interesting to think about

where their line is. What does he do that works for you? And what does that look like and why? Because I think there's political clout to that. I think that that's a—it seemed to me like a really revealing moment for her, where I was like, “Oh, this is saying a lot about you.”

And they're not alone in that kind of thinking with a lot of Arab Americans here. I mean conservatism runs strong in Arab Americans. And I think it'd be interesting to see how people reckon with their conservatism and also be marginalized as they marginalize others, because that's not something I can quite speak to. Because being gay has made me a target for just all kinds of shit from Arab Americans and Arabs back home even in Israel, my family. So I can't really speak to that, but it's interesting. I don't know, it's hard. There's not solid representative of Arab Americans in the way that we think, in the way that we feel, because like I said, our nationalities are all gonna make us—we all come from different contexts. And then we come here and then we share some of the same hate, but I think our contexts make us conceptualize it differently. I think I've said this too before, there's something interesting in being Palestinian that really affects the way we think about politics and everything like that, because of what we have specifically been through, that Lebanese people can't say that they identify with, or Jordanians, or anyone from the Gulf, or really anywhere else. And you know, I don't know what it's like to be Saudi Arabian. I can't imagine what it's like to go over there and live in that country.

I guess we'll just have to see how all of this goes. For Trump to talk about a Muslim ban and then still be somehow looked upon in favor by some Arab Americans, I think that really opens the complexity of these things, which I didn't even consider. Even I thought it would be a lot more black and white than this is. But yeah, it's a complicated thread to follow, and I don't really even know how to think about it without immediate disgust and repulsion and anger at some of the things people say, because I think about stuff like, again, like I said, when has America, or anyone in the West's guns and tanks and planes ever helped? Never! [Whispered] Never. Never. Never. I don't know, I can't identify with that. That's just where I'm at. And I'm nervous. I'm trying to be hopeful.

I have been personally focusing on how artists and writers that are Arab American and Muslim, or just Arabs and Muslims, or even just Muslims, how they think about these issues and how they work through it. Like Farah for instance. I really am fascinated by her work and I feel like I learn a lot through her work and things that she does. Or even reading what Leen or Loureen or Najla say, their perspectives, because they're so smart and they're so well-spoken, like, they write so well. It's making me feel more hopeful now that I can start to see other Arabs that I think share similar political ideas and also are teaching me so much more. And it needs to be pointed out that it's all women. Like, these are all women. I think there's something really big going on right now with Arab women, and I think that they need to, and I hope, will have a much larger role in our collective future, as Palestinians or just as Arabs in a Western context. With people like Linda Sarsour for instance, I really am so excited to see someone like that, not only

because she's Palestinian and hijabi, but because also she's a woman, a Muslim woman, an Arab American woman who is having a voice over a loud speaker. People conflate wearing hijabs with silence and docility and being subservient, and here she is screaming. Not screaming, you know what I mean, having her voice heard and being loud and being part of the Women's March, even. Large movements that are going on in America, and here's this hijabi woman who's in it. I think that that is setting a good precedent for the future, I'm hoping.

I'm trying to focus on more hopeful aspects of this and not think about the clown that is our president. Because I know I'm going to disagree with him and all of his cronies until the end of time. I don't care. That's not where my conversation is, that's not where my effort needs to go. I'm personally interested in learning from all these radical revolutionary women here and abroad and trying to see that as some kind of beacon, because that's been a really, really important thing for me. And something I'm excited going back home, or back to Israel and Palestine, is getting in touch with other queer Arabs. I want more of that perspective as well, I wanna see what other people think. Because for the longest time it seemed crazy that there would be another gay Palestinian, which I know is sounds stupid because, like, how? Statistically, obviously, there's so many others. But growing up here, being closeted, going back home, not seeing another gay person, not knowing if anyone else was gay, it really felt so isolating. I didn't think anyone else like me would exist. And then I remember when I lived in New York City, this was the gay pride parade of 2014 or 2015, there was a float for an organization called

alQaws, which is a queer Palestinian organization based in Jerusalem. And that blew my mind. I was like, “What?! Gay Palestinians?! Where?!” That was very exciting for me, to not feel so alone, and then to finally find other Arabs who were of a similar mind.

Because I just clash, like I said, I think earlier, I clash with so many other Arabs that I was around. So many. Like I said, they were too conservative, they weren't radical enough, or they were only selfishly interested in Palestinians' rights and did not give a fuck about other people around them, or would be pro-Palestinian to such an amazing and respectable degree but then would say a racial slur. Like, what? And that would throw me so off, I seriously would reel after that. And there was one time in particular, a friend of my dad's, my dad's known him for a long time, he's very active, and not to out people, but I don't give a fuck, it is what it is. He was big in Palestinian movements in the West Bank and things like that, and I won't name names, but he was at my kitchen table and he said something. He used a really, really, really charged, anti-Black term, and I couldn't sit at that table anymore. Because I just thought to myself, like, “How are you sitting here, talking about Palestinian rights, saying we're so dispossessed and we're oppressed, and it's hard for us and we're battling on more than one front and drop a term like that? So that's all you care about? That's all you care about. Really? That's all you see? You and other people like you?”

I get it, you're trying to do something good for your people, but if you're not helping out other people—there are Black people in Israel. A lot of Black people. And they're Arabs,

they're Muslims, they're Christians, and they're Jewish, and they deal with so much anti-Blackness here, over there, fucking everywhere. Anti-Blackness, I personally believe, is a global phenomenon, and it's probably been proven and I haven't read it yet. So it just invalidated everything for me. I kept finding these grave pitfalls in these peoples' logics, that to me just deemed everything else almost useless. Like this isn't the revolution I want to be a part of. I'm not cosigning this anti-Black shit. If I have to get better by putting someone else down, what's the point? That's what's happening here. That's what we're talking about, being oppressed as Arab Americans because white people prioritize their safety and their whiteness over our existence, and we're doing the same thing to other people. No. I just had so many—it was a struggle for a very long time, thinking, “Maybe I'm just never gonna understand or I'll never find other Arabs that think like I do, maybe they're all just super conservative.” But then I said, meeting all these other really amazing Arab American women, and also Arab women from the Middle East, it helped me reframe my idea around my own identity and being Arab and appreciating it in a different way.

Q: Well, this leads into—this is a question that I like to save for later usually, but I guess I'll ask it now because it's really relevant. How would you define the word “solidarity” and what does that word mean to you?

So I guess that does kind of wrap into what I was just saying. Solidarity to me is support, but not even just support. The kind of open, vulnerable support, where you're here to not

be their crutch but you're here to assist in ways that are sensitive to the situation.

Solidarity to me isn't calling yourself an ally, it's not the showiness of what it's kind of become for a lot of people that I've seen. I guess it's hard to define. It's one of those things where it's like, you know it when you feel it or you see it, what really good solidarity could be. Because there's a lot of times when people think they're standing in solidarity with you but really they're just drowning out your voice and talking for you and instead of you, which is an issue and really doesn't help. But I don't know—I'll bring up Emily, for instance. Emily Helm. She's a good friend of mine and she's white. And she, to me—she's not perfect by any means, and I don't mean to present her as such, but Emily always presented me, just the way that she acted, it was never something she told me, I just always watched how she was. Because she was really involved in the farmworkers' movement and in the Youth and Young Adult Network at U.C.F. [University of Central Florida], she was the president of that. As a white woman working with all these Latinx and indigenous communities who are heavily exploited for their labor, I think really made her have to learn how to deal with this. So for me, I always saw the way that she listened before she spoke, and she would always—it's not even how to talk, it's also when not to talk. And she's so good about that. She knows when her voice is needed and when it's absolutely not needed, and when someone else has already said that, and “I don't need to repeat that. As a white person, I don't need to lay it on thick. I'm gonna let this person who's dealt with it say it.” And so again, it's hard to explain, but I've always seen that in her and I've always respected that. And I try to employ that myself, that kind of behavior

when I'm talking to people who I don't identify with, who deal with similar/different things than I do. So you said what does solidarity mean to me and is it important or?

Q: Well, is it important?

I mean yeah, I mean huge, it's super important. Especially here in the States, being Arab American in this context, having a lot of white friends, dealing with backlash. And solidarity, I think, is also a process, because you don't ever see it perfectly. No one's perfect, we're all human and we're all trying to figure things out together. It's just—I want to see the process. I want to see that there's an effort. I want to see that I'm being listened to, that I'm being considered, that my opinion has weight with the people who I'm around. It's very, very important. And I think seeing those things and thinking what you can do when someone's facing verbal attacks, you walk up to them, engage the person who's on the receiving end of those verbal attacks start some other conversation to just ignore the person. Things like that, where it's like that to me is solidarity. Because they say you're not supposed to stand up to that person because you can really put yourself in the way of violence, but instead just shift the focus, like, “Hey, let's just talk about my favorite flavor of ice cream instead of whatever the hell this guy is saying.” Because it's probably a guy, let's be real. Solidarity is important. It's also more necessary than ever. And it's always been necessary, but right now it feels pressing. We need people to listen to us and we need help, and we need money. We need money. These causes need money. Solidarity is also money, baby [laughs]. And I'm serious about that; I saw after this whole, “Oh, all

these women of color got elected to office! Yay! That's amazing!" You know, this last round of elections how we've had all these new women of color who were elected all over the country. It is amazing, but I was seeing these posts online of other Black women, like "Yeah, you voted for us once, give us all the money, give us all the resources, and then we can talk." Actually, no, that was a response to Roy Moore. That's what it was. Seeing ninety-seven, ninety-eight percent of Black women and men voting for Doug Jones, and then that's when that person was like, "Yeah, okay we came out and voted for you and we made this political difference. Now you need to give us the money, because you need to elect us more, because we are clearly pushing for the future." So yeah, solidarity is all kinds of different things, but I think it's definitely very important to me and I want to see that it's at least being attempted. Because I can't expect perfection. I'm not perfect, and I'm always aware of when I say something wrong. Even if I felt weird about something. It's always—part of it to me is just being cognizant and hearing yourself and hearing others.

Q: You mention Palestine and Israel a lot because it's where your family's from. How can you not mention it? So much of that goes into your identity, how you see the world, how you move through it, and how you relate to people, how you view news topics and things like, again, what's happening in Syria and Western involvement in the Middle East. How much of your knowledge and your views on Palestine, how much of that was done through your own research or through your parents and family? Because thinking back to when you said your dad was watching for updates on things during the beginning of

this “War on Terror” or the invasion of Iraq and also Afghanistan, and it was just on and so you were kind of forced to reckon with it. Do you think in a similar way, you were having to deal with these topics through them or did you just hear about them and they didn't try to concern you with it because you're living in the United States even though it does affect your family back home? Or did you feel like you had to educate yourself on that initially? Because I know when you grow up, of course, you try to read things to help inform your point of view or at least are curious about things.

I think what I got from my family was more personal accounts, what they'd personally been through, what they'd personally seen and how they've been affected, not so much the historical context and the political movements that were happening. It was more like, how all of those—it was more like at the bottom. I was hearing from the lower levels instead of what was going on at the top levels that trickled down and made what my parents and family went through happen. So I got—for a lot of the history and things like that I had to do my own reading and my own research, but I remember hearing a lot of things that my dad had been through, getting picked on by IDF soldiers while they were in a tank, just, they would beat up kids in the streets sometimes just out of fun, things like that. Having my grandpa's land taken, like, a significant part of it. Things like that, I was aware of. I had to do, for political parties and the Nakba—like obviously the Nakba, now, it's kind of—that's engrained in our identity and our story as a people, so that I knew about, but the Intifadas, for instance, the First and Second Intifadas, like I didn't really know how those started and what exactly they were about, so I had to do my own

research as to why, like, the context around which they erupted. I had to do that kind of stuff myself, which is funny, because my dad is like super up on it. He has so many books that I have now that I've read and does all kinds of reading on this stuff, knows so much about it, but never bothered us with it. It's funny, he's political in his own way, but he never brings it to us. He's never trying to have political conversations with us, weirdly. I don't think he's trying to avoid it, because I'll talk to him about it and he's fully willing to engage with me and tell me what he knows, but he never brings it up which I think is interesting. I don't know. Maybe now, he fears [laughs] I'll get too hot or something, because that happens sometimes, I need to work on that. But it's interesting because I never thought about that. I never thought about the way that this stuff was reported to me and the channels through which it was reported and what I had to find out versus what I just knew, but I guess it makes sense. You just learn about the things that your family has been through, and so I learned that. I mean, I go back home and they don't really talk about it that much. I mean, they'll talk about Netanyahu here and there but I really don't hear that much—my family, a lot of them don't seem, and this is weird, that they don't seem politically aroused for the most part. They'll post things on Facebook, but they're not really active. I don't know. But also, maybe, that's not a fair barometer for political activity.

Q: Did, well, after Trump saying that Jerusalem is—and, I mean, erroneously—the capital of Israel, did you hear anything from your family about that? Did they post about

it? Do you think that kicks up some dust and ruffled their feathers and started a chain of posting more about what's going on?

Yeah, definitely. And that's the funny thing, because when I go there, they don't talk about it to me. And I think that's what I should say influenced what I just said earlier. Because I don't hear about it at all. They don't talk about it. But on Facebook, it's kind of a different story. I mean, it's mostly family stuff, of course, like anyone else's Facebook, but I get a lot more political posts from my Palestinian family than I do normal people, like, moms. Whose moms do we know on Facebook who are constantly posting political things, do you know what I mean? But I know my aunts, they're constantly, like my grandma, even, for god's sake, will post something on Facebook and she has no idea how to use Facebook, but still. I caught my mom, just a sidenote, I caught my mom [laughs] telling her how to—I guess chastising her for using Facebook incorrectly. She was commenting on peoples' statuses about anything else, like, “I went to the store today,” and grandma would be like, “How are you doing? I miss you so much! I heard your uncle died, I hope he's doing well.” Things like that and my mom had to be like, “Stoooooop.” But anyway, yeah. Definitely after Jerusalem I saw a lot of people postm, and especially because it incited protests back home, and then those protests became targets for violent actions. So when Ahed Tamimi, for instance, got arrested, no one can stop talking about that. No one. Nor should they. Nor should they.

Ahed, her mother, and her cousin, all three of them got arrested that night. And Ibrahim Amoufariyah—or -thariyah I should say—he's the that disabled activist who was in a wheelchair and got shot in the head, either way, they murdered him, a disabled activist who was unarmed. And these sorts of egregious human rights violations that we see enrage everyone. It wakes people up. My mom's side is a lot more politically active and a lot more politically aware than my dad's side is, so it's more so them that I see post about these things, like my younger cousins—I say younger but I mean they're all 18 now, but they're younger than me so they're still babies in my head. But yeah, so all of them, my aunt, or both of my aunts, both of my uncles on my mom's side, and like I said, even my grandma. That's the thing, being political is an inherent part of our identity. Our identity is politicized, it's contested, it's erased, it's dismissed. The rallying call of Zionism was a people with no land going to a land with no people. Cool. So that tells you everything. I read this article by a Jewish American scholar and it was called “I Desire Sanctity,” and she did work with, I wish I could remember her name, but she did work with Jewish settlers in the West Bank, trying to understand how they were conceptualizing the land and what this meant to them and why they were here, like, “Why did you come to this place?” Trying to understand and and ask them questions, and she deduced that they saw Palestinians as ideologically invisible. From a religious standpoint, they meant nothing, because it comes down to religion, which is not unique to that area. They're very religious, they see themselves as the people of this land, “so no one else who's here matters because this is our birthright. It's the land that god gave us, so anyone else who's living here is incorrect for doing so.” So it makes it difficult to work through because it

feels impossible on either end sometimes, because no one wants to compromise and it's hard for me to judge that sometimes. I don't know. I hate how open things are. I wish things were more black and white so I could just have my opinion and go to bed. It's so stressful going back and forth and having a conscience that implores you to explore other peoples' points of view. I hate it. But it's necessary [laughs]. I wish I could turn that part of my brain off so I can stop thinking. It's exhausting.

Q: You know what's funny, when you said your dad's side is generally less political than your mom's side, my question about where you got your information from, your parents or yourself, was kind of spurred on—I came to ask you that question because I remember in interview I conducted with Rifat, he was saying how he informs his kids about what's happening in Palestine, and his kids are young. I think his daughter, or your cousin, just turned 11 because it was her birthday when I interviewed him. And she has two brothers too. So yeah, he says that there's definitely something to be said for that, that he feels the need to explain this to them and what's happening over there and keeping them informed.

I felt that I would feel the same way. Why shouldn't they know? I think it's important, it's a huge part of our current existence. I just think it's so crazy, what's going on right now. Like even with Ahd, I can't believe that. I mean, I can, and I've seen it, and they've imprisoned much younger than her. And they've also killed so many people in her family. It's something.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add onto or talk about that maybe you mentioned or I mentioned earlier that you feel the need to talk about again or that you want out there?

I guess I would probably just try to stress that, and I think it's something that you're definitely going to find over the course of these interviews, is how various even homogenous identities are. Because as I've explained throughout this, I've been so floored by the vast political differences that I've come across between Arabs and Muslim people and how differently they conceptualize things and their political concerns versus their religious concerns and how those meet and how those affect other people around them, all of that is a huge mixed bag, and I think it makes it hard for all of us sometimes to work together. Arabs aren't good at doing that, historically and now. Like never. And I don't know why that's the case, but it super is. It's one of those things, you just want this overarching experience to tie people together, but I don't know how that could work. It's difficult.

I guess I would just say, that I just hope to see more openness. I think that openness, I think that love and consideration is the best thing. I think that makes the most difference. And I think that hopefully as Americans—because there's the whole narrative, “Oh, they hate us, why do they hate us so much? Why do they hate us so much?” And then, “They come over here and they think this and they—” all this stuff, like they, they, they, this separateness that I think in the end doesn't help anyone, and I think if we were able to, as

Americans, be more open, be more accepting on a world stage, not just as people like you and me, like our friends, but our president. I mean our government. I mean the aesthetics of our situation and the forefront also needs to be this, “We care about people, we care about human rights, we care about the Constitution and things that—” I mean, that's a huge part of this country, and I think that's why so many people wanna move here. That's why my dad wanted to move here. And I think if we were able to start pushing a different global campaign and advertise ourselves differently, which sounds a little gross but that's what it is, I think that things would change.

I think that whole, “they hate us, they hate us” sort of thing would start to have—it sounds fucked up—more weight. It's kind of like, “okay so if you eliminate everything you're doing wrong in the situation and shit still isn't different over there, then you're right.” It's like, the whole time Americans are saying, “Oh, Muslims are rabid terrorists because that's their nature, that's what their book is telling them to do,” but if we keep doing what we're doing, how are we going to know that, you know? As a force of radicalization which the country has been over there, how can we talk about what Islam is like over there when we are constantly affecting it and we don't consider that we're affecting it? So to me, almost if America were to become a more accepting, more open place, and they didn't change, then it's like, “oh, you are right.” And not to say they're right about Islam inherently being more violent, but it's almost like I think if we start eliminating the things that we're messing up and actively destroying over there, I think we could start to work towards a better end. I hope that made sense. Because I think

about this all the time, even another good friend of mine and I talked about this before, minimizing the effect on our end to highlight issues on the other end.

If I'm having a conflict with a friend I'm going to stop—if I'm doing things that I know are passive aggressive, that I know are a little bit shitty here or there to stab at them, and I can't fully blame them for giving me that back, because that's what I'm putting out there. But if I stop putting that out there and I'm still getting that, then I know that that's the source. I know that it's not because I'm doing this, it's because you're doing this. You didn't stop, I did. So that's kind of what I want to happen, which I know sounds painfully simple and really probably—other people might cringe at that, but I think honestly, we have to work, we have this moral superiority, we think we're so much better and smarter and just, whatever. But I think if we really do inch towards that in our own country and also in the way that we treat other people, we really will start seeing the benefits that we want. We're not gonna get those by shutting people out and telling them they're bad and different and wrong and bombing them. And that's just what I wish. You have people that are on one end, “Kill 'em all, get rid of 'em all together,” which, again, never gonna happen.

Q: Who's to say that you could be wrong? It hasn't been tried yet. The U.S. has had a very, very long—in our short history compared to other countries—a very long engagement with businesses that don't belong to use or don't deal with us. Instead we pull people unassumingly in, forcefully, and obviously and covertly into situations that don't

always pertain directly to them, and the results can be egregious as we've discussed in this interview and so many other ways. The U.S. has not stopped doing terrible things to other people or its own people, so it's like, okay, who's to say you're wrong with that very simplistic, "Well, if we stop, and if they don't stop, then we're right."

You know what I mean? And I know maybe at this point it's totally impossible because what's done is done and there's absolutely no switching into reverse, but I just—that's my hope. That's kind of where I want to end this, is like on a hopeful note. I'm a photographer, as you know, and I'm explaining it because interview purposes, and ever since really engaging myself in that practice, for me now, that is a happy ending to every political conversation that I can have, which sounds stupid, but let me explain. Because we can talk about this thing with the Middle East and it's, at the end of the day, bleak and grim and it's not gonna—there's nothing we're gonna see anytime soon that gets better, probably. But for me, I have this personal framework of, "I have this work I can do. I can hope to affect change by just working hard at this thing that I love, and maybe that in and of itself is good enough or could be good enough in the future. Maybe this will take me somewhere." So it leaves me on this hopeful note, like everything sucks right now, I'm not feeling that good, I'm feeling terrified, I don't really know what my future's going to look like, but I have this thing that I love so much it makes sense to me, it's how I work through the world, and it's how in the end, I think I could best affect change if I'm going to. I'm not a politician, I'm not a doctor, I'm not a lawyer, I'm not gonna help from those angles. And I know that and that's fine, there are other people who can do that ten million

times better than I could. And they should. But this is what I know, this is what I love, and this is what I think I'm good at, and for me that really helps steer me out of what otherwise and before had just been deep depressive trenches of “well, fuck it. What am I doing? Might as well just go float off into the sea because nothing's gonna get better.”

And I think that's really important thing, I've been seeing a lot of—I mentioned Farah earlier, but there's so many Arabs that are going into art, and I think there's no coincidence in that. I'm really close—I met him over Tumblr in high school, his name is Elaf and he's from Iraq, but he lives in France. His family left Iraq for France around the time the War on Terror began over there. I should say the U.S. invasion of Iraq. And he for the longest time was—I forget, he was studying city planning, and I remember that, and I was really interested in fashion for a long time, and that's what we knew of each other. And we'd have a lot of discussions and talk about fashion because he liked fashion too, and I didn't know anything about city planning, but that's what he was doing. And then I got off Tumblr, hadn't been on there for a while, and recently he found me on Instagram and followed me. I followed him back, and we started talking and chatting for a long time, off and on for a couple months now, which really excited me because I really missed him, and come to find out he's also a practicing artist. He's doing work himself, he's curating and he's making work, and I am too, and we had this amazing conversation about why did we come to this place, what was so urgent that we felt like we needed to start conceptualizing what we were seeing and feeling in a way that—conceptualizing and then making work that could show what we were seeing and how we were feeling.

I'm sorry, I feel like some of these sentences are gonna be an absolute nightmare to transcribe, but good luck [laughs]. And I think that's an interesting thing, and he's all the way in France, and I'm here in Florida, so that made me so hopeful. I was like, "Yessss," like I'm just seeing people getting pushed out of necessity but to things that I think will ultimately be the most productive and very exciting. I think this bodes well for the future of Arabs and Muslims in this world, I hope. I hope. It's usually bad times that lead to big things, that's why you see so—I think for the amount of Palestinians that there are, there's a lot of artists and writers and poets and musicians who are Palestinian, and I think it's because—and you know, I don't stats to be like, "there's percentage wise more Palestinian artists than there are Saudi artists or Jordanian artists," like that might not be the case at all. But I think their call to doing this sort of work comes from their experiences and things that they've dealt with, and I think that's kind of exactly what's going on right now too for a lot of people. Arabs in this modern world get pushed to these things, and I think it'll help see us through. I'm very excited for myself and for others. I'm super inspired. And it makes me even more excited to feel like I'm a part of maybe something that can be a global shift or—all these Arabs like Elaf is also gay, so that really helps queer and Arab and women and Arab artists starting to have their voices seen and heard in ways that no one else could replicate. It's so unique and it's so exciting. I hope that this works. We'll see.

Q: Well, I believe in you.

Thank you. And if not me, then believe in everyone else [both laugh].

KYNA PATEL

This interview was conducted by Mary Marshall Clark. I decided it would be a good idea to include an interview with myself because I could better articulate how I feel in person while providing more context to this thesis.

I remember after September 11, wanting to have one of those American flags that you put on your car window and I do remember feeling like more patriotic in a way, but it was that kind of like blind patriotism that a lot of kids would feel after something like this because they don't understand like all the nuances behind what happened, what's going on, what's going to happen in the future, what our involvement in the Middle East and in other countries will do to this and has already done? Like is this really patriotism or is this nationalism? Because there's a fine line there. Like, all of that nuance of course is lost a third grader. Or at least me in the third grade. We did a carwash to raise money. Me, my brother, and a couple of other kids in our neighborhood. We did that and we borrowed a boat from the local fire department to put money in and we sent it off to Giuliani, who is now, wildly enough, Trump's lawyer.

I do remember on 9/11 being really worried about my cousin, aunt and uncle who lived in Queens because I didn't know the geography of New York City and the five boroughs, and so I just thought "New York, oh my god, this is, like, all of New York. How is Anushka doing and also my aunt, Riddhi?" She was pregnant at the time with my cousin,

Anay, who was born October 11, 2001. Exactly one month after 9/11 happened. And so I was just worried about them, not knowing that Queens is not lower Manhattan. Like, they were totally fine. They lived by Flushing. And so I had no idea what was going on really, but my mom's like, "Oh my god they're fine they're fine they're fine." But in a way that was kind of dismissive and didn't—like she didn't really explain to me that Queens is an entirely separate borough. I could have understood that. Yeah but she's just like, "No, they're fine." I don't know if knowing where Queens is would have helped but whatever. Yeah. So it's a little weird doing this project of asking people about 9/11, people who are in my age group generally speaking or cohort because they have similar stories where they really don't remember too much. I mean, at least people who were not in New York at the time.

I remember my brother telling me in the interview I did with him that his understanding of 9/11 was mostly just through school because they would just talk about it on the anniversary of 9/11. I mean I think for us people who were a little older it was kind of assumed that we knew what happened. Because we did know generally what happened, that something bad happened but not in the way that—I don't know.

My elementary school was in this town, Bartow, that I mentioned earlier. Very small. Initially [the school] was founded I think in like 1960. The school is now defunct. In 2006 is when it closed down. But it had opened in 1960 and was a very, very small school. It's a non-denominational private school, which is really rare because, you know,

most of the private schools in that area and in the South are usually like Catholic schools, Episcopalian schools, religious schools in general. Again, I appreciated the fact that it was a really tiny school. And I think the year that I figured out that I really liked to learn things was in fifth grade, because I had an awesome teacher. Nancy Smith. So great. And she was a really interesting lady. She was born either in 1944 or 1945 and in Morocco, because her parents left Florida to escape the drama from World War Two or something like that. So she was born in Rabat and after the war ended, they moved back to Florida. To Lakeland. She had really cool and fascinating bits of history and knowledge to share with us, like, we learned about the Kennedy assassination. Franz Ferdinand and the beginning of World War One. We learned about so many different things in World War Two, Sergeant Alvin [C.] York—we learned all about JFK's P.T. 109, the boat that he commandeered that was left in the South Pacific after the Japanese destroyer had like cut it in half, just so many interesting stories of people and conflict. And then we also learned really basic weird life lesson type things. One that sticks out to me that I'll never forget is that if you write something down, someone will find it. And that could be on the Internet, that can be in physical writing, whatever, but that—I don't know. That always sticks out to me. As a result, I'm cautious about what I write. And I think it's kind of a bizarre thing to learn and understand at a young age, especially since this was before the Internet became what it is today. That was from fall 2003 to spring 2004. It was my fifth grade year. Which was also right as we went into Iraq and Afghanistan. And I also remember—I was just thinking about this the other day, just kind of popped into my head, but I

remember Ms. Smith being like, “Yeah, this war bad,” and I'm just like, “Oh? Okay.” Of course she said it in a more subtle way.

I don't remember talking about 9/11 really in elementary school in the following years. I know there wasn't and still isn't a solid curriculum to explain 9/11 and its aftermath in public schools. And maybe Ms. Smith did talk about it, but I personally don't remember it. Of all the things that I remember from fifth grade, if she talked about 9/11 I just don't remember it. I remember my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Walker, talking about it on the first anniversary, because she cried and explained that she is patriotic and gets emotional over things related to that. It was the first time I'd seen a teacher cry. But besides that, maybe I don't remember discussing 9/11 in classes or specifically on any anniversaries because it was overshadowed in my mind by us going into Afghanistan and later Iraq.

Even when people talk about it, or at least when people in schools talk about it I never—it never felt like—they never felt like we were talking about it in a way that we disseminate all of the big events that led up to it and all the events that came out of it immediately. I know a lot of that would get lost on younger kids, but all throughout middle school and high school that basic paradigm of good versus evil with regards to the United States and the Middle East was pretty much all that was given to us by teachers, that 9/11 existed in a vacuum and the results are easily understandable. Ms. Smith did a lot more for my political consciousness by hinting that the war in Iraq was bad than so many of the teachers I encountered later on.

I did not know what the Patriot Act was until high school, and this was late in high school when I looked it up and was like, “Oh shit, they passed this because of 9/11? And this screwed up all of these other things? Like wow wow wow.” In a way, it's kind of a reality check because I'm finding out all of this information that just points to the fact that the U.S. is literally isolating its own people and is continuing to meddle with things overseas and killing and screwing over so many people in the name of democracy. But the way that it was always talked about was that it's a sad thing. We should remember the people who were lost on this day, which of course, is important. But we never really talked about anything that came out of 9/11, which, I mean, I think is really counterproductive in the long run because so much came out of that. So much had happened that led up to 9/11 happening. I didn't know that the World Trade Center had been bombed in 1993. I didn't know when it happened because I hadn't been born yet. But I also didn't know that later on when 9/11 happened. I think it was probably, again, in high school when I found out that the World Trade Center had been bombed eight years before 9/11 happened. I think the silence really bothers me around it because it's not the kind of silence where like—I mean maybe—maybe silence is different in terms of locality in the sense that maybe people here treat it differently or taught it differently or talked about it differently, especially because you would have kids in classes who had been related to 9/11 in some way versus like when you're removed from the situation almost entirely other than the fact that you are an American. But this was one of the biggest attacks in the United States

in recent memory, so why you don't talk about it in a way that is critical or at least gives us some facts or something?

Again, it's the silence around it that gets to me and eats at me. No one wants to talk about this stuff because it's hard to talk about.

And I mean again, coming from Lakeland, Florida, where more than half of its people voted for Trump in the most recent election. Polk County is always a red county. It always has been a red county and it always will be red county in my opinion. It is very Republican. But then—basically, coming from Lakeland and knowing that not everyone, but a lot of people are Republicans and a lot of people are like, “Oh we're at war. We have to support our troops blindly. We have to support the government in this war no matter what. Clearly those—” I mean, I think it comes back down to a lack of understanding of why we invaded Afghanistan and Iraq in the first place. Like why Iraq was invaded.

Q: It's all connected.

Exactly. And knowing that there are people thinking that the reason we have to go invade Iraq is because Saddam Hussein is going to “kill Americans” and blah, blah, blah, weapons of mass destruction and all this stuff is upsetting and unsettling. It's a very reduced understanding of why we're at war or why we participate in these conflicts or

start them. Anyway, my point or anecdote, I think, was that—and this is something that I always think about—I remember in high school at some point I was talking to my close friend, who is a person of color. She was a Republican for a hot second and I was not a Republican. I would say I was very much a liberal, would believe that global warming is a thing, war is bad, and all of these are very basic liberal, generally progressive—as progressive as like any high schooler who didn't really have to think about politics can be. You know? So on that level I guess I was more liberal and a Democrat by today's standards. And so one day I just asked her why we were even in this conflict in Iraq or these conflicts in the first place. I didn't get it. How was this relevant? Because it never made sense to me why we were at war or so to speak “at war.” And she gave me an answer or something along the lines of like, “Well, when people want to threaten you and all this other stuff and are, you know, going against everything that we stand for as a country and against democracy,” and I was just like, “But why?” Like what did they specifically do to us? I didn't get it. Like, what's the connection? Why were we getting involved in other people's shit? And that's like American imperialism 101. It's like, why do we get involved in things that don't pertain to us? Because we can't keep our hands out of everyone else's business. That's why. And hello, oil! But I didn't know that. I was a junior in high school and naïve, but I was wondering why we were still talking about this in a way that's clearly very black and white.

My political consciousness was growing and it's still growing. I mean, you don't stop growing and I think it's silly to think that people stop growing or people think of

themselves as like oh no I've already reached the apex of like my mental acuity. The end. That's it. I think they get frustrated when people get too comfortable with the way that they're thinking because like once you get comfortable in your thought processes or whatever it is, like, an issue that you're engaged with. It's like, but there's always more. There's always more! [Laughter] There's always something that can complicate something. So it was very frustrating for me to not get a clear answer from anyone, even my A.P. [Advanced Placement] U.S. History teacher Gary Goss. He was—I remember hearing that he somehow avoided the Vietnam draft and I know he's a Republican. I did not like his teaching style at all. It just never clicked with me. I didn't really understand how to read history and understand history until my senior year when I had a teacher, James Shuff who literally would have notes on the overhead and we would just have to copy them and that was it. And then we could ask questions and would of course have tests and homework. But the way that he did it, I learned so much from that. Because the course was about the history of the Americas and so it wasn't just the United States' history, it was history of parts of Latin America and South America too. And so we learned about their economies, how all these countries were involved in the Cold War, and he just kind of interrelated these concepts of what socialism was, what communism was, and what it meant for all these different countries in these different time periods, how race was constructed in Latin America differently than it is in the United States and things like that, but in a very cold and divorced way. Again, we were just taking notes from the overhead and that was it. And I thought that that was really fascinating to me, that it made a lot more sense to me to interpret history in that way, to finally understand

this is why people were afraid of communism in this point in time. Or this is why people reacted to socialism this way in Chile or whatever. Iran-Contra, Nicaragua, the Zapatistas in Mexico, Castro's policies in Cuba, Haitian Independence, the Dirty War in Argentina, other examples of egregious and covert U.S. involvement in Latin America, et cetera. Some things about Latin American dictatorships and military rule we had learned from our Spanish teacher, Señora Anderson, who was from Cuba and came to Florida shortly after Castro came into power.

Anyway, Mr. Shuff's class was bizarre, again, because he was just such a standoffish and aloof teacher, whereas Mr. Goss was much more animated. But also Mr. Shuff was very—well, not progressive because I don't actually know, but I would say he's a Democrat and so maybe on some unspoken level I picked up on that and understood what kind of approach he was taking with what he included in these notes and everything. I remember more conservative teachers being more open to divulging where they stood politically than progressive ones—and you knew who was more progressive because they didn't openly criticize Obama, or because they were outspoken like my art teacher, Tony Piekarski.

But Mr. Goss, who—I don't even know what that class was. It was just—he was a nice guy, I just never really understood a lot of the reasons why at that time he was in support of the war and a lot of my classmates were too, whereas Mr. Shuff was considerably less fun. And this is a very objective statement. He was less fun in class. In his teaching style

and everything but he was also like—I don't know. He was much more no-nonsense about some things and so I appreciated that. And I didn't realize anything about Soviet involvement with Afghanistan, the Mujahedeen—like, the United States backing certain groups in Afghanistan, and all this stuff, people who are now upset at the United States, et cetera. And all of that I didn't realize until I think freshman year of college when I actually started to look at these things because I felt I was finally in an environment where like no one's going to really ostracize me to that extent and maybe they'll ostracize me for not being as progressive or leftist or as pluralistic or holistic in the way that I'm approaching a situation. But I'm still learning and I'm very open to that idea of worrying instead of what I had been accustomed to back in Lakeland.

Q: It's such a breathtaking story because—Mujib Mashal, who's been reporting on Afghanistan for the New York Times for a while is a young man who was a former student, Columbia College person, now senior reporter for The Times from Afghanistan. I think they're just moving him to Sri Lanka and closer to Iran where he'll do more reporting on Iran. But he did a project after he attended one of our summer institutes on interviewing his teachers in Afghanistan about not being able to teach about the war, the Soviet invasion or any anything less than twenty years earlier, or anything within the twenty year earlier period and it was a remarkable oral history project. And then I thought, "Well, how well do Americans teach what we're doing in the world?" And so your life story is just a perfect example of this very smart and curious kid who wants the facts. You know the interpretation is important too, but you really want the facts and it

takes you—have to poke around and you do your best to fill in information that would normally be taught in American history.

Right. You would think that history is something that is just objective, like scientific fact when you're in high school unless you are smarter than your peers and you know that historic objectivity doesn't exist and operate on that plane. I mean that was taken care of in my thinking when I got to study anthropology in college because now I'm like, "That's totally right. Objectivity in this case doesn't exist." But anyway, I think that the schools definitely don't talk about it enough. They don't talk about—at least in public schools. We never really discussed what was going on in Iraq and Afghanistan or even 9/11 again, besides that it was always somber day that unites Americans, and that we always remember those who died that day and who put their lives on the line overseas to allow us to live safely in the United States. Not even that these invasions in to Iraq and Afghanistan were connected, no discussion of how that led to so much other stuff and just further complicated like in the way that the U.S. government and like lawmakers and policymakers like reacted to it at the time. Just, again, further complicated everything. U.S. citizens being surveilled, being detained, immigration law becoming more constrictive, Islamophobia-related hate crimes increasing at ridiculous rates as it's doing again after Trump's election to the White House.

Q: How do you describe your relationship to your parents as immigrants? How do you feel—do you feel like you carry some of that past with you?

I'd say that it's a sort of strained connection I have with India. I already don't agree politically with my parents, especially my dad, but with regards to Indian politics I don't like the current government there and I think most, if not all, of my family in India supports the BJP. Maybe not a few of my cousins, but definitely a lot of our family. I see some similarities between Trump and Modi, especially since both are inactive in the aftermath of violence and spew nationalist and Islamophobic rhetoric.

And I see some Islamophobia from my family, mostly in the form of anti-Pakistani comments, but that also stems from Islamophobia, from time to time when I visit. I do not approve of it at all and will address every time it's brought up. And like I get that Partition was awful and messy. Millions of people died and even more were displaced, but I just get so bothered that people fall for nationalism like that to this day.

And my family who lives there, I feel like they view me as too American in the sense that my Gujarati isn't perfect and that I was born and raised in the States and don't really engage with India or its pop culture on a regular basis because I'm not there. But I think it would be hard for me to live there not because of my nationality or my personal interests in music or what I like to do in my spare time, but because I feel like the fight for gender equity and equality looks so different there than it does here. Socially and culturally, gender dynamics are different there than they are here. I know I'm a nervous person, but if I lived there on my own, I don't know how I would handle any of my

problems if anything were to happen. I know I have a strong relationship with my family and family friends in India, so I wouldn't be out on my own completely and I understand that. However, the corruption there is on a different level than here. And I know women and mental health don't get taken seriously and are ignored in so many places literally everywhere, but for a democratic country that touts itself as "secular" with a growing economy, I've been led to believe that gender inequality there is worse than here. And I know people are doing work to change that and are pushing for justice and equity, and I know feminism looks different in different cultural and social contexts and that I'm coming from a Western, leftist perspective, but I think it would be a hard readjustment to make. I think that's where my biggest disconnect with India comes from. I feel like I am almost powerless there. All of that and the disgusting Hindu nationalism and Islamophobia. And all of that can change; I can change, the world around me can change. I hope that's not what my relationship with India will be in the future and I know that I'll have to work at it by reading more and being there more and engaging with more people my age and outside of my family and my actual family for that matter, but so far that's where I'm at.

But anyway, I have had "exposure" to India and I love where my family is from but I don't know. It's frustrating because growing up I didn't feel like I was Indian enough for a lot of other Indian Americans and I feel like it's the same thing back in India. A lot of people are like "Oh you're so westernized." I mean, the West is viewed positively in some respects in India but then also negatively in ways that can translate over into the

way you present yourself, the way that you talk about gendered issues and things like that. They'll criticize the West like so easily and I'm just like, "Okay, well I didn't have control over this, this was not my choice." I didn't choose to be born here, that's impossible, yet I still feel like I'm being blamed for it to some degree.

For the most part, I'm very comfortable in my identity in the sense that I know that I was born and raised in the United States. I know that my parents were originally from India and raised me in a secular home, but there is no confusion about that. It's not confusion. It's more like a reconciliation or trying to figure out how these parts go together.

Q: So here we are. You're here now, I'm here, and now you're doing your project on 9/11. Why through oral history? Why oral history?

I've mentioned this before the interview started but I had been listening to This American Life for about ten years now and I fell in love with all of it. The extent to which all of the stories have certain themes and the way they organize that I thought was really interesting. And the fact that they have been on the air since 1995 and there is a whole archive of stuff that I can go through and listen to on pretty much anything. I just really like the way that they get people to tell stories and it's weird but also not weird that I am attracted to storytelling and oral history because in my own family I felt like I never really had like family members who would tell stories like they do on the show. Besides just the one story of my great grandfather being involved in India's independence

movement and being jailed by the British in British India, there wasn't really any kind of family history that would be passed down, or there was not a kind of oral tradition in my family that I feel like a lot of families have, especially immigrant families. Or at least I was not made aware of any kind of long-standing oral tradition.

I thought was strange but then I as I grew older I realized it could have something to do with my dad's dad. He died when my dad was a teenager. Which was really hard on the whole family. I actually think last week he would have been seventy-five or something like that. And for some reason our family is really good at not talking about things.

Another way to interpret silence! My family doesn't say anything about my grandpa who passed. Like so I have no idea what he was about, what his occupation was besides being a business owner, his own history or interests or anything like that. I only saw a photo of him for the first time about two years ago.

And then I find out that like my cousins know marginally more about him than I do because their parents or at least their parents will concede that he was nice or that he focused a lot on everyone's education or other evasive facts about him. I think his death hurt my dad in a way that every teenager who loses a parent they love has felt to a degree, but I don't know how my dad processes death or anything like that. Everyone processes death in different ways. But I think he never really got comfortable with talking about him. Especially not to me or to Ryan. Maybe to mom, but that's a different thing because they're married. Yeah. So I always felt kind of deprived in this way that I never really

heard family stories like that again except just the one—there's always the one that's just packaged and repeated so often. It is historical. It's good. It's perfect. That's that.

So it was really frustrating to see that there had been almost no “oral tradition,” let alone no airing of grievances. That's something my family is also really good at, is not addressing their problems or feelings with that person directly. I was such a non-confrontational person growing up and through high school that in college I had to become comfortable expressing myself because there's no other way to live, really.

I think that's my impetus for going to oral history. I have a lot I want to talk about I have a lot that I want to share. And I feel like other people do too. I feel like my whole life there have always been moments where a constructive dialogue would have been so helpful but it never happened, and I think oral history is a powerful tool that helps bridges gaps in understanding history but also each other.

Afterword

A lot of myself is reflected in this project. If not through my questions and ramblings, then through the people I surround myself with and interviewed as well as the interviews I chose to include. Family, education, and acceptance and understanding of each other and issues related to race and identity are really important to me, and I think this thesis is a testament to that. I feel that it is imperative that we take it upon ourselves to educate ourselves about the recent past and try to bridge the gaps in our own

knowledge of what is happening in front of us, what we've witnessed in passing as children and adolescents, and how these events may or may not inform one another. This feels more urgent to me now not only because I'm in the early parts of my adult life, but because of how powerful people in our government shamelessly and obviously disregard facts and cloak objectivity with doubt, skepticism, fear, and hatred.

Family members differ in opinion all the time, and to think that the relationships between them exist in a vacuum void of politics, race, and identity is a rapidly-narrowing idea. My current understanding of my own identity in relation to the world, history, and politics was not wholly dictated by my family, so it was important to me to interview my parents. As I mentioned in my interview, I felt that there was a lack of oral tradition in my family, but it feels really empowering to reclaim it even if it's in a less orthodox way. Doing this research meant so much to me because I never felt that my ancestry was represented in my education or the media while I was growing up and my parents didn't always talk about India. Having a stake in that knowledge while discussing themes of distance, immigration, agency, silence, belonging, displacement, and family was important given the current hostility towards immigrants in a time of increasing conservatism.

Like most people, I find misinformation frustrating. Misinformation can of course occur by accident, but for the most part, fewer things make my eyes roll harder when misinformation is clear as day and intentional. I imagine people generally don't like being lied to. That's one thing. It's another when you've been led to believe one thing for so long because of another's intentional omission of an important fact or careless,

remorseless oversight. September 11, 2001 shaped so much of how the United States and its people operate today, but events like that don't necessarily exist in a vacuum and discussions around them are, as expected, rife with misinformation until significant time has passed. Once you're older it's easier to do a little digging, especially with the Internet, and find out about the Soviet-Afghan War and the United States' role in that conflict and region. I think the big internal conflict when finding these things out is struggling to understand what to do with the information; is it just something that I'm going to ignore because I don't like it? Or is it something that will shape the way that I view my own country and government?

One of the biggest life lessons I learned from engaging with my friends and family during this strange time in the United States is knowing your limits emotionally. Clearly, I care about certain social issues and problems enough that I would write a thesis about them. I also don't mind being the person who has to explain certain concepts related to race, nationality, nationalism, immigration, identity, etc., because if it just takes one person to speak up and explain something so someone doesn't consciously repeat the negative action again, then I do not mind saying something. But sometimes people are set in their ways and don't want to ponder something contrary to what they think or believe, which is something that I have come to accept. I learned that I can keep making an example out of myself academically and politically for others to see, especially my younger family members, but I have to remember when to cut my losses (and which losses at that) in arguments or discussions without being completely discouraged. Being a young adult who values their mental health involves practicing this skill as well as more

accurately gauging where one's expectations for other people should be so as to not set oneself up for disappointment; however, these skills become more challenging to sharpen when a political line is drawn on the sand because one's own tolerance for certain behaviors or beliefs has changed.

Family is central to this thesis. I could not have written it without the help, support, and cooperation of my family and the Harb family, and past cooperation of the Jaffery family. Because everyone has different histories and experiences even within our own families, it's beneficial to see how traumatic, violent, and important events play a role in relation to our individual understandings of ourselves and each other. On a similar note, I think we all need to be better about engaging with people and things that exasperate us while also knowing that complete isolation inside an echo chamber isn't doing anyone much good in the long run. People don't want to pay attention to unpleasant things they cannot erase from their minds or read things that they know will make them upset. But is it actually better to live consciously in ignorance's bliss than to see injustice and feel some type of way about it? I believe that at the very least, people's general tolerance for bullshit and idly standing by has lowered significantly in recent years. This could result from any number of frustrations and injustices, like the number of gun-related injuries or deaths in the United States, police brutality against Black people, separating asylum-seeking families at the U.S.-Mexico border, etc., but overall, people are realizing that the mess that we're in doesn't have to be the status quo.