



Oral History Project Interview

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

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Gender: F

Name: Ruba (Anonymous)

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: born in U.S.

Abstract: Ruba identifies herself as American Palestinian and spent a portion of her life living in Beitin, Palestine, where her parents are originally from. She greatly appreciates her parents' open-mindedness in their upbringing of their children and recognizes that not all second-generation immigrants would have had the same freedoms and independence to choose their careers as she has. Ruba considers herself a moderate Muslim – she follows all dietary and alcohol restrictions but does not pray five times daily or wear the hijab, though she does not feel that should define a “good Muslim.” She strongly empathizes with the conflicts happening in her parents' homeland and throughout the Middle East and has considered joining the Peace Corps or other volunteer organizations to give her time to help those struggling abroad.

Key Themes: Parenting, Palestinian-American culture, conflict, religious beliefs, open-mindedness

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

I: Since we're not putting your name on it, that's fine, but can you tell me your age and your level of education?

R: Okay, so, I'm 23 and I'm a senior at Marquette.

I: Okay and where have you attended school?

R: Franklin High School, which is in Milwaukee County, and Marquette University now.

I: When you were growing up, where did you go to grade school?

R: To grade school? Well, it's actually pretty funny, I went to a public Milwaukee school, however, I believe when I was 8 years old, my family and I moved overseas to Palestine. So, from '98-200, I was in school in Palestine.

I: What was that like?

R: It was interesting. The first few months were difficult, because it was just a whole different world, it was just really, really different. And I think the whole reason we did move over there is because my parents wanted us to kind of know the language a little bit better, know how to read and write as well as the culture, because we grew up here and everything was very, you know, so, it was interesting. But it was great overall. Like, the school I went to was nice because it was a lot of American-born Palestinians who also went back there, so I was, you know, the same background, but it was a great experience, it really was.

I: Did you... did your parents teach you Arabic when you were growing up before you moved to Palestine?

R: They did. I didn't know how to read and write. Well, just the basics, like my grandfather, you know, used to sit us aside and you know, the alphabet and all that. Speech was perfect but reading and writing wasn't the best.

I: So, thinking back to when you were growing up, either in the United States or Palestine, can you think of some like places or buildings that really stand out to you?

R: In Palestine?

I: Or in the United States, either one.

R: In the United States? Like buildings that stood out to me?

I: Yeah, or places where you spent a lot of time.

R: Okay. I would have to say the one thing that really stood out to me growing up was just Palestine itself. You know, visiting Jerusalem, you know the Dome of the Rock was amazing to see at a young age and I think besides like the struggle sites in Palestine alone, there's nothing I can really recall like a building growing up, but...

I: Where in Palestine did you live?

R: In Betin, so that was about like ten minutes outside of Ramulla, which is like the main city. Yeah, it's the main city, I think it's 45 minutes from Jerusalem, it's been like seven years since I've been back home, so, yeah.

I: And then, were you born in Milwaukee?

R: Yes.

I: Okay. Can you tell me about the house that you grew up in?

R: The house that I grew up in? Well, you know both my parents were born in Palestine and came here at a very young age. I believe my father when he was fourteen. He really did, I believe it was like the American dream, because he came here with like ten dollars in his pocket and, you know he worked his way up and now, you know, he has his family and my mom came here when she was sixteen, so my parents growing up, it was, I feel like they were open-minded. You know, I feel like a lot of people who migrate to the United States are a little bit closed-minded and are able to kind of coexist with everyone else, especially with cultural differences, but I feel like,

you know I grew up in a very diverse family, and it was very ... I don't really know how to explain it. (I: Okay) You know, I have older siblings and it was actually really nice and knowing the differences between cultures and whatnot, I feel like at such a young age you only see this black and white difference, so, it was a good experience growing up, I guess.

I: Thanks. What part of the city did you grow up in? When you were in Milwaukee?

R: In Milwaukee. I grew up in Milwaukee County, I didn't grow up in Franklin. I went to Franklin from Palestine after in 2000, so in Milwaukee County.

I: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about how you felt about being Palestinian, being Muslim in the different spaces that you grew up in?

R: Mmhhh. This one, I never really noticed a difference about being Palestinian or being Arab or being Muslim, you know, growing up even in the United States, you know, when I was younger obviously there was some little differences like in elementary school during lunch and they'd be serving like bacon or like a bacon and cheese sandwich or like ham and cheese or something like that and I knew the difference of not being able to eat it, at such a young age, I kind of like, I really didn't understand why, I just knew that wasn't part of my culture, wasn't part of my religion, but, I really didn't feel like there was much of a difference between let's say, me and my classmates. Like a lot of my friends even now, my best friend, she's a Christian, she's American and, we notice the differences but there really isn't, you know? I think where I noticed it the most was probably going overseas was kind of a culture shock at eight years old. It was a whole different world, and it was a learning experience, I guess of my own culture. I think the most where it hit home the most was probably September 11. The attacks really kind of it was really tough on the family. My mother, she wears a hijab, she wears a scarf, so it was tough to see, it was just tough to see friends and neighbors' reactions toward us after the event had happened and, I feel like that's when that... I don't want to say gap, but I really saw the line between the two cultures, really. I think that was kind of a culture clash. But yeah, I think besides those two events, I think, I hope I answered the question, I'm not sure if I did.

I: Yeah, yeah. Actually, I'm going to skip ahead a little bit because there are some questions in here about September 11, is that okay?

R: Yeah, that's fine.

I: Okay. So, how did you feel on September 11 and sort of the first days afterwards?

R: Well, during that time, I actually went to – the Islamic Center here in Milwaukee has an elementary school, a middle school and a high school and at that time, I was I believe I was in fifth grade... fifth or sixth, I'm really not sure. I remember being in school, everyone was brought to the gym and was told of the events, well not really told of the events but just let go and told our parents were there to pick us up. And walking out, I see all these cop cars and I kind of got concerned what's going on. I opened up the TV when I got home, and I'm just kind of completely distraught. You know, my heart was broken to see what had happened. And at such a young age, you really don't understand, either, you know what is going on. And the first, I believe two weeks I was off of school because it was an Islamic school and there were a lot of threats so for the children's safety, we were off school. The first few days were a horrible

experience, actually. The neighborhood that I grew up in, well that I lived in at that time, all the neighbors are very close, very friendly and it was kind of sad to see people's reactions especially towards my parents, towards my family. I'd walk out of the house to grab the mail and they'd be like, "You're a terrorist, I hope your happy," and, I was only I think 11 or 12 years old at the time. Eggs – our cars would get egged in the morning, and I think it was more so tough to see my parents go through it because I feel like if someone were to look at me as I was crossing the street, they wouldn't be able to tell that I am Arab or I'm Palestinian or I'm Muslim, I don't wear the hijab, I dress very modern and whatnot, but I feel like it was really tough to see that on my parents. So, it was a very tough time. It was sad because I felt sad for the events that had happened, you know for the innocent people that died. At the same time, I kind of – you know neighbors and friends kind of acted differently towards me and I really didn't understand it at that time. I feel like that even was kind of a learning experience for everyone, too. It was a tough time.

I: Do you remember how your parents reacted, or if they sat you down and talked to you about it or anything?

R: Especially going to a Muslim school at that time, my parents did, that day, going back, I don't remember a hundred percent clearly but I do remember my parents talking to me and my sibling, letting us know what exactly had happened and that there is a possibility that people will act differently towards us and to kind of, not for us to kind of like lash back or be angry, to kind of just let it go and, I dunno, they kind of prepared us – not that you really can prepare anyone for it, but they kind of like gave us a talk as in, "This is what's gonna happen, it might happen, it might not, but kind of be strong, put it on the side and, you know, innocent people have died and innocent people are hurt and they're just not acting rationally" I guess. I think it was a good talk that they gave us because otherwise, I would have been like, "What the hell is going on? What the (expletive) is wrong with you guys?" But yeah.

I: Have your interactions with people changed since September 11?

R: I don't think my interactions with people have changed, at all. I think I've just become a little bit more cautious. Let's say if I'm out with my mom, especially, it's very, it kind of like, hits hard because my mom does wear the hijab and there are some people who are very understanding and who know the religion, know the principles. I feel like after that event, many people confused what had happened with what the religion preaches, which is complete opposite things. Islam is nothing, it doesn't include terror, it doesn't include harming other people. I just feel like I'm a little more cautious about the way other people in public were to, even if they'd give my mother a look, I don't become very defensive, but I do get worried. I do get worried because, just look at the events that are happening in the world and I don't want someone to unleash their anger on my mother when she did nothing to do with it, they still kind of – the hijab is like a symbol of this terror to some people, I guess. I think I kind of worry about that, the way others kind of interact with my mother, which, to be honest, nothing has really happened besides the first year or two where I was concerned. It's more of a defense mechanism towards interactions towards my parents more than anything.

I: Do you think that she noticed that as much as you did, as her daughter?

R: She did. She did. I think me and my siblings definitely noticed it. We're very defensive of my parents, we were very worried. I think my mom deep down notices, I feel like she doesn't really express it to her children as like a concern or something she thinks about, but it's pretty evident that that's what happens. There was a time where, even just like out shopping or something, like a clerk, you can definitely tell some people do act differently towards her than other people, and I believe there was a time we were like at Target or something and the clerk or whoever was helping her there wasn't treating her the best and it was for absolutely no reason, was just kind of giving her trouble and once I approached him and I started talking to him, he acted completely different. I dunno, it just makes you think, think twice about the way people interact. Is it just because I'm not wearing the hijab that I'm different than my mother? We believe in the same things and hmm (shrugs). Things like that, I guess. I dunno, I hope I'm answering your questions. If I'm going off subject, I tend to like ramble a lot.

I: Oh no, that's fine, you are! I'm going to back track a little bit. Let me make sure this is still recording. (checks recorder) Okay, it is. I'm assuming that you've never served in the military?

R: No, I haven't.

I: Are you currently employed?

R: Yes.

I: Where do you work?

R: I work at, well it's actually Physicist Scribe, it's a company based out in Texas, but they recruit like pre-med, pre-PA, or like nursing students to the Aurora hospitals here in the Milwaukee area, so I work at Aurora St. Luke's, West Allis and St. Luke's South Shore – the Aurora hospitals here. And I do medical charting for physicians in the ER.

I: Okay, cool, how do you like that?

R: I love it. It's the coolest thing. The clinical experience you get is just amazing. It really is.

I: What's your major? Sorry...

R: Oh, it's fine, biological sciences.

I: Okay, and what are your plans for after undergrad?

R: Plans... there's a direct admit entry option for the nursing program, so it's getting your masters in nursing, and the offer it at UWM and Marquette, so I'm actually applying in my year off, after graduation, and, so your first 15 months, you pretty much take the main classes like in the undergrad nursing and within the fifteen months afterwards you can take the NCLEX exam, be considered an RN, work and then you're directly admitted into the master's program. So that's my goal, that's what the plan is!

I: Cool. Can you tell me a little about your siblings – how many you have; how old they are?

R: Mmhmm. So, I have five siblings. The oldest is 30 years old, my older sister. Do you want to know a little bit more about them?

I: Sure, if you want, yeah.

R: Okay, my brother is 30, he works with my father, they own an electronics shop in the Milwaukee area. And then I have an older sister, she will be 28 I think next month, and she

works over at Chase, and then my younger sister is nineteen and she's a journalism major at Marquette. And then I have two other younger siblings – I have a pretty big family. My younger sibling, he's 16, in high school. And then the younger one is 14 in high school, so I have two sisters and three brothers.

I: And then your parents, did they meet in Palestine, or did they meet in the United States?

R: They actually met in the United States. My father came here when he was about 14 years old, my mother when she was 16. And I believe after the first month of my mother being here, they had met and gotten married like two weeks later.

I: Really?

R: Yeah, it's, it's a very different, the way they used to do things back then. I'm like, "How did you guys get married in two weeks?" But, yeah, they met here, in Milwaukee, in Racine, actually.

I: Okay, I'm going to switch gears a little bit. The next questions are about your culture and how you define yourself. So how would you identify yourself?

R: I would identify myself as an American Palestinian. You know, I feel like that's a very important aspect of my life. You know, I grew up in the United States, so, you know, me being American born is a big part of who I am. As well as my culture, my family linked us to it at a young age, so I feel like my culture alone I can't say is a Palestinian culture or a Palestinian tradition, I feel like it's a combination of the two. I guess, I don't know any way to really explain (I: No, that's good) Okay, yeah.

I: Do you think the way that you identify yourself changes with where you are? Like if you're at home or if you're at school?

R: No, I don't think it changes depending on where I am. I think, yeah, I really don't think it changes at all. I think they're both me, being at school, obviously in different environments you kind of somewhat adapt to the people you're around and the environment you're in, at the same time I don't feel like any part of me changes, like, being Palestinian and being American are just a part of who I am, yeah.

I: Are there places where you feel more able to express your Palestinian identity?

R: No, not really. Not really, I don't think so. In fact, I think when I meet someone and we become engaged and we talk about our backgrounds, it's kind of unique to have that Palestinian identity in there, as well. So, not really (laughs).

I: No, that's fine, what traditions of your religion and your culture do you practice?

R: What traditions?

I: Mmhmm.

R: In religion and culture... So, in religion, you know, the, Islam is really on a basis of the five pillars and asks the first one is believing in God, there is only one God, and the last prophet was Mohammed. So that's, you know, being a Muslim alone, I believe in that. That's the foundation of Islam, really. And then, like donating to charities is something that I participate in, as well, you know, whether it be volunteering or donating money or anything of that sort. And then fasting, so during Ramadan I do fast. It's getting pretty tough, with it being in the summer now,

so I do that. I don't pray five times a day, but I don't feel like that really defines who I am as a Muslim or makes anyone else any better. I don't pray five times a day and I don't wear the hijab, however, everything else, I do carry, you know close to heart and the principles of Islam, which I believe really is the foundation of being moral, the difference between what's right and wrong. So, I'm not extremely conservative, but I feel like I'm kind of in between the conservative and liberal, I guess, in a sense, so.

I: Thank you. What about culturally, are there food recipes that you still have at home or anything like that?

R: Oh yeah, well, I really don't cook, my mother does. There are plenty of them, hummus is probably the main one. Did you want me to just name off a few things, or...?

I: Sure, yeah.

R: Like the stuffed grape leaves my mom makes. I think without my mother, I think I would probably just be eating like falafel sandwiches and hummus from, like stores I can actually purchase it from. There is, it's sweets as well, like during Ramadan, it's actually pretty delicious, it looks like a pancake initially, but then you put, this is gonna, it probably sounds a little bit odd, but you put goat cheese in it and you put it in this syrup – it's very fatty, it's all sugar – and you dip it in there and it's really good. So, there's plenty of sweets, like (baglawah?) and like (22:00) and stuff like that. There's a lot of things that, I feel like food is definitely a big part of our culture. Like tea and what not.

I: What's your favorite dish that your mom makes?

R: My favorite dish would probably be stuffed zucchini. It's pretty good. I really don't know if that's just in the Arab culture alone, but it's good.

I: Do you follow food restrictions?

R: I do.

I: Can you explain a little bit more about that?

R: Yeah. So, I don't eat pork, for example, pretty much only anything that's really kosher. What else? Hmm, I'm trying to think. When it comes to, I guess alcoholic beverages or anything like that I don't drink alcohol as well. For many reasons. It's prohibited in Islam as well as I just, anything that really kind of like deviates your mind from being a little bit from ration or anything like that, so marijuana or any kind of drugs, really, I'm just, don't really do (laughs). Any other food restrictions? I feel like besides the pork, I really don't think anything else.

I: When your mom is cooking and she's looking for food that she uses, does she go to special grocery stores? Or where does she shop for food, I guess?

R: For the most part, any place really, like Sendik's or Pick 'N Save or anything like that when it comes to like fruits, vegetables, but I do believe the meat she purchases at, like, Arabic stores, just because they're halal and they're cut in a certain way, so besides the meat purchasing, I think everything else is really anywhere (laughs).

I: In, with your family or on your own, are there cultural or religious community activities that you participate in?

R: Community activities? Such as like attending like lectures at the mosque and things like that?

I: Sure, or like anything that you do where you're in public with other Palestinians or other Arabs or people who are Muslim?

R: So, like from a religious perspective?

I: Both.

R: Both? Okay, well there is usually conventions that go on, I believe in Chicago and sometimes in Milwaukee I think once or twice a year, so the family do attend that, and there's lectures on religion and culture and things of that sort. There's like entertainment and things, too, so the family attends. And then, a major thing that's been new, I'm from Beitin in Palestine, which is a small village in Palestine, and there's a big community here in Milwaukee, so they recently started this convention, like a Beitin convention and it usually takes place, I believe the first year it was in Chicago and then St. Louis and then North Carolina. I believe this year it's in Milwaukee, so that's a nice time, it's really not more on a basis of religion, but it's more just for everyone to kind of get together and entertainment and cultural activities and stuff like that.

I: And then, in Milwaukee, do you go to like the Islamic center or...?

R: The only times I go to the Islamic center is probably, I'd probably have to say, like during Ramadan, there is a prayer, you know that you can perform. It's called (NEED TRANSLATION HELP), it's a prayer you perform during Ramadan. So, I usually go every day during Ramadan, as well as a night, it's a special night in Islam, they it's the night that God had given down the Qur'an to Mohammed, it's called (NEED TRANSLATION HELP), and I really don't know how to translate that, but...

I: I can have someone help me translate.

R: Oh yeah, but you know, on those days I go to the Islamic center or, you know, the mosque.

I: Okay. And you already answered some of those questions a little bit for me. Do you pray daily, I know you said you didn't pray five times a day, but?

R: I do pray daily; you know at the end of the day. Praying five times a day in Islam is very important, however, you know, there are times when I don't meet all five prayers, in all honesty, I really don't sometimes. And I feel like, you know, living such a busy life, with like school and work, you know sometimes there are hours at the hospital that I'm there from like 11 at night to like 8 in the morning. There are times where I don't meet all five prayers. But at the end of the day, I really feel like, this is from my opinion, too, it's like I just feel like the end of the day, it's really a relationship between you and God, as well, and, you know, although Islam does really practice praying five times a day, I really feel like, as long as you are moral in life, you are rational in the things you do and you do pray, that, you know, I feel like that's more than enough. But I don't pray five times a day.

I: When you do pray, where do you pray?

R: For the most part I pray, I pray at home. If there are times, you know, when I was younger, I used to go every Friday to the mosque, and go with the parents and the family, however over the years, you kind of get a little bit busy with work and school and other things going on in your life and, whenever I do get the chance, I do go to the mosque to pray on Fridays. Otherwise, it's pretty much at home. I just feel more comfortable praying at home or at the mosque.

I: Was it different when you were living in Palestine?

R: From like a religious kind of...?

I: Mmhmm.

R: It's kind of different because they were both different times in my life. When I lived in Palestine, I was eight years old. It was from when I was 8 to 10 years old. I didn't pray, when I was living over in Palestine, but I did fast. You know, you're taught at a young age, in my family and the household I, even starting at a young age, I think starting at seven, I think my mom would call it like 'half-days,' and instead of fasting the entire day, I would fast for like half the day, just to get myself used to it. So that's something I did participate in when I was younger. I think the experience in Palestine kind of made it, really kind of enriched everything about the religion for me. It was nice to hear like the call to prayer during Ramadan, or even just throughout the day, so yeah (laughs).

I: When you're at home, what language do you speak with your parents?

R: It's funny because I say it's like Spanglish. It's like a mixture of English and Arabic. There are times I even add, like I say a word and I add '-ing' to the end of it (laughs). So, it's really a mixture of Arabic and English.

I: You answered a lot of questions already, which is awesome.

R: That's good. I'm like rambling!

I: That's fine! Do you have relatives, like you're extended family, that you're in contact with?

R: Extended family like just...

I: Like grandparents or aunts and uncles?

R: Yeah, both my parents actually for the most part all their siblings live in Milwaukee. I'm very close to all my aunts and uncles. My grandparents I was very close to growing up. Unfortunately, over the past few years, three have passed away but for the most part, very close to my extended family. I think that's a big part about our culture, too, is y'know you're always having these big gatherings and people are coming over, you know whenever I come home from school and I see like there's like 30 cars outside of the house, I'm like, 'Oh gosh, okay, there's family over.' Family is like a big part of our culture.

I: Do you have big family get-togethers, is there like certain times every year?

R: Yeah, pretty much. I think, I'm more, I think more of that is really done with my mother's side of the family. I think usually every other month, we have, like a potluck thing, and it's everyone usually goes over to someone's house and hangs out. We usually try to do like every month, or so, to just kind of, everyone get busy and caught up in their own lives, with work or whatever they have going on, so it's just kind of nice to do that together with everyone. And then, I think I'd probably see relatives the most during Ramadan. And like, Eid, for example, like on holidays.

I: Okay, thanks. Do you read a newspaper daily?

R: Mmhmm.

I: What newspaper?

R: I read the New York Times, at least every morning, it's kind of become just like a habit to read it in the mornings.

I: What sections interest you the most? Do you have ones that you...?

R: The science section interests me a lot and then, I really just go to the headline page, like the main events, like international news, for sure. I think the international section probably, like the global, international section as well as the science section probably interest me the most.

I: Have political events in Palestine affected you living in the United States?

R: Affected me how, would you say? Like, emotionally, or...?

I: Yeah, anyway.

R: I feel like they have definitely, it's like my homeland and it's tough to see events that have happened over the years, you know, affects people, innocent people that unfortunately weren't as fortunate as my parents to come to the United States and to kind of, create a new beginning. You know, since the occupation in Palestine in 1948, things have been very rough for the Palestinian people. There aren't many opportunities. For those who have been able to come to the United States have been able to kind of transform their lives and kind of start over. It really kind of breaks my heart to see those who aren't, weren't able to have that opportunity to come to the United States to make a different living for their family, for themselves, you know. It's pretty tough, it really is, and a part of me kind of, I wish there was more I could do, you know? So, I just feel like Palestinians regardless American-born or not, Palestinians who reside in the United States I really feel should really use that opportunity to educate themselves and kind of eventually give back to Palestinians, whether it be through charity foundations, or politically, you know, I think.

I: Have you ever taken action any ways, like politically or through charity, anything like that?

R: Through charity, yes, whenever I get a chance, I definitely try to donate as much as I can. I am a college student, so there really isn't that much, but so I definitely try to. I actually have been thinking of joining the Peace Corps, I was thinking of doing that on my year off. So, I am considering going back and devoting at least a year or two of my life to helping in refugee camps and so forth, whether it be in Palestine or around the world. There are so many places that need help, and although Palestine is very close to my heart, I think I'd definitely love sometime in the future to devote a year or two of my life to that.

I: How would you describe your political participation in the United States?

R: My political participation in the United States? Besides voting, gosh, I really ... in what kind of, can you narrow it down a little bit?

I: Well, yeah, well, so, you do vote?

R: I do vote, yeah.

I: How often do you vote, just in big elections, or in local elections as well?

R: Just in the bigger elections.

I: And when it comes to candidates who are from your own culture or religion, does that affect your voting decisions?

R: No, I really don't think it does. That would just be very biased obviously, which would kind of, for some people, it would lead them to, 'Oh, same background, definitely do it that way,' but I think it's just the way the candidate presents themselves and the issues and things that they're willing to do and the effort that they're putting in to certain sections, whether it be like humanitarian issues or you know, I think for Palestinians it's pretty hard because when voting, too, you kind of have to look at what candidates, what they say they're offering. You know, in the local perspective, like in the United States obviously, but internationally, too, so.

I: Okay, I'm gonna switch topics a little bit and go back to more family and parenting sort of thing. Some of the questions are about parenting a little bit so (both laugh).

R: I'm not a mother yet!

I: We can skip over those, but I'll try to tailor them a little bit. Okay, so, are there any ways that you think boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: No, not at all. In fact, I think one thing that I love about my parents is that they treat both the boys and the girls in the family equally. You know, I don't, I know many, many Arab families – or many, not even Arab families, just in general, that favor the boys a little bit more, make rules a little bit more lenient for them, whether it be curfews or going on trips or anything like that, but one thing I absolutely love about my parents and I think I would definitely do for my own children is equality, for sure, I don't think that, I think they should be brought up doing the same thing, in the same way. I don't believe in the whole 'favoring the boy' crap. At all (laugh).

I: When you were growing up, were there any major conflicts that you had with your parents about anything?

R: Major conflicts? Not really, nothing that comes to mind, to be honest.

I: Okay.

R: I think one thing only probably was attending school outside of Wisconsin. I think my parents were more so worried about because we are so close to the family, and family is very important, so that's one thing, that was the only thing we really clashed on. But I ended up going to Marquette and absolutely love it, so it worked out for the good (laughs).

I: When you were deciding what you were going to major in in college, what role did your parents play in that decision?

R: I think my parents kind of just took the back seat and wanted me to figure it out for myself. They kind of gave me their opinion, they told me that obviously you want to do something that you're interested in and something you're good at, as well as you want to kind of find a career path that you'll find fulfilling in life, whether it's devoting your life to humanitarian issues or public health issues, just kind of something that will have your interest. At the end of the day, you really do want a job that you're gonna wanna wake up to in the morning and actually feel like you want to get out of bed. I would really hate to have myself in a position where just not wanting to go to work the next day or just not being intrigued about something that you're doing. So, they really just took the back seat and let me figure it out on my own and obviously I went to them for any other additional opinions.

I: Okay, the question asks what kind of husband or wife would you like for your children, but I'll ask you what kind of husband would you like for yourself?

R: Okay (laughs). Definitely I think, being able to relate to someone else. I would definitely want someone of the same background as me.

I: Do you mean culturally or religiously, or...?

R: Culturally I think the most. Religiously would be a very nice factor to put in play. Let's be honest, it would be tough, I guess, I don't want to say it would be tough raising children in a household with a parent that preaches one religion and one the other, and I think if anything I think it would be good for the children, so I really don't know where I stand on the religion aspect of it because I'm not against a marriage of someone with two different religious backgrounds or beliefs because at the end of the day, I believe the child should choose their faith. Obviously, both my parents are Muslim, I was brought up believing the Principles, but at a certain age you begin to question things and you begin to make your own answers, I mean your own decisions. I think definitely background similarity is a must, I think, education, you know, I think anything that a normal person would want, really.

I: When you say background, do you mean someone who's Arab or someone who's Palestinian or...?

R: You know what, it's really tough to say. I think Palestinian or even Arab really, I don't want to narrow it down to just Palestinian, and a lot of Arab countries I feel like a lot of our cultures and traditions are very similar but someone with a similar background, as in like, culturally related, yeah, for sure.

I: Okay, thank you. Let's see, when you were in high school, did you have a job at all?

R: In high school, I did not. I volunteered at the hospital, like my last two years, my junior and senior year, but I didn't have a job.

I: So, you never, did you ever work for your parents or anything like that?

R: No.

I: When did you first start driving?

R: As soon as I was able to get my license, I started driving (laughs).

I: How did your parents feel about that?

R: Oh, they loved it, they were totally fine. I have younger siblings, so it was more, like, after the first two weeks, I kind of like, 'Shit, why did I get my license?' (laughs). But yeah, they obviously were worried but, I think they found it as a blessing that I could get my license like, 'Oh, now you can do chores for me' (laughs).

I: In college, are you involved in any religious or cultural organizations on campus?

R: With MSA, I was more involved my first three years, first two or three years. I just had more time then, you know, now with school and work and doing more rigorous classes, time really has to be put towards that. But that, MSA, which is Muslim Student Association, as well as ASA, which is Arab Student Association. Both really close friends of mine were part of like the board. I was actually part of the board of ASA last semester, so those are two that I was able to participate in and kind of was a part of on campus.

I: Did your religion or your culture influence your choice of friends at Marquette?

R: No.

I: Okay. Do you ever make a point of having friends who have the same culture or religion as you, or is it just...?

R: Not really, no.

I: You already answered that question, too. So many of these you already answered, that's awesome. You mentioned what your dad does. Does your mom work?

R: My mom doesn't work; she was more of a stay-at-home mom most of my life and she got married very young. She got married when she was 16 actually, and a few years later started a family and she never actually got to finish high school. But what was pretty neat was my mom and I actually graduated high school together. She went back and she got her GED and then she got her Associate's in phlebotomy, so she did phlebotomy for a little bit and yeah, she's not currently employed, no.

I: Okay, and then, what's your father's level of education?

R: Probably ninth grade, yeah, he didn't finish high school either.

I: Okay, how do you think that your parents would define themselves?

R: From like a?

I: What would they say that their identity is? I guess.

R: I would have to say American-Palestinian, as well.

I: Okay. And what makes you think that that's how they would identify?

R: My parents are, they're very diverse, you know, I feel like, Palestine is a big part of them, that's where they grew up and where they were able to, I really do believe it was like the American Dream for my father. Every time I think about it, I just find it to be amazing that he only had like a ninth grade level education and I think America and Palestine are very big factors of their lives and I think the traditions and the culture they never lost, as well as gaining new traditions and new values that they kind of found throughout the years in America too, so I dunno, I just feel like, the way they present themselves, as well, and you know, they don't only take place in cultural traditions that are Palestinian yet they've carried that with them and they've never lost it, which I appreciate because they've brought it to their children, as well. They've also picked up, you know, American culture as well, living in America such a long time, I think probably like 30 years, so I think that's just, that would just define them. I think they're both very big important parts of their lives.

I: Okay, thank you. Did your grandparents also immigrate to the United States? Do you know when?

R: This would be difficult. So, my mother and her parents immigrated to the U.S. when she was about 16, so this probably had to be like 1980, I believe, sometime around the beginning of the early 1980s. My father, like mid 1970s he came here. He came on his own, however, he had like older sibling that were here. So, around those times.

I: Both your parents' families are from the same place in Palestine or are they from...?

R: They are, after the 1967 war, they both grew up in Beitin in Palestine, the same village, which I find pretty funny that they're from the same village, which is not really uncommon in Arab tradition, but my parents, my mom's family moved to Jordan after the 1967 war and my father's family stayed in Beitin, but then, yeah.

I: Okay. Do you know how your parents met?

R: Okay, so, you know, one thing that you'll probably find out once you meet more people like myself that were, I guess American-born or Arabs in general is that you're somehow related to someone. You'll meet someone and you'll find some kind of linkage. So, it's actually pretty funny. So, they're not blood related, in fact they're like very distant. This is gonna sound very confusing, and I'm sorry, but (I: That's okay). Okay, so my mother's uncle is married to my father's aunt. (I: Okay). So, I really wouldn't call that, that's blood related I guess somehow? But yeah. And once my mother's family came to the U.S., I guess there was some kind of like event that just gathered everyone together and they met then and after three weeks they were married, I guess.

I: So, it was not an arranged marriage?

R: No, it was not.

I: Did they talk to their parents before they decided to get married? Did they have their families meet?

R: Yeah, one thing about the Arab tradition even now over the years, you know the parents are very involved but it's more so like a form of respect, I guess. So, the way for most people it works, or for myself and my family is that my father would have to go, or at that time my father, or even now, let's say today's age, you would have to go to her father and ask for his blessing and so forth. Obviously, everything goes well I guess and the two can really figure it out for themselves. The family is a very big part. So, it's very important for, I guess, the guy to ask for the father's blessing before even asking the girl in marriage or anything like that.

I: Mmhmm. Okay, I'm gonna switch topics a little bit and talk a little bit about cultural clothing, and then we're almost done! So, do you have any traditional or cultural clothing?

R: I do.

I: What kind?

R: It's more of, it's a *thobe*, I dunno how to really describe it, it's more of a ... I really couldn't describe it. I could show you a picture. But they were, usually the only time I really wear traditional clothing is, we have a day before the wedding, it's usually like a henna and it's very traditional, like you're in traditional clothing, you've got the gold on, stuff like that, the henna's done on your hand and those are the only times I really have worn traditional clothing. My mother usually – it's made in Palestine, and it's brought in and it's like, it's ... I really don't know how to describe it. Have you ever seen traditional, Arab traditional? (I: Mmhmm, yeah) They're all very similar, so I have a few of those done, I really don't wear them much unless there's like an event.

I: When you do wear them, how do you feel about wearing them?

R: It's nice, you know. It's nice to have that Palestinian identity it's nice to have that tradition. It's nice to carry on the tradition after so many years, too. Palestine was kind of, you know after 1948, things have been very difficult for Palestinians and it's nice to see over the years that Palestinians still carry their tradition and their culture and their identity true to heart. And you know, they carry them with them over the years and it's just nice, really. It's really nice, that part of me, you know.

I: So, what would you say that your cultural clothing means to you, I guess you kind of already answered that, but?

R: What it means to me? It's just a more symbolic way of saying, you know, that Palestinian identity, of that heritage. You know, it's just, I don't know how to explain it anymore, but it's nice, you know.

I: Okay. And I know that you mentioned that your mother wears the hijab, does she wear other cultural clothing daily, or...?

R: More like events she wears cultural clothing. Otherwise, she dresses very modernly. Obviously with the hijab comes a little bit more restriction like looser clothing and things like that but, yeah, I think only like at weddings or parties where there's a big gathering, she usually wears it.

I: So, you said that you got your dresses from Palestine?

R: Mmhmm.

I: Are they ones that you buy when you're there and bring back with you or do you...?

R: The last time I actually visited Palestine was like in 2006, it's been a while, but my mother usually goes back and takes my younger siblings every summer. I usually just give her my measurements and they're usually made just in Palestine. I'm like, 'Ah, you take care of it.' (laughs).

I: Would you pass them on to your children?

R: I definitely would.

I: Why?

R: It's our culture, our tradition and I feel like Palestinian clothing, although its, I really don't know how to say, but it's just a very nice way of expressing ourselves as Palestinian. The *thobes* and the traditional clothing have been in our culture for a very very long time, it's just nice to kind of have that symbolic, even though its clothing. It's just very symbolic of the culture itself and I think my children would enjoy it just as much as I did.

I: Okay.

R: I dunno if I answered that for you.

I: Yeah, you did!

R: Okay.

I: Thanks. Is there anything else about your culture or your history that you would want to share?

R: I feel like we covered, and I feel like I've rambled so much.

I: No, that's good, that's fine!

R: I pretty much covered my whole life, but no not really. Unless you have any other questions for me?

I: Are there any services or resources that the Research Institute that's doing these interviews could provide to meet the needs of the Palestinian or the Arab community in Milwaukee?

R: You know I feel like they've been doing a very good job, I know Dr. Enaya, I took Arabic classes as well as English classes with her, she's been doing such a great job with, you know with doing these and for American Muslim women and I feel like she's been doing a great job with that. I feel like every year it's progressing and they're doing such a great job that I really don't have any recommendations.

I: Okay, that's it!