



## Oral History Project Interview

Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute (AMWRI)

Interviewee: Anna

Interview Number: SMG 2.00

Interviewer: Sarah Marie Gresser, Milwaukee WI

Date: September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Abstract:** This is an interview of a first-generation female immigrant from Iran. She chose to remain anonymous and will be referred to as Anna. Anna's story is one which highlights the relationship between the political and the educational, as she has faced various setbacks and delays to obtaining educational institutional qualifications due to the failed cooperation of the Iranian and American immigration, educational, and political systems, due to post-revolutionary relations between the two countries. After obtaining her B.A at an English-speaking university in Iran, Anna emigrated from Iran to America for the sole purpose of coming to study in America. She did not intend to stay in America, but due to the political situation in Iran, obtaining her masters was delayed. Furthermore, the political situation meant that she would not have a teaching position if she returned to Iran. She claimed that her decision to stay originally, and now, is because of the political situation in Iran. Anna's attempt to obtain her PhD in biology was delayed both because of institutional-political issues, and finally abandoned due to a fire which destroyed all of her research. So, although Anna originally planned to pursue a PhD in biology, following the fire, she felt the desire to give back to the community of Milwaukee through a career in adult and continuing education. Currently, Anna is unemployed, and her citizenship is pending, but she has high hopes for a future where she will be able to use her own difficult experiences to help others, especially adult immigrants, integrate into the community.

**Key Themes:** Immigration, Iranian-American culture, politics, education, citizenship, identity

**Note:** In the transcript, I refers to Interviewer, and R refers to Respondent/Interviewee.

R: What is it you are using?

I: The recorder.

R: Oh, the recorder.

I: (Laughs) Alright, so, this is an interview on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012, with an interviewee who has chosen to remain anonymous. My name is Sarah Gresser and I am conducting an interview with the AMWRRI.

R: A.M. W. R. R. I. (writing down).

I: Yes.

R: And that is what again? It stands for?

I: The Arab and Muslim Women's--.

R: The Arab and Muslim Women (writing down).

I: Research, and Resource Institute.

R: And Resource Institute. I don't know how every day I wanted to get to the 'net and research a little bit. I mean, what it is.

I: The website?

R: There has been so much that I had to, so many deadlines of different things going on and it couldn't wait.

I: Yeah.

R: But I know that it is a new organization, is for a good reason, they're you know its educational and everything, and I am willing to work with them.

I: Awesome, cool, alright. So, I am going to start with some general questions about your background.

R: Sure. Would that be fine with you if I just taken an outline, like the questions you're asking?

I: Oh, yeah, yeah.

R: Just maybe later on I can review it and think, oh I could say this much more, and you know and I connected different.

I: Cool. And you know what, I have this, it's the guide that Dr. Othman gave you.

R: Uh huh. I don't know if I got that guide or not.

I: I can e-mail it to you.

R: I'd 'preciate it

I: Yeah. Alright so, where is your homeland?

R: Iran.

I: Iran. And the city, town, village? The specific area?

R: I was born in capital of Iran, and I was there until I went to a different city for my university.

I: Mhmm. When were you born?

R: When I was born?

I: Yeah.

R: Date of birth?

I: Yeah. Date of birth.

R: 1958.

I: 1958?

R: Yes. And then for 17 years I lived there and then the university I chose for my bachelor was in a different city. Oh, and I went there for about 4 years.

I: What city was it?

R: Shiraz.

I: Shiraz?

R: Mhmm.

I: Cool (laughs).

R: (Laughs) that's the name of the city. I particularly chose that university because everything was taught in English. Yeah, know it was quite related to universities in Pennsylvania. Mhmm, they have some kind of connections or whatever. Because I was willing that for my graduate studies come overseas, come to United States. So, I lived there about 3 ½ years and then the revolution started.

I: Mmm. Did you live in any other countries before coming to the U.S.?

R: Yes.

I: Okay.

R: I lived 5 ½ months in Vienna. In order to get an interview with the U.S. embassy, for student visa. There was no U.S. embassy in Iran due to the hostages and things like that. So, anybody wanted to come to United States all the things had to go through one of the European, which ever country, that had U.S. embassy opened. And for me, that was in Vienna.

I: So, when the revolution happened you had just graduated? Or you were still in, in the university?

R: No when revolution started basic universities got closed for about good three years. And basically, everything was stopped. You know. The program that I was in, the science program, and most of the majors had to face different policies, you know, cuz a lot of Islamic education they put there, and you know, the changes that they school different department, they had to face, because a lot of professors left Iran. And then the university had to restructure, you know, and the person who is at this age, at this year of program, now with all the professors gone, how to, you know, put their program together? That took about a good three years and then I had to, instead of just finishing one last semester it took about a good two years for me to meet the new policies you know, course work and everything that became mandatory to graduate.

I: Yeah....so what did you study?

R: Science.

I: Okay.

R: Biology.

I: Oh cool.

R: But it was supposed to be a general biology, you know, study but lot of professors left and professors who were there, more available to finish our program were a lot of professors in field of botany, like taxonomy of events and things like that. I think my degree reads, biology, but lot

of the last courses I took were all in plant physiology, you know, things related to plants. Yet, I was able to take molecular courses which was my best interest. I wanted to come to United States for molecular biology and those sorts of things. So that finishing those courses with good grades was very helpful for me to get admission to UWM.

I: So, you always wanted to come to the United States? Even before the revolution started? It was part of your plans?

R: I like to come and just have a part of my studies in United States. All of my courses were taught in English in that university. So, language was not a barrier. And I wanted to see, you know, how studies, graduate studies are done here. For master's, yes for master's part, I definitely wanted to study, just, to get a sense of diversity. You know, how people live here, how people study, you know, how is everything there. A little different learn, learn about how things are done here in their universities.

I: Yeah, so did you want to return to Iran, originally?

R: When I came here for my master's, I wasn't quite sure that with a bachelor, I would directly connect myself to a PhD program, that was something that I learned later, that, for example, at UWM if you have a bachelor, you can step to PhD program, directly, or it would be better to get a master's and see how things go and I discussed it with my thesis professor and he thought that it would be better that I get this two years of master's done and then see you know, what are my plans, and that is what I did.

I: Yeah. So, were you the first of your family to immigrant to the U.S.? Or did you immigrate with your family?

R: My immediate family? No, my immediate family, my brother, studied medicine there and had no intention of coming to the United States with me. My sister, before I left Iran, went to Canada and that wasn't for pursuing her studies or whatever, just to live there. So got married and she decided that for whatever reason she liked Canada better so.

I: And you brother still lives in Iran?

R: Yes.

I: Okay. With a family?

R: Yes, he got married there before I left, and he still has no intention of leaving there. With my parents later on some years after I came to United States. My sister went to Canada before I came to United States so paperwork, she could sooner than me, apply for our parents to come to Canada. A few years ago, two, three years ago they thought it would be good if your brother has, they put in application for him, if ever, you know he wants to come. He agreed with it, but you

know he withdrew, and he said that he you know he doesn't think, neither his wife, nor himself, have really an interest of living here. So, they're there.

I: Okay. Cool. And so, your parents immigrated to Canada?

R: Yes, they are citizens of Canada.

I: Okay. And do you know what year they immigrated?

R: I guess, in 1993 they came, I think immigrated there and they didn't want to stay. They thought that my father had, did heart surgery there. And then they thought that well, they don't want to really live there. But my sister talked to them and said that you know, she would be sponsoring them, they will be under her care, and they agreed to downsize their life in Iran and come to Canada. They did. I think as of '95 they came, and they decided to live kind independent, 'cuz they were, quite in good health shape, they could take care of them, so they didn't see any reason living with my sister. But close to where she was living and then in the same apartment building and then my sister bought a house and they bought an apartment but quite close to each other, so that my sister could visit with them and if they need help cuz their English, although there are classes there you know for immigrants, they won't be completely sufficient for living there so my sister was there and doing paperwork and visit with them and if they needed to go to doctor and things like that.

I: Are you married?

R: I am not.

I: I am assuming, then that you do not have children, then?

R: No.

I: Okay (laughs). So, oh. Did you, oh you said before that you were not employed right now?

R: I am not employed. I had a job in February of 91, some major restoration in our building suddenly needed and that kind of interrupt my entire you know. And I have been very involved with putting my life back together. Starting basically from scratch you know, I had insurance that has been very helpful. I'm a few steps before completing everything, you know. So, at this point that I am talking to you, I am not employed. But I am looking for work, and I somehow, I have decided that just before these new challenges start, I decided that I really want to transfer whatever credits I have in science and find an institution that can help me with my studies in adult and continuing education. Because I see that I can a lot better connect with people who are in that field, you know, so.

I: Great.

R: Uh.

I: So, what were your main reasons for immigrating to the U.S.? What it?

R: Education.

I: And...

R: Education. My reason was because I had a student visa.

I: So first you went to Vienna and then you went... (talking to self)

R: It was very difficult when I was getting my bachelors, I was on scholarship to work as soon as I graduate. It was not preventing me from doing master's program there, because master's in science was available. PhD in science was not available. I thought that it would be better for me to come to United States for my master's and then decide whether I want to go back, and never get a PhD, or if I decided to do a PhD, I would be better prepared with two years of master's.

I: So, when you came, you came to Milwaukee first?

R: Yes, all of the time I've lived here.

I: Oh cool!

R: Yes, mhmmm (laughs).

I: Cold!

R: Mmm (chuckles).

I: So, when you first immigrated to the U.S., what was your life like?

R: Excuse me?

I: When you first immigrated to the U.S., what was your life like? What are some of, like obstacles? Or exciting things that happened to you? When you first came?

R: Oh, I had a sponsor, because I did not come here on a scholarship from school or whatever, my sponsor's life faced major challenges, so I had to seek scholarship from UWM, which was approved. And (chuckles) yeah, well it delayed a little bit my graduation because not being familiar with everything, but I did graduate at UWM.

I: And when you came to the U.S. did you learn how to drive right away, or did you already know how to drive?

R: No, I had a driving license back home that I was hoping through AAA program I can just convert it to U.S. driving license. However, because of that hostage situation in Iran you know, kind of grey relation, between United States and Iran. A lot of contracts and, lot of things changed, therefore I think United States AAA didn't have that kind of thing with Iran that if you are holding the driver's license from Iran, that can be considered as a valid driving license in United States. Especially that my license in Iran, that was for manual and here I wanted to be automatic.

I: So, when you first came to, oh I am sorry, what was the year ago that you came to America?

R: It was 1986.

I: (Talking to self) 1986. Okay it was 1986 that you came and then you were studying, so you were in of course in America for the hostage situation?

R: No, no, no, I wasn't in United States for hostage situation. I was just telling you that the hostage, unfortunate, diplomatic relation, the hostage issue that created some unfortunate diplomatic relation between United States and Iran affected that.

I: I'm sorry. I don't remember what year the hostage situation was.

R: At the time of President Carter.

I: Okay, I am sorry.

R: Yeah, I think it was at the time of President Carter.

I: Okay. So yeah. (Silence) So, how would you describe your religious life?

R: My religious life?

I: Yes.

R: Personal faith. Culturally, I'm Muslim, but people practice Islam at different levels. You know, there are some people in Iran, even before the revolution happened, they were wearing very traditional Islamic clothing. You know there's large scarf, you wear all over, you have probably seen. Biggest scarf down to here (points). Small scarf, you know, or no scarf. You know. In my family all the women to their own decision usually they would the small scarf. In my personal family I never had somebody who used to wear, you know, one of those long scarves or all over scarves. You go to mosque whenever you want to. In my family what was getting practiced routinely, was praying, fasting, celebrating the holidays. In Islamic holidays,



there are some sad days, you know, like the days that this religious leader passed away or one of his relatives passed away, sometimes those are hard, I mean, everybody's closed. You know, banks are closed, you know, whatever. Like prophet Muhammad, his birthday is celebrated, and I think it is still a formal holiday, everybody's closed, but the closest person to prophet Muhammad there are three days that I think the entire country, the business is closed, the day that he got hit on his head by a poison knife, and the day that he was getting close to die, and the day that he actually died. Those days are very, still very, very important days, you know, they still, at least I think from those three days at least two days of it, everybody's closed. I think it happens in the month of Ramadan. And then, close to that, maybe within a week, there is celebration. When the fasting time, it's over. So, we have sad days, that people and businesses close, there are happy days, prophet Muhammad, and I guess 12 of his close relatives, that some of their birthdays, everybody's closed, not the death of all of them everybody's closed.

I: Do you still celebrate Ramadan in America?

R: The day that Ramadan is over I send happy holidays message to people that are fasting. During the month of Ramadan some sort of communication you know writing with them, but I do not myself fast, you know, they are long hours of not drinking, or whenever. It has never worked with my life. And when I was a student, it was very hard for me to do that. Some people can easier take it, but I don't. Physically I wasn't ready when I was a child, you know, in the family when everybody was fasting, I did just half a day fasting you know, instead the time when someone comes, sometimes, they said, "you're supposed..." and I said, "I couldn't do it." It was too much for me. And if you feel that it is too hard on yourself you don't have to. Pregnant

women don't have to. Sick people don't have to, you know. And I guess you pay, or your father, the one who is financially sponsoring you under 18 pays something you know. For the ill people in the family or those who cannot fast.

I: So, do you, do you attend the mosque in Milwaukee?

R: (Silence) Not regularly. No, I kind of, mine is more kind of private connection, you know. I do not wear scarf, but when you go to mosque you do it. But I get dressed, you know, the way I believe I should get dressed. I don't think that wearing scarf is a big issue, you know. I think it's all, you have to understand, I know that is one of the requirements, and that a lot of Muslim women from different countries do that. But I have never done that, my mother never did it. Unless that you want to go to mosque, there you have to. I don't think you go to mosque without any scarf or something. But on a daily basis I just get dressed, you know.

I: So, do you regularly? Oh. How do you describe your political participation in America? Do you regularly vote?

R: Vote? I'm not qualified yet, until my citizenship is done.

I: Oh. I thought you were. Okay, so you are not. So, when will you become a citizen?

R: The application has been sent. But for 10 years when I was just on student visa, I had no way of doing anything. And I was so busy with my more deeper issues than voting, you know. I didn't know a lot of politics. I didn't have much time, you know, for following the politics. Watching the particular one that I am very interested in, right now. Because it was, on a student visa you have very restricted time for graduation. You are just allowed in this program for this many years and you know. You came to the country everything was quite new, and there was a lot of learning, and you know I didn't even attend any English class! Because I thought that it was decided for me, that I can communicate, because my university was taught in English. Quite different from the type of English that I needed, you know, because in that university we were taught everything in English, understanding English is a lot easier than speaking, at different levels, you know, and it is quite different from writing at different levels, you know. English has very many different levels you know. For example, writing to a senator, writing to a congressman, resume, I wasn't at work age when I was in Iran, and I don't think the first time I heard about resume was when I was in United States. So, all these different things, were different things that I needed learn, even making contract with an insurance company. There were special vocabularies that I was never taught as a part of my science studies. And even for science studies, that university, everything was in multiple choice, so I was reading the questions, I was understanding, I was marking, I was getting my grade. No essay! Writing is I think something quite different. I go to Canada and a lot of immigrants there and they get these basic classes for English learning, and they think that they now know English. Because now it is convenient to go to store but, asking "how much is this?" paying and saying, "thank you" is different from the type of that you want to write and get a grant. Totally different! Unbelievable! Very difficult to help somebody understand, what this is. As an example, somebody came to United States in Milwaukee and in an employment resource center I met, and if ever I am explain something too much just cut me off, but they came to be and they ask me that whether I would be willing to talk to someone from the Middle East and I interrupted what I was doing, and I went and talked to her, and I found out that she is Persian! She could hardly talk or say anything meaningful in English. And then I could, I was talking very slowly with her, to see, what type of education she has. She was telling me that she has a master's degree from University of Michigan. And I said, "Then how come you cannot talk?" She said, "I got a degree in Iran." "In Iran? University of Michigan?" Apparently, somehow some kind of arrangement between University of Michigan and some people in Iran, this program evolved. And they went there, and her degree, on top of her degree is University of Michigan. She is unable to write a cover letter. And on different occasions we have had different conversation of how different she is from a student at University of Michigan! She said, "But my degree is from United States." I say (silence), "Don't cheat yourself! You did not sit at the same class with the same student. You are not American. You were not grown up here. And you never talk to anybody in English you didn't write, everything

was taught to you in Farsi! And yes, they stamped and gave you a degree, yes, that is just paper.” You know not to be disrespectful to her, but that is kind of trash. When you compare yourself, and then you don’t have, you don’t have those classmates who you go together finding job, writing resume, becoming each other’s mentor, and it is 7 years, she’s sitting here. Her life is fully sponsored by a brother she has in Texas. And she just doesn’t know what is wrong. She said, “There is something wrong with Milwaukee. It is not big enough.” She got a degree in energy therapy and things like that. Well, there is no school teaching it, and insurance doesn’t pay for this service, so what are you, expecting, to do, with a paper? Even if every line if it is written in gold, you know, it’s not doing you any good! You’re not a person! It is something that, you know, she bought, something that is not helping her. Unless that she brings a huge amount of money, starts a business for just practicing because when you are practicing energy therapy you are not talking to patient that much, you know. You just practicing. But who is going to run that office?

I: So, is this something that really challenged you, when you came to America?

R: No because I have a lot better English in my background. You know it was, I came actually here on an ESL program, because they thought, that I might need ESL, but professors that I got interviewed to, because you have to choose a master’s professor, they decided that its adequate. It’s adequate, I don’t need ESL, they changed my, there this special school paperwork, it’s called I-20, something like that. That is, you’re legal here, on a legal document that immigration office gives you, but that is only for that school. If you wanted to change your school, that has to change. If you want to change your major, that has to change. And that is difficult, difficult, difficult! Life is a lot more difficult for an immigrant who wants to change school or major than for an American, we just change, you know. I didn’t want to change, you know, I learned it when I was planning to switch to pharmacology at medical college of Wisconsin, and I learned oh I have to go through all that, and a new sponsor and everything has to be done again. So, I stayed at UWM with science. So.

I: So, all the paperwork was frustrating? Was it frustrating?

R: No, I had to stay in a little bit longer, about six months, until all of my documents, from Iran, all of my education paperwork, got translated and sent to UWM. They reviewed it, there were some professors at that time at UWM, who can explain things to graduate school, that how difficult it is for a person who has done her studies in Iran and has contract with university, to work there, because there was no tuition for me. But I had... my return was to teach. But there was no job. Women were basically out of job, country was in a big political switch, from the time of shah to the time of a religious government that was limiting women to go to work. So, I could get, little by little, my transcripts when they documented that. I am graduated, but they don’t have any job for me. So, that helped. An interpreter was needed, you know. For professor was Persian, you know at that time, who were working for United States stepped in and explained things to graduate program and the coordinator with UWM: that this is how it is. And

it was understood. So, my transcripts, my degree, everything came, little bit at a time eventually came together. And they sat and they made a decision about it.

I: So.

R: So, these are the questions that everybody who does an interview, goes through with the interviewee?

I: Yeah, generally, yeah.

R: Generally. So, it is not as specific, you know?

I: No just specific, yeah.

R: Would that be possible that I get a copy of this questionnaire? To see what kind of questions there were, to see if my notes were enough?

I: Oh yeah, Dr. Othman can send one to you. Yeah.

R: She can send it to me?

I: Yeah, they gave them to you at the...

R: No, I don't think that I got one of these.

I: Oh well, I can give it. At the end, I can give you, my copy. Because I have it.

R: That would be great.

I: Yeah.

R: Just interested to know. I mean it educates me; you know.

I: Yeah.

R: Because she said that there might be a possibility that I go and interview.

I: Yeah, that would be great! Yeah!

R: You know. The question makes a lot more sense to me, than somebody who doesn't know that culture. You know, you know, what I mean?

I: Mmm.

R: I can, quickly, probably, make sense of the answers.

I: Yeah, and you probably have contacts or friends...that.

R: In Arab? In Arab culture, I do not.

I: You don't have any...

R: But I am covering a lot of news and educational ... At least four hours per day, I am on channel 10 and 36 and very interested to know, what's going on and things make sense so easily, you know?

I: Yeah. So, when you first came to, oh, now do you have, what is your community involvement in Milwaukee?

R: Oh, my community contacts?

I: No, just involvement. Do you attend any like any classes? You mentioned that you attend a knitting class?

R: Once I was...

I: Did you do that first?

R: A student graduate. And got admitted to PhD. It was a while since I came here. So naturally, I was getting, I was developing some stronger roots.

I: Yeah, friends?

R: Then just a student, you know. And at school it wasn't a lot of connections, because of nature of my research. You know, I was in dark room working with electron microscope, it was a very isolated life, you know? I did have some contact with my uncle's friend, my uncle was a physician here. But it was, and it became a quite different community for me, because most of the men, in Persian community, were quite professional people, but not necessarily their lives. So, some of these lives get mailed from Iran (chuckle) to here. And they basically remained in the same mentality and everything, that they had in Iran no real desire for educating themselves, they just had an easier life then they had in Iran, for example you go into grocery store and buy whatever you want to, more maybe fancy stores, like Boston store, or whatever, but I did not see really the kind of intelligence I was looking for, you know what I mean? And that was not very attractive to me. I've gradually found people that their intelligence, their missions, you know, were very, very interesting for me. I became connected to Amnesty International, yes. For some years we worked together and the director of Amnesty international once invited me to serve as the speaker, just about my life. He thought that you know, telling people about my life would be

all he is asking me. I am very happy that speech was very successful, and fundraising was like nice too. And the Director of Amnesty International and attending their meetings monthly I got to know other people, you know. I made connections with some organizations out of state that their mission was focusing on women's rights and children's rights and things like that, it was a long time ago. (Sigh) It is on my resume; I can't remember some of those organizations I was connected to. And this was about, almost when I was finishing my masters.

I: So, what year did you graduate with your master's?

R: May of 1990. And then I at that time, we translated my thesis and send it to Iran to see if there was any chance that I came to United States because there was no job and no chance of you know, of getting easily to the graduate program there. You had to be quite religious, you know, so that the committee, so the new committee at the university approves you. You know? And my family wasn't that kind of religious. The Ayatollahs and that kind of government we have. So, for me, when I was asking: "is there a job for me?" that I serve in return of the free education that I had. Basically, everybody's education was free, you know, universities were not charging for education. But we had a commitment to work, you know, for the country. Well, there is no job, what am I supposed to do? So, I got this admission for UWM here. Came here, and now I am graduated. What is there for me? They sent that. They approve a scholarship for me. So that I get my PhD here and then go there serve as a faculty. I was almost halfway done when I heard somethings inside of that government there's no kind of unity. You know, even the people of the government have their own different views and things change or whatever, so my scholarship got interrupted. And...

I: Why did your scholarship get interrupted?

R: I...of. I had to go to Iran. Because my father needed heart surgery, and I thought at his age that would be the last time that I would see him, meet with people of Senator Feingold, explain my situation. That here I am, I'm on student visa and if I leave, there is no guarantee that they renew my student visa. I am in the middle of these things, I have made investment in my life, you know. I've done this much of my graduate studies, on scholarship from UWM, of which I'm very proud of. I escaped the English part of it, my immigration paperwork, my legal immigration paperwork was for ESL.

I: Yeah, you...

R: You know, but professors here, when I was getting interviewed to see which professor was right for me to do my master's thesis with, they said you actually don't have to go through ESL program.

I: Yeah, you said.

R: They understand that how money is hard, now that my sponsor had some challenging financial situation, how difficult it is to send money. And you are doing adequately, we completely understand what you say comparing with people who come from other countries, either their pronunciation is so difficult to understand or whatever. It seems that Persian's pronunciation is not that difficult for Americans to understand. Yes, I do have an accent, but I

make sense. And writing research paper or something that I have is very difficult, a lot of people from church help me. You know. They volunteered, they brought interested to be part of my solutions you know. I was very interested in English, English language learning, I just didn't know how important it is to write. I'm graduated from a university in Iran that everything is taught in English. Here I noticed that how difficult it is to write comparing with just listening the lectures in English and then taking the exam in multiple choice.

I: Yeah, you were saying.

R: You know? It is only an immigrant that knows. And it is not that you are a good interviewer, but you do not know. How difficult it is, to change the level of your English from understanding English to speak to students as a teaching assistant. The life is a lot easier for an Indian student, because their formal language is English, you know. It is a lot easier for a Canadian student, you know. But for somebody who has had 22 years of her life in Iran, and never wrote anything to anybody in English, starting from writing cover letter and putting a com-competitive resume together, all of this happened as I was struggling...not struggling, just... preparing myself, for learning molecular biology stuff, you know. Yes, the lectures were making sense to me. But every course have to have research paper, you know, and I had to learn that, by help of church people.

I: So, you attended a church?

R: I didn't attend church but they the friendships that I developed in the school they were connected to church. And they explained my situation, that I need that and they brought interest in reviewing my things and of course for preparing thesis, university has a writing center. So, they were very helpful for me. It was just, it was just learning how to say something clearly. You know what I mean? That center was helpful for Chinese, you know, oriental people? And I used them. But a lot of English writing after that, I just learned it by expanding my connection in the community and by talking to people, and by obligation of writing to politicians to, when you know, when my scholarship got disconnected, then I had to do something, you know. I had a life-threatening situation going back home. And it took a good five years before I got approved for permanent residency. And a lot of writing, a lot of communication, a lot of, you know, speaking to different people, and at different positions who could be helpful to me. I think we talked enough about this. Unless that you have other questions about this that I should of think. My coming to the United States, how did I come, how did I finish my first mission, you know.

I: Why did you decide to stay after your PhD?

R: My PhD is not done.

I: Oh, it's not done?

R: No, because I decided to change my PhD to adult and continuing education.

I: Okay.

R: I thought that it connects me to the community easier, than just being in that focused area of molecular biology. Being in, working in lab, you know or whatever. This, this, this, in more different ways, I can look for job and it's a field that makes me a lot more interested than just in molecular biology, you know. Stem cell and all that research you can do is one thing, and adult and continuing education, especially that I learned there's so many people here, adults, that don't know to read and write. You know and seeing the difficulties these people have to make the ends meet, something like that they say, what I have gone through if I become an instructor in that field I can offer more. Then (silence) just being in molecular biology. That any American can do, but adult and continuing education is for more people who have challenges more than just the area of, their studies and you know. Lot of students I work with at the different community programs (long pause) they're handling a lot. You know they do a little education as they are facing so many life pressures, you know, and I feel that that this is where I have to be, you know I can give a lot more of my life experience with the people who have to go through the challenges that I had to go.

I: So, you plan on staying in America? For?

R: Until the situation changes in my country. I am requesting expedited processing for my naturalization. So, I can, so that I can hopefully, more frequently travel to Canada, you know. The permanent residency that I have is good for working in United States, but in order to leave United States, I need to have a valid passport and that has to be American passport.

I: So, you haven't left United States? Did you go back to visit your father?

R: I have gone there. I could go through a private company in translating business and they charge something, and they get in touch with Embassy of Pakistan in Washington has a little office in it, intersection of New York. And a lot of people on political asylum have been able to get a valid passport. And yes, I have a few times, well you have to have, you have to first have your permanent residency. Even if you get a passport, through that part of Embassy of Pakistan, has a little part called intersection of Iran. Yes, you can get two three times, I got my Persian passport. I did not go to Iran, but it was helpful for me to go to Canada and to come back. But,



due to the restoration and you know, repairs that we, as of two years ago, had in our building and the demolition that happened and without my consent they threw all of my stuff out. You know, my entire life. Everything that I put together over 27 years. My furniture. My documents. My everything.

I: Why did this happen?

R: Fire, of unknown reasons. Some kind of electrical fire happened. And my apartment got affected, very badly. And I don't know how many of those people whose apartment got affected contacted 911, but I did. I know that I did. Because I just thought that the sooner they come, the sooner they can stop the fire, which was very little, at the corner of kitchen. I heard (claps hands together) and I went to the kitchen, and I saw on the wall, two three locations, from the wall, fire is coming. And I, the first thing that I could think of was call 911. (Long pause). They came extremely late. With fire, at blink of eye, things can happen. And they came 45 minutes late. (pause). Whether that was because, I informed them, I informed 911, they said, "Are you safe? Wherever?" I said, "Yes, I am in a little balcony." Because my phone was in bedroom which has little balcony. So, I throw off the screen and I stood there, and I was breathing fresh air, and I see that the fire people they were on the street, and I say, "Come Up! Come Up! Everything is burning!" And the smoke was coming up out of the kitchen side, I had no way of going back, and go to the hallway and go where the fire thing is. So, I was depending on their coming. A bunch of attorneys I called seeking help, they said, "It could be they came to your apartment so late because they knew you were alive, and you were staying in balcony and breathing fresh air. So, once they got to your building, they had to go to every other unit that they have." That's an explanation, but still, there is a question that, the situation, the financial situation. And, teachers, firefighters, police officers, number are cutting down. I do not want to make any comment. Because I do not know that why did they come so late? And why, you know? It was just little that came, when I saw it and I tried to put blanket on it. (Tense voice) But how can you put blanket on it when it is on the wall? You know what I mean? If it was on the floor or something you could, yes. But it and it is moving. You know when the fire happened it is moving. (Resumes more relaxed tone) So it is I am very thankful (soft sigh) that most of the restoration is over. But in the summer before, last four kind of unimportant, things that are left to be done. So, I, at least I get done with fire restoration. Just closet door and refrigerator door, oven, and blinds, flooding of air conditioning.

I: Wait, what year did the fire happen? It was 10 years ago, you said?

R: No, no, no, it was 2011.

I: Oh, it was in 2011, oh okay.

R: Yes, and well living in complex is places like mine; it is not that you are deciding. If I was living in suburb and I had house, less than three months and everything, but here you are dealing with board members, you're dealing with insurance of the building, you know, which I have been paying every month as a part of premium you're dealing with a lot of things, and this was so new to all of us. Our building never, as far as I know, never, in their entire history, has dealt with huge flood, or huge fire. So, everybody was learning as we went. And that is why mmm. Finishing my PhD. And I mean, I was at the middle of my PhD, and this happened. So, all of my paperwork, research things...

I: Yeah.

R: I feel like sometimes I explain a little too much, but it is, when you read my answers, it might connect things better.

I: Yeah, no you're great. Thank you so much. I have just some final questions. So, you were obviously in America when 9/11 happened? September 11<sup>th</sup>? What was your experience on 9/11?

R: 9/11? When it happened I was in Canada.

I: Oh, you were?

R: Yes, I had just, received my green card.

I: Mmmm.

R: Because as I said, for ten years I was a student and then then that interruption of my scholarship happened, and it took a good 4-5 years, until you know, I could get documents, you know. My scholarship was interrupted I had nowhere to go. You know very, very, nice politicians got involved, supporting my request for permanent residency. Got denied once, but Senator Feingold stepped in, and other politicians were very nice. Until a lawyer stepped in who was familiar with asylum cases, refugee cases, and he was very helpful in getting my permanent residency, here is one year that after you get approval of asylum you receive a letter says that says that "this person is an asylee in our country. And she is allowed to live here indefinitely and work here indefinitely." So immediately, you can work. But you cannot, I think, if you leave the country, you cannot come back. So, so one year you have to do nothing. Just live with that paper that they give you. Next year you can apply for permanent residency. Now I think it was in '95 when my scholarship got interrupted and I applied for (silence) permanent residency. Once I got denied because I did not have any documents. You know, I just heard that my scholarship got interrupted and this and that. In 96 an attorney stepped in, and I got my asylum approval. But until 1997 I could not do anything. You have to sit in that position for one year. Before you can apply for permanent residency. In 97, I applied for permanent residency. And just waiting, waiting, waiting for it to come. From 1997 that I applied for permanent residency in United States, as a legal right for me, until 2001 I had no green card. Yes, I could leave the country, but

I had no document for coming back. That permanent residency is helpful for coming back to the United States. In 2001 when my card came, it said on it, "permanent resident of united states as of 1999." Now why did I receive it in 2001? I don't know. Just, whatever, things that is happened. So as soon as I got that permanent residency card, I definitely need to fly out to Canada and see my parents. I stayed there a few months with my parents. And we were getting ready, my mother was going to come and see my life here and everything and 9/11 happened. 9/11 happened and that I think delayed my returning from Canada to Untied States for a couple of months. Sometime in October I left Untied States for Canada, Toronto, where my sister and my parents are. I stayed there for a couple of months ready to come back, this happened. Instead of September, I think my mother and I came here in October. And then I started working for MPS, as a substitute teacher, and then, substitute teaching with exceptional education. I did not tell you that from the time I got approval of asylum and legally allowed to work here, I worked for social services, Catholic social services, and Lutheran social services, and then I wanted to really switch to educational things. The first thing that became available was, you know, substitute teaching at elementary school. Soon I noticed that because my childhood wasn't here, so it would be easier for me, to connect with older people. So, I put application for high school people. Yet it wasn't the best fit, because even my high school hasn't been here, you know. Then I came to do some research in community programs of the colleges like MATC. And there I learned about adult and continuing education, and you know, it took a lot of interviewing, and you know applying for different jobs until I got a substitute instructor position at MATC, and following by that, I got a job at Brian Stratton college as an instructor for science. And then the fire happened.

I: Mmm, yeah.

R: It has not been easy, but my best interest is to work with people who have a lot of challenges or have faced a lot of challenges, because I think that my life experiences and thankfully being successful in (pause) life obstacles (pause) can be helpful to other people. You know?

I: Yeah.

R: An American person at my age can be very helpful to American people who are facing issues that are American issues, you know? But an immigrant like me, I think, can be helpful to immigrants, you know, because I have gone through all of these challenges with all of my fibers, you know. And thankfully I know where I am right what I would like to do.

I: Great. You are a great example.

R: Hopefully.

I: So, I have some a few more questions, the question is: how do you identify yourself? So sometimes people identify themselves as Muslim-American, Arab-American, Iranian American. How do you identify yourself, when asked to identify yourself?

R: (Long pause) That I like to think about it. Do I have, yes, I have your e-mail. I want to think about this and send my answer to your e-mail, because I think that (long pause) an immigrant-American is not sufficient because this immigrant American first generation is not an immigrant. Somehow more specifically, I would like to label myself, if I can, if I can do it.

I: No, but if you were just like in a conversation, and with, like not even officially, like how would you say it?

R: Well, I am not completely American because citizenship is not over. (Sigh) I have no contact with my country (sigh) until this government is gone. And I don't know how much you follow the news or interest that, all that region is facing challenges, you know. (Long pause) This I want to think about it and then I will tell you.

I: Totally, so you said that you don't wear the scarf, your family doesn't wear the scarf. You said that when you, you wear scarf, or traditional clothing when you go to the mosque?

R: (Pause) If I go, I have to. A lot of times when, when I first came to the United States, I was talking to my friends there I said, you what I am exactly getting dressed as you guys, I don't know, you have seen media that people of Iran, there was at the time that people made some kind of green revolution, they don't want this government, they want to change everything. And so that time you could see a lot of Persian women, how did they get dressed. I said, you know, that that the official allowed way of getting dressed by Iranian ladies, you know, you have some pants, and you have something like trench coat, they call it raincoat down here. And not a huge shiny makeup, I think a little bit of lipstick, natural color, most of the time it is a lot, at the time at religious times or whatever, if the police of the government see you with a lot of shiny eye lashes, or red lipstick, and red nail-color, they might question you. But I think, I said, that's how I get dressed. I am in Milwaukee, most of the time it is winter.

I: Yeah.

R: And I wear long overcoats, and I like them because it keeps me warm. I say a lot of times these overcoats has a hood, how much different this is of from the way you get dressed? You just wear a piece of fabric to cover your hair and that is how I do, and I think (pause) being (pause) of a woman (pause) how do I say that? It is all here (points to head) how you dress, or how you dress or how you like to expose your whole body. It's all here. It is not just by wearing scarf, because I try to get dressed decently, you know. Even when I was a child, I didn't have a lot of interest in kind of dressing that exposes my body. I do not like to define myself, that way, you know. I want to more of define myself as a person who is interested in education, in meaningful life not you know, how my body looks, you know. So, I was telling my friends how different do you think I live here than I was living in Iran? For a couple of years, I had to wear scarf there even when I was going to university there, so, it's not much different. My life mission hasn't

changed that much, I have just come here to better educate myself. I do appreciate here the freedom of expressing your ideas, this is not in Iran. You cannot say things to your president or whatever, but here you can say that you know, we don't like this you know freedom of your thought or people of all kinds of religion can live here. And just sit and talk to each other, they don't have to agree with each other, but there is not harm, you know, labeling yourself that I am Jewish, that I am Catholic, or a kind of Christianity, I am more you know tied to a kind of Muslim. Honestly, all of these things, and I have watched a few very valuable journal shows where researchers came and said here is a bible, here is book of Jewish people, here is book of Koran. And see how many parts they have overlap, you know. So, I do appreciate the beliefs that seem to be right, you know. I was attending some classes at a Catholic Church, just because of my interest, just because I want to know how much things that I never knew before and how much of these learnings can strengthen me. My belief is with the supreme power, I call it, you know. What I can learn from them, you know. If you do not know enough about it, how can you say which one is better than the other? You know?

I: Yeah.

R: So, I am, I am, I am trying, as I find more time, to you know, to get some distance from molecular biology, these are the things that I want to, you know, it seems to be important for my new future, which is adult and continuing education, you know 'cuz you need to connect with people. Adults, who have different beliefs, and the better you can connect the better you can grow.

I: Yeah. Yeah. Wow. That was such an amazing experience. Thank you so much for agreeing to...

R: Oh no.

I: It was a good experience hearing your story. I really, really appreciate it.