



Oral History Project Interview

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

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Gender: Female

Name: Huda Asad

Country of Origin: Palestine

Year of Immigration: Born in the United States

Abstract: Huda is a second-generation woman who spent most of her life growing up in North Carolina in a town which had very little diversity. She got married at the age of 21 and moved to Milwaukee. She is the oldest of three girls. Prior to moving to Milwaukee, she completed her bachelor's degree in North Carolina in Accounting. After moving to Milwaukee, she completed her master's degree at UW-Milwaukee. She prides herself as a Muslim and Palestinian. Growing up, she struggled formulating her identity, she feels that the older she is getting the more she prides herself in her Muslim and Palestinian identities. She feels that her parents' emphasis on education has allowed her to become goal and career oriented. Establishing her career and independence was very important to her and finding a husband who was supportive of her goals has allowed her to be continue her education and establish a career for her, marriage is about teamwork effort and friendship.

Key Themes: Proud, Muslim, Palestinian, Arabic, School, Career

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

I: We can start with your name, age, and level of education?

R: My name is Huda Asad, I have a master's degree in taxation, and I am 31 years old.

I: When and where was your degree completed?

R: At UWM, I completed it in 2009. Also, I have a bachelor's in accounting.

I: So, you completed your bachelor's and right away went to master's?

R: Yes.

I: When you were growing up, where did you go to school? Did you go to public schools, community schools, religious schools?

R: Public schools, I did go to a private school for three years, it was a Baptist school, only because the school system we were in was a little...there was a lot going on in it, drugs and stuff like that. So, my parents pulled us out and we went to a private school for three years, realized that it wasn't that good of a choice, so we went back to a different school district.

I: Let's start when you were growing up, so let's talk about where you were born and the places and buildings you spent a lot of time in during your childhood and which you remember fondly?

R: I was born in Rocky Mountings, North Carolina. I lived in North Carolina until I was 18, then my family and I, we moved to New Orleans, lived there until I got engaged and married and came here. The most place I spent my time was with my family, mostly at home or at a mall, park, but it was always with your mom, your sisters, your dad. Not a lot of, "Let me go out on my own" type thing.

I: Let's just go into a little more detail about your home, your school, just describing the various rooms and the people who lived with you at these places?

R: It was me, my parents, and I have two younger sisters. We would have occasionally have uncles and aunts come stay with us. My uncle got married when I was in middle school, and him and his wife came and stayed with us until they got on their feet and moved out. Another one of my uncles got a divorce, and he came and stayed with us until he got situated and everything. But mostly it was just my immediate family, grandparents would come visit, they would stay with us.

I: So, did you live in a more rural area, more urban, in the city?

R: More rural.

I: Tell me how you felt being a Muslim growing up? If any specific challenges came up when you were growing up expressing your Muslim identity?

R: I think it maybe was slightly easier when I was younger, the only thing I had to worry about was not eating pork. And of course, you get older, and people are dating, people are having parties, people are drinking, people are doing all this stuff, and you're like, "I can't do that, I am Muslim." "Your parents aren't here watching you." "Yes, but God is." I was fortunate enough to be raised in a household, my parents taught us the difference between right and wrong. And we knew better, if we did anything wrong, it was going to come with major consequences. But I would say, when I got older, I made a lot of friends and I would get close to someone and realize, "Hey, they are more about partying, drinking and doing all this as well". I can't really roll with that. I had a group of friends that were accepting and understood that "Hey, Huda can't do this, let's figure out if we want to do something, let's figure out something that she's going to be able to do with us." And my parents were actually very strict too. So, it wasn't like, "Oh, let's all go to the mall together as friends." No, 9 times out of 10 if we wanted to hang out it was your friends need to come over here, because you can't go to their houses.

I: So, in school, what was the ration of Muslim students in your school?

R: 2 to 200.

I: So, quite nonexistent?

R: Quite nonexistent, yes. They thought I was Hawaiian, and I would have to explain to them, "I am Palestinian." And they are like, "What's that?" We grew up in a very, very small, suburb town that didn't have a lot of diversity in North Carolina.

I: Did you serve in the U.S. military or did anyone in your immediate family serve in the U.S. military?

R: I did not, my husband actually was in the Marines before all the fighting and everything started, before I met him. He served for four years; he didn't like it. I think he just did it to go with his friends kind-off-thing, everybody was doing it, jump on the bandwagon.

I: Are you currently employed? If so where and what's the nature of your job?

R: I work for Johnson Controls, I am employed. I work for their corporate tax office, so we do pretty much like you do your taxes every year, but we do the company's taxes and all the entities the company owns. So, a lot of numbers.

I: So, you did mention that you are married, if we can talk a little more about that. So how did your marriage happen, was it arranged? Was it very stereotypical or non-stereotypical at all?

R: Well, when people say arranged, I always think of like, "Okay, good morning, Huda, we have your groom he is sitting outside waiting for you." My parents were very involved, I was actually visiting my uncle in North Carolina at the time, and we decided last minute to do a road trip to Chicago to come to a cousin's engagement party. We met his family there, we are actually related distantly, so it was interesting. I have heard about my father-in-law, I heard his name many times growing up, but I never knew who he was, nor my mother. They invited us over to their house, Wisconsin isn't that far, so the next day we came up. I saw my husband; I didn't really think twice about it. I was 21 at the time, marriage wasn't really in my head, I was more like, "school, school, school." And then they ended up calling us a few weeks later, calling my dad saying, "Hey, so you have a daughter, and we have a son, what do you think?" I agreed to talk, it doesn't hurt to talk to this guy. So, they came down and we talked for a couple of days. And then they came back to Wisconsin. And they're like we need an answer, I was like, "I can't give you an answer from three days, are you crazy?" So, we talked for like a month, our parents were okay with us talking on the phone, so we talked on the phone for like a month. Then I was like, "Okay". Nine years later.

I: Do you have any children?

R: I do not.

I: So, I know the next question is going to be very open-ended. How do you identify yourself? So, some people like to answer this question relating themselves to their religious background, more cultural background, for you, how would that work out?

R: Rephrase the question? That is hard.

I: I know, it is, it is very hard. So obviously you have been in a lot of interviews, when an employer asks you to describe yourself, tell me more about yourself? What are the first things that pop in your head?

R: I think I am a people person; I like being around people. Maybe if you go back to religion and culture, I think the older I get I pride myself more in my culture and my religion. I think where I grew up, being such a small town, everybody was white, I was more reluctant to share things. And it wasn't very accepted when I would share, I don't eat pork, "Why don't you eat pork?"

I: What about culture, growing up was there a lot of cultural things around you?

R: Not really, we had a strong Pakistani community around us, but not Arabs, it was on Eid we tried to mesh with them, they were always in their attires, so we wore thubs on Eid. But I think as I grow up now, they are like, "Oh Huda, what ethnicity is that?" And I jump on them, I am Palestinian, this, this, and that. I like to explain the culture and same thing with the religion. I have no problem if anybody asks me if anybody has questions. They always ask when I fast because they are like, "You are starving yourself." And I am like, "It's actually not that bad."

I: So, do you feel that the way you identify yourself changes with where you are and with the people you associate with?

R: I think so yes. I think growing up, I was more around American people, not there is anything wrong with that, they were more accepting of me not being who I was. They wanted me just to be "normal", they didn't understand my religion, they didn't understand my cultural background, they didn't understand why in the summers I was gone for three months going overseas visiting family. I think growing up, being older now and being around more Arabs I just realize it's okay to be more accepting of your own culture and it makes me more proud now. And I kind of regret being the way I was when I was younger

I: Are there places either physical or not physical were you feel your best and most successfully expressing yourself and expressing your identity?

R: Places?

I: They can be actual physical places, or they can be specific individuals?

R: I probably saw with my husband. He and I are completely different people, we are like night and day, but it's weird how we bounce ideas off of each other and learn from each other. I think he learns a lot about our culture and a lot about our religion from me. Because he grew up a little bit, guys are different. I would definitely say I am never scared to speak my full mind with him, versus other people I know I definitely will hide back and just be like, "Whatever, you don't need to know how I feel."

I: What traditions of your culture or religion do you practice? So, when it comes to using food recipes in your house?

R: I try to cook. Cooking is hard, especially when you work full time. I finish work at 6 o'clock. By the time I get home at 6:30, the last thing I want to do is worry about making makloobah. I crave the foods a lot, so when I crave something, I try to get recipes from my mom.

I: Do you follow specific food restrictions? You did mention no pork.

R: Yes, definitely no pork, if someone tells me, "Rice crispy treats, you're not supposed to eat those." I am clear of those; I won't eat marshmallows' now. As soon as I know. I just found out last week that there is something shady in Panar's soup, the broccoli and cheese, I still don't know what it is. But as soon as somebody, it's like a red flag now. We had it delivered at work the other day, I was like, "I can't have that, I don't know what, but I can't." So, I try. I am trying to get better about eating halal meats, but I am guilty, it's just easier to go to the grocery store right next door to my house and buy chicken or beef from there.

I: What is your favorite ethnic food? Hopefully it's not pizza.

R: My favorite is Mexican food. I love Mexican food

I: So, when it comes to Palestinian food, do you have specific favorite dishes?

R: I like mlukhiya, I like makloobah and mansaf. I could totally eat all three right now.

I: How often do you prepare them?

R: I don't know how to cook anything, well I can cook mlukhiya, but my makloobah is gross. And I have never tried mansaf. My mother-in-law makes them really good, so I just bother her for it.

I: When you do cook then, what's the most common dishes that you do cook? Are they more Western or are they more of your culture?

R: Probably more Western, we'll make nawashif, labanah, hummus, stuff like that. Usually, our weekly menu is taco Tuesday, or sloppy Jo's, turkey sandwiches, salad, things like that.

I: So, when you do cook Arabic food, or when your mother-in-law cooks Arabic food, where do you find the necessary ingredients or where does she find the necessary ingredients?

R: There are a couple of Arabic stores in the area.

I: So, some people I heard like to grab things from overseas.

R: I do actually request that, I do. My in-laws are overseas right now, and I asked for Mlukhia, zaatar, smaak. It just tastes better when it comes from there. I'll buy bread the Arabic store, labana, yogurt, but I like my zaatar when it comes from liblad, it tastes so much better, I don't know what it is.

I: In what ways if any do you participate in cultural or religious community events or activities that happen in your community?

R: I try to be as active, today there was a protest, but obviously I was doing this. And then I was going to be late anyways with work. So, I was like, "Whatever, I am not going to be able to go." I try to be more active on Eid, if there is something during Ramadan, like a program I hear about. I don't know that many Arab here, I'd say I am pretty out of the loop most of the time. But if I hear about something and time permits, then usually I am down for going and checking things out.

I: How would you describe your religious life? So how often do you attend the masjid? How often do you participate in religious events?

R: Not as often as I should. I don't go to the masjid that much, I skip prayers a lot, which I am not proud of. I am trying to do better, as much as sometimes you hate Facebook and you hate social media, sometimes I learn a little bit of things on there. People post hadith and stuff like that, and it's nice to read them. It reminds me, don't forget this and don't forget that. Even though I have to be careful sometimes, because you never know if it's a good source. A lot of times, we'll read something, and I know people who are more religious, if it throws up a red flag, I am like calling or texting, "What do you know about this, can you tell me more."

I: Can you describe your kitchen? I know this is a little bit strange.

R: Messy, just kidding.

I: How does it feel different from your friend's kitchen? You did mention that you cook a little bit of Western food, but when it comes to the Middle Eastern aspect of your kitchen, if you can describe that?

R: I have zaatar and zayt sitting on my counter at all times. There is labana in my fridge, my freezer is always fully stocked with pita bread. I guess most of my friends do have a lot of Arabic food too. I don't know if I'd describe it as different.

I: Say if it was an American, Western friend?

R: Oh, yes then definitely different. I mean, typical Americans have beer and alcohol in their fridge, or something like that. We don't have that. Fruits, vegetables, lots of rice in my pantry too. I do love rice; I mean I am Arab. We eat rice. I would say probably the main thing is pita bread, zaatar, and laban and the rice. I have had discussions with people at work and they are like, "You love rice." I am like, "Yes, I am Arab." And I have Asian co-workers and they are like, "We like rice too." And I am like, "See, they understand me."

R: What languages do you speak? And how fluent are you in them?

I: Just English and Arabic, definitely more fluent in English than Arabic. I think I do pretty well with Arabic considering, maybe looking at other people who grown up here. But I definitely could use some practice. It's different when you are growing up my mom used to force us to speak on the weekends and as soon as we got home from school, she's like, "If I hear any English, I am taking away dessert tonight" or something like that. So, I appreciate that now, because my husband and I would communicate a lot of times in English and I am like, "We need to make sure we know our Arabic because we're going to have kids one day and they are going to be like, they are not going to know any Arabic". It's definitely something important to me to try to keep, maintain it.

R: So, did you go to any type of weekend school, any type of schooling to improve your Arabic?

I: Yeah, when we were younger, we didn't have an Arabic school, we went to the masjid which was run by Pakistani, and we learned with them, a Sunday school program, learning about the religion and what not. And actually, my mom was a pretty good teacher, she helped teach us Arabic. I can read and write a little bit, probably a kindergarten level. If the letters big and bold, I can read them. But if they are small with all the, what is it called?

R: Harakat.

I: Yes, no way, I can't do it. The Quran, I want to get to that point one day, but right now, I cannot read this.

R: What is your connection with your parent's homeland, how often do you visit, or talk on the phone?

I: We used to go a lot when we were younger, pretty much every summer we were there. Definitely, nowadays I am always checking the internet to see what is going on. There is a lot of hostility going on back there, a lot of fighting. It worries me. Just last week there were issues, I come home, and I am like flipping through the channels, and I am like telling my husband, "It really upsets me that I have seen nothing about what's going on. We are talking about little kids dying and nobody cares, everybody is worried about the Kardashians and what they are going to wear next". It really agitates me, and I have a soap box about that, I am like why are people worried about all this crap, and people are dying overseas. But I try to call my grandparents every once-in-awhile and checkup on them. My sister was actually just there, she came back two weeks ago. So, I was always checking my phone, "Hey, what are you doing? Everything okay?" And as soon as she responds I am like, "Okay she's fine." My in-laws are there right now, they are coming home in two or three weeks, so I call them every other day or so, just be like, "Hey, you guys doing, okay?" It's scary though, I was talking to my mother-in-law, yesterday and I

could hear sirens in the background, it's just like, "Oh my God" I know where they live, I know the area, so I am just envisioning all of this, it's scary.

R: How do you typically get your news, you did mention Facebook, do you read the newspaper or watch specific channels to get your news, whether it's news from overseas or American news, Western news?

I: Usually I flip through the different channels I have access to. But mostly I would say online. I would jump on aljazeera in English and see what's going, what is the other channel, AON or something. They were really good about broadcasting both sides of the issue last year when there was war in Gaza going on. But usually, the first place I see something is that I go on my phone in the morning when I wake up and I am looking at Facebook, and then I see something and then I jump on the news to see, let me get a more solid source of information.

R: In what ways, if any, have the political events in your parent's homeland affect you?

I: When somebody says, "your parent's homeland" I am like you mean my homeland. Actually, I just had this conversation at work the other day, and they are like they are American, I am like no I am not, I am Palestinian. It doesn't matter where I was born. How does they affect me? It's upsetting, and it makes me want to keep explaining to people what's going on, letting them hear Palestinian side of the situation. I think that I know that the other side is obviously is always broadcasted and everybody sees one side of the story. People have to remember that there are two sides of the story, maybe the Palestinians aren't always 100% innocent, but there are always two sides.

R: So, when you go there, how does it affect you? The after affect?

I: I would say the last time I was there was maybe four years ago for my sister's wedding, and it freaked me out. It freaked me out and it pissed me off. We fly into Tel-Aviv and the first thing, are you from Palestine?

R: Yes.

I: The first think they do is that they put you in the VIP room.

R: I go to Amman. I don't know how it is through Tel-Aviv, please tell me.

I: You go into this; Americans have nicknamed it the VIP room. And it's basically, as soon as they see you are not a Jewish person, doesn't matter where your passport is from. They put you in this room and they make you sit and wait, and they ask you why you've come, what are you here for. I've never had this happen to me, but I heard stories of people saying they'll pull a

picture of your grandma, "Do you know who this person is", "Well yes that is my grandma. Why the hell do you have her picture?" "Where are you staying?" They want to know. They ask me for my email address once, which kind off freaked me out. "Where did I work?" Why is that relevant? What does that have anything to do with what I am doing here. And you walk into this room, they are interrogating you, it's like a desk they are sitting at, and there are two soldiers on either side of him, with guns taller than me. And I am like, I not going to do anything to you, you already searched me 3000 times. Is this necessary? It angers me, at the point there I am shaking, and I am just trying to answer their questions. I even think I was so scared the last time I went, I was like, "I am just here for my sister's wedding, I don't think I am ever coming back here again." I just said that, and the guy was like, "No, no, we want you to visit.", I was like, "Okay." But yeah, it's scary, once you're there it's fine, because you are you not seeing all the soldiers, every time I had the luck of going without any major fighting or anything, but when you want to go visit Jerusalem city, or something like that, that's when you go through all the check points and getting searched, and it's like, "I have an American passport, just like the Jewish person next to me. Why aren't they getting searched? Why am I a second-class citizen?" It's frustrating, very frustrating.

I: So how do you describe your political participation in the US, when it comes to voting?

R: I try to be pretty active. Not usually too happy with the politicians because of their... especially presidents and people of higher statues, because usually they are backing Israel, and it's just like, "Why? Why aren't you backing the other side? Or just stay out of it completely." I try to listen to what they are saying, I like to know I am doing my part.

I: In what elections do you typically participate in? Presidential, congressional?

R: Presidential. I am not very into congressional, maybe I'll vote for the governor, more the big heads. Which makes me think, maybe I should be more involved in the other ones because they are like the backbones.

I: When it comes to candidates, this is a hypothetical question, if they were to be from your culture or religious background, how would that influence your decision? Choosing or not choosing them.

R: I would definitely be voting and backing them 100%, only because it would be nice to see somebody from our background and from our point of view, having a voice for Palestinians, for Arabs.

I: So, would you look into their policies and their backing, versus their background? Say someone who is Palestinian, or his parents were Palestinian, would you look at their policy they would be making?

R: No, for sure you would want to know their policies and make sure, okay just because you're Palestinian doesn't mean... you could be completely brain washed or something. So, yes, I would definitely make sure that their thought process is aligned with what I believe in.

I: Were you in the United States on September 11, 2001?

R: I was.

I: We'll chat a little about that. How did your experience after 9/11 change? If you can elaborate more on where you were in your schooling process.

R: It's one of those days that you would never forget. I remember, it was my senior year of high school, and I was in a program where you took college credit in the morning in a nearby community college. So, I had driven to school and there was a break time, so a couple friends and I were just hanging out and it was on the TV. I feel like that's when people in my town, so small, they don't know what Arabs are, they don't know what Palestinians are, they don't know what Muslims are. All of a sudden started knowing Muslims are terrorists, Muslims are terrorists, and that's all I kept hearing. It was frustrating. Okay, you have the guy who did the Unabomber or whatever, and you've got those kids who do school shootings and stuff, why don't you call them terrorists? Why is it because of a couple of people that claim to have done this wrongful act? They're blaming an entire religious population, it's not right. So, I think it brought more light to our religion and culture and what not, but a negative light.

I: So, since 9/11 how has your life or interactions change with others? If you can recall any specific things that happened, negative or positive for that matter, after 9/11 with individuals.

R: I do remember having a psychology class or something in high school, I don't remember what the project was, but I made mine relatable to Palestinians, and I remember bringing in pictures, a board of things that have happened to people and there was of, I am sure you have seen it, the dad who was shielding his son and got killed. I brought that picture in, and I'll never forget this guy, he was laughing at it, during my presentation, I was like, "Okay". So, I waited until we were done, and I followed him outside and I reamed it into him I was like, "What are you laughing at? Would you like it if you were shot and killed or trying to defend somebody you cared about?" I am like, "I see nothing funny. Can you please explain to me what was so funny about that?" I feel like at that point I was like, "You know what, forget trying to be... I want to be who I am. I am proud of what I am, I am proud of where I came from."

I: We'll switch a little to the topic of marriage, since you are married, we'll have a lot to talk about. In your culture, how are women viewed, and what is their typical role? And, how if at all has that changed in recent years?

R: If you look at culture, I would say culture is very different than religion. I feel like that's a hard question to answer only because there's different mentalities. I have seen people, Arabs, who are more like, "Well, a woman should be at home, she should be cooking and cleaning. Taking care of children." Growing up, I never had brothers, so my dad always harped on school is the most important thing, just that it didn't matter that you are a woman. He still wanted to see us succeed and do well, he wanted to put us through college, and I think I grew up slightly different than most. When we moved to Louisiana there was a huge Arab population and it had just become... I was one of the few girls there who started University, and I think after that, it started, not a trend because there was a couple of other girls, but I think it started becoming more acceptable for girls, "Hey, I don't want to get married right away after high school. I want to wait, I want to work on my schooling, get a degree." I think, because of my dad and my mom, I grew up more like, goal oriented, career oriented. I knew that I wasn't going to, even when I said yes to my husband, it was the farthest thing in my mind, it just had happened like, he fell into my lap, and I was like, "This is kinda cool, I might keep him." But like, even talking to him, my main thing was like, "Look, if you want a girl who's going to sit at home and cook and clean, have your kids, I am not your girl. I want to finish school and I want a career."

I: In what ways, have you been able to balance your faith and your American identity?

R: That's a hard question. I would just accept it. I never understand why people need to drink alcohol to have a good time. And I feel that is such a norm. You go to a wedding, everybody is drinking, that is the fun thing. And everybody is like what do you do for fun? Go to the mall, go bowling. I have been to a couple of work functions; I have been to happy hour with work and what not. I go for appetizers, and I get my virgin cocktail and I am good to go. I end up having a good time. I usually leave before everybody gets a little rowdy. I am only there from 5-6pm or whatever, but I think I am a fun person, I don't need alcohol, or I don't need to do bad things to have a good time. So maybe being more accepting of that.

I: How did your religious or ethnic upbringing contribute to who you are today? I know this is a very open-ended question, we are getting to the tough questions. Think, if you had a completely different set of parents who raised you in a completely different way, how you would be different today, maybe that will help you narrow it down.

R: I think definitely, growing up my dad's strictness, I didn't like it, nobody likes strict parents. I appreciate it more now, and I understand why he does it now, and I think because of that,

growing up and seeing what I see now, seeing girls who have no problem with going to bars and clubs, and for taking in certain things Muslims should not be for taking in. And it kind of upsets me to see that and know that that is going on too. And I just think had my dad not been so strict, there was a sense of fear, that he was going to kill us or something, but you know, you fear your dad being upset with you, it isn't a good thing. And same thing with my mom, because if we upset her, she is like, "I am just going to tell your dad." So, it's a loose loose situation. But I think having stricter parents, maybe not even stricter parents because I know people who had stricter parents, but they still managed to... I think if you want to do something bad, you can. But just explaining, don't just say that's haram, and that's wrong, explaining why. Why is that, why do we not do this. I realize and I see a lot now growing up, being younger, girls are more sheltered, your hidden from stuff, especially when I am with my mom and my sisters 24/7. You don't see people getting raped. This girl was at a bar, and she got drunk and some guy took her home and raped her. That makes me appreciate, well I don't drink, and I am Muslim, so I am never going to put myself in that situation.

I: What does marriage mean to you?

R: You have a husband. I always wanted my marriage to be teamwork kind of thing. Obviously, your husband has to support you, but again, I didn't want to just sit at home and go shopping all day that's not a life. I think it's a teamwork thing. And I think you should learn to become best friends. I am not going to lie, when we first got married, we weren't a team. You are used to, "Haram, haram, haram" and all of a sudden you are living under the same roof with a strange guy, it's like, "Whoa." Over the years, we know each other now, it's been, I have been married for nine years, I can honestly say he is my best friend. If I am upset or something, that's the first person, he knows me, he knows how to calm me down. I just think, being with somebody who you can be yourself with. And like, that teamwork thing is what a good marriage is and what it means to me.

I: So, what factors play a role in a marriage for you, so the characteristics had you not been married right now you would be looking for in a husband?

R: Definitely open-mindedness, I want him to fear God. To have some sort of faith, I am not the most religious person, so I don't expect to marry somebody who is overly religious. Somebody with who I would want to have my children and be a role model to my kids, and vice versa.

I: So, would his homeland/nationality/village concern you in your decision?

R: A little bit, only because I am from Elberah, so you're supposed to marry somebody from Elberah. Even though, my dad and my mom were not from Elberah. Living in Louisiana, I was

surrounded by people from all different towns from Palestine. It's funny, because you are all from the same place, it's Palestine. It's like you are from Wisconsin, but it's like Greenfield can be different. And the different towns, it's all very different. I would say, maybe in the situation if somebody from here, it might be a little bit different, because I see most American Arab Muslims kind of similar, mentality-wise kind of. But maybe if you are going off to overseas, then they just do a lot of different things, I think I tend to be hard-headed sometimes and I am like "No, we have to do it this way, because this is how I did it when I grew up."

I: So, would his education, income, social class make a difference whether for you or your parent's decision to say yes, or no?

R: Believe it or not, that was before I got married, I said I wanted to get an educated, working a 9-5 job, no stores or whatever, and I married somebody completely opposite, he does not have a degree, he worked in stores, but I think what attracted to him was his open-mindedness, he was like, "I am not looking for a girl who's going to sit at home and twirl her hair all day while I am at work." I think you shouldn't base your decision, looking back now, I was like I want. And seeing how, he's a really smart guy, I could consider him pretty much smarter than me even, at times I am just like, "How do you know that?" So, I would say initially I started that thought process and then ended up marrying somebody completely different.

I: This question doesn't make much sense since you did move, but would you move because of a marriage or relocate because of a marriage, is this something that you did not consider at a point, and in your case, you just did consider, was there a time when you didn't consider it?

R: Yes, it was ideal to stay by my family, only because we grew up with them, that's all I knew, home mom's cooking, mom did the laundry, I was pretty spoiled. But I mean I wasn't against the idea, especially if there was a good reasoning. I was just in school, he was working, who's going to be bringing home the bread? Not me, I am blowing money on tuition right now, I need somebody to support me. So, I was open to it. It was hard, it's still hard, nine years later, I would give anything to have my mom right next door, but it gets easier, it does get easier.

I: Now we are going to go into your wedding and all the ceremonies that went through with that, that's always a fun topic. How many days did your wedding last?

R: Total, 4 days.

I: So, why don't you tell me more about the specifics that happened, after you said yes until the wedding day?

R: We had a tulba party, the official coming and asking of the hand in marriage. It was a funny situation how it happened too. Because when we agreed it was during hurricane Katrina, we were evacuating. We evacuated back to North Carolina because all my uncles were there, and we stayed with them. We actually evacuated there thinking it was going to be a couple of day thing, it ended up being there for almost a year. They are like, "We need to have a tulba" we are like, "We don't even have a house right now, where are we going to have a tulba?" We waited a month or so and then we had one, over a month, like a month and half, we just rented a hall, and just did something small. Then we had an engagement party, khutba party, so that was one day, that's when we officially did our marriage license, Islamic marriage license. I wasn't ready to do it right away, I was like, "Let's wait, we live far away so there is no need to rush." And then our wedding, we had a party, just a small thing in my in-laws garage. When we did the henna and stuff Friday night, Saturday was the henna and Sunday was the wedding, Monday everybody comes back to the groom's house for mansaf, traditionally.

I: So, the wedding happened here in Milwaukee?

R: Yes, here in Milwaukee.

I: How were those ceremonies similar or different from your sister's wedding?

R: Sister's was different because they were overseas. Weddings there are more quicker. Here because you are traveling and everybody is together, there everybody is more separated and more religious. I don't really know how to describe the difference, going to each of my sister's wedding, they all live here but they wanted their weddings overseas for grandparents and what not. It seemed to last longer, because you don't just go there to two days and come back. You are going for two weeks. I preferred weddings here because, I liked that my dad was there the whole time with me verses my sister's wedding my dad only came in at the end.

I: So, the actual ceremonies, you would say they are somewhat similar or different?

R: The actual ceremonies, they were pretty much the same, we did it all in private, we didn't imlich in front of an audience, it was my mom and sisters, we were separated, he was in a different room. Same thing with my sisters it was very small, very low-key, it was just the big party after.

I: Is there anything that you would have done differently, now nine years later, knowing what you know? Thinking back is there anything you would have done differently for your ceremonies or your wedding?

R: Honestly not really, I wish there was Pinterest back then, because there are so many cool ideas. I wasn't a bridezilla, I wasn't like, "Oh my God, my wedding needs to have this, this and that." I was just like, "Whatever", I was fine with whatever my in-laws did. They did a good job.

I: How open are your parents when it comes to marriage outside of your religion and national group?

R: How open? On a scale of 1-10, like 10. Definitely no.

I: So specifically, town or the nationality?

R: Not the town, I would say like a 2 for the town, maybe a 5. But nationality for sure no, that's a big no. And religion, hell no, which is understandable.

I: What obstacles, if any, did you face before marriage?

R: School, I worked part-time at the mall. Nothing major.

I: Who influenced your decision to get married to your husband now? Relatives, friends, etc.

R: When it comes to that sort of thing, I am hardheaded and firm. And I know what I want, kind of thing. I think there were people who were against it, and there are people who were for it. In the end I picked, based off of my decision. I think I had both, both sides of it.

I: What cultural barriers do you think individuals face who do decide to marry outside of their culture?

R: Just culture in itself, we do things in a different way. You said cultural, not religious?

I: Religious too.

R: I mean religious would be a huge one. I wouldn't be accepting of somebody bringing alcohol into my house. I went to a wedding a few weeks ago, with co-workers for a co-worker, and the plan was to meet at my house and then we'll drive together. And one of them brought alcohol and I was like, "What is that?" She's like, "Oh, why?" I was like, "Sorry, no." So definitely I would not be accepting of that. And raising kids, I would want my kids to be Muslim, there is no way I would want them to be any other religion. That would cause a lot of tension in a marriage.

I: Did the possibility of having children influence your decision of career that you chose?

R: No.

I: Is there a major or a career that you think individuals choose or not choose because it might reduce their chances of getting married? So sometimes, some people say that attaining a high professional degree possibly reduces your chance, what do you think about that?

R: I think that that idea does exist, I don't think people should act on it though. I mean, I am a tax accountant, we work a lot of hours sometimes. Just two weeks ago, I was in the office for three or four days straight working until midnight, it happens. I don't think a 9-5 job even exists anymore, if you find one, call me because I want it. But I think, within our culture, that definitely does exist. And I see a lot of girls, my perception is that a lot of girls will even go to school just to have something to do until a guy comes along, to get married to them. And I have seen girls, just stop completely, and I am like, "Weren't you going to be a pharmacist, what are you doing?" So I think, you should know what you want, and there is nothing wrong with pursuing degrees, there is nothing wrong with pursuing a career as long as you are staying true to your religion and what not.

I: Would you have considered marrying someone who is younger than you?

R: Probably not, because guys are immature. My husband is like five years older, and sometimes I am like...

I: Would you consider someone born outside of the United States, so from your town, from your nationality, from your religion? But actually born and raised overseas.

R: Probably not. I just feel like there would be so many differences, there would be the language barrier, my Arabic is not the greatest. The mentality, a guy from overseas, and I could be very well wrong, but from what I perceived, and from what I have seen, they're not as accepting of, "Hey, this girl is going to go work until midnight tomorrow because it's busy session." No, that doesn't work. So, for me, this definitely somebody from here, and I needed somebody more open minded and accepting.

I: So, when it comes to marriage in general in your culture, possibly in your case or not, how makes most of the decisions, is it typically the bride and groom, the parents? On a more cultural scale.

R: You mean for me personally?

I: Yes.

R: I would say it was more of a group effort. My mother-in-law definitely gave me some say, but there were things that she wanted, and I was understanding of that. It makes it more fun that way. I think when you have a bride and groom who are like, "No, we want it all like this." And you

are not including the family, Arab weddings aren't just about the bride and the groom. They are about the whole family. You have two families becoming one.

I: What do you think about dating?

R: Extremely against it. InshaAllah one day if I have a daughter or son, I will kill both of them (don't quote me guys I am just kidding. Not literally.) Dating, you are not supposed to date for a reason, that's why nowadays we have people all those...A guy and a girl in a room, left alone, nothing good is going to come out of it. There is going to be attraction, there is going to be whatever and that leads to so many different things. That's why you have so many kids being born, not that there is anything wrong with kids being born, their parents don't want them because, "Hey, I am 14 years old, I don't know anything about being a parent." So, then you are having this kid.

I: Do you think the Internet and Facebook/social media has made it easier for Arab and Muslim Americans to meet their future spouse?

R: Definitely, I mean I am guilty of that. When my brother-in-law was looking for a wife, I was like, "Hey, come scan my friends list." You see a lot more people, it's not like you have to wait to go to a wedding to see what's out there. So, I feel like a lot of people do put themselves out there too when they are interested in marriage, and I see that becoming a thing. I for one would be paranoid as hell when I have kids, and they are not allowed to have any Facebook, or any social media, God only knows what will be out there at that time. I will be like, "No, you can't have it, sorry".

I: Do you think communication types such as cell phones/texting and Skype made it easy for guys and girls to get to know each other before making the decision to marry?

R: Definitely. I think a lot of the times parents are not paying a lot of attention to what their kids are doing so that they are chatting, it's available anywhere. You go to school, there is internet, there is computers.

I: Do you think community events/centers and weddings are places where people tend to see a potential spouse and proceed from there?

R: Definitely. I think anywhere that there is a mix of guys and girls that there is going to be... Even if it's not guys and girls, you have the moms that are scoping out, "Hey, how are you doing? Who are you?"

I: What do you think about weddings, a lot of people say that weddings are the place of finding a potential spouse, what do you think about that?

R: I would say, they are the place to see. But I feel like I wouldn't use it as a main focal point. Because everybody goes to weddings dressed to the nines, full face of makeup, I am decked out, my hair is done, you can't see my pimples, anything. So, it might be nice to itaraf on people, see who's out there, who has daughters, who has sons, but it shouldn't be the bases of...

I: How is marriage in America different from your parents' way of marriage, or "old" way of marriage?

R: It's lengthier. Do you mean how they got married or marriage in general?

I: Marriage and what leads up to the actual marriage?

R: My parents were very old school, they met in a day, and they got married like two days later or something crazy like that. I could never do that. But then again, it was what they grew up with and what was acceptable than. I don't even think that happens now anymore, even back there, but it could very well. But I think that being here we're more exposed to universities, careers, way more opportunities than then. Overseas, my mom's main goal was to help take care of her family. Worrying about fighting and stuff when it broke out and everything. It's changing back there, like it is here.

I: A family which has more than one daughter, so this applies to your family, how would the marriage between the different sisters change? So, do you think there will be more restrictions, differences in the processes between the oldest and youngest daughters?

R: No, I think my dad, he was pretty strict in every single guy that came, filtering what he wanted. If a guy came that he didn't approve of, we didn't even know about it half the time. He was like, "Bye, go away" but I think his process was the same for all of them. And I think me and my sisters, we all wanted each other to accept each other's spouses, it was important to us, my husband, they didn't want to hate him and not visit me or whatever.

I: Let's talk a little bit more about parenting, about you growing up and how you see that you will raise your children in the future. In what ways if any, do you think boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: I actually don't think boys should be raised differently than girls. I think you should be just as strict on your sons as your daughters. If you allow your sons to do something, why shouldn't you allow your daughters. In our religion, it says nothing about boys should be able to do this and girls shouldn't. There are obviously different roles that they play, but if you are not going to let your daughter go to a party, why are you going to let your son go to a party, there should be no

difference. So, I know for me, when I have kids inshAllah one day I definitely would just as strict on my son as I would my daughter.

I: What do you think are the main issues that concern parents raising children today?

R: There is a lot of issues, I already think about this stuff where you have... In our religion we don't believe that there are gays, and that there should be gays, and now it's very socially acceptable. How am I going to explain that to my kids? What am I going to tell them when they are seeing this? Or it freaks me out knowing that they'll be in the bathroom and then a girl that's a guy will come in, it's just, there is a lot of that. Our culture and our religion becoming very Western, there is so many... dating is now becoming acceptable, it's haram, you're not supposed to do that. I've overheard people even taking it further than that, I know people who go out drinking, and they go out pray at the mosque. You can't do that. I don't know if it's society in general getting them away from the religion, that's scary, so.

I: How do these issues concern your spouse, do you think they would have the same concerns, or would he have different concerns?

R: I think he has similar concerns; I worry, I am always thinking about ten years down the road, and he's like, "I am just thinking about tomorrow, can we just focus on tomorrow?" I am like, "No, no, but ten years from now, what about this?" And he's like, "Tomorrow!" So, I know when I have seen things, I am like, "Wisam, what would we do?" And he's like, "We'll do this, this, and that." I am like, "Okay, just making sure we're on the same page." Sometimes seeing certain situations happen, or acceptable things which are acceptable to certain Arabs or certain Muslims, it freaks me out. I am like, "Wait a minute, we need to touch base, have a meeting really quick, what would you do in this situation?"

I: Would you have any particular concerns for your daughters that you wouldn't have for your boys?

R: That's actually a hard question to ask. Because I consider myself awkward sometimes where I don't know how to talk about certain things. It's just weird. Like even with my sisters, I had issues talking about...this is weird to confront you about something, not confront but just talking about. I don't know, I keep telling myself, I am not a parent obviously, but I keep telling myself that I will try, obviously if you are going to tell your son not to drink, you're going to tell your daughter. If you are going to tell your son you can't sleep around, even though your son it won't be known if he slept around, there is no indicator. Where's your daughter you would know if your daughter did something wrong, her future husband would know. But I would consider

myself somebody, in my head, I keep telling myself that just like I would tell one I would tell the other gender.

I: What kind of spouse would you want for your children? So, for you, it was open-mindedness, would it be similar or at all different for your children?

R: Definitely I want open mindedness, but definitely I would want somebody the same way I would want for me, or my sisters. I kind of look at my sisters as my kids in a way, because I was so protective of them. When guys came for them, I was like, "Excuse me, who are you? You need to come through me first, not even my dad, me." I would think open-mindedness, I don't want my daughter to sit at home and do nothing. And that teamwork aspect, this is not you maid, this is your partner.

I: How important is it to you that they marry someone from the same culture as yours?

R: Very important, maybe balad might vary, it would just depend on if they have good morals and what not. But definitely culture, they would have to be the same culture.

I: So, we'll talk a little bit more about growing up now. What aspects of your homeland did your parents keep while you were growing up?

R: Like from back home?

I: Yes. This could be something as simple as the food you ate.

R: Probably a lot of the food, my mom did the cooking, there were somethings that my dad didn't eat from Elberah that she ate where she is from, so that. I think spouses influence each other no matter how much people deny it, they're in your face 24/7, you know! My mom speaks madani, my dad speaks falahy. My dad now says certain things in madani, and me and my sisters, we mix the two, and my husband always looks at me and he's like, "You're confused. Because you don't know which side you want to be on." And I am like, "I don't know, this is how I grew up." Like "kalayah" verses "ghalaya" and he's like, "It's ghalaya" and I am just like, "That just sounds weird."

I: So, what languages were spoken at home? You said most of the time you did speak Arabic at home. Was that the rule which...?

R: That was the rule, but it just varied, depending on my mom's mood. Most of the time we'll speak in English, but she'll respond in Arabic.

I: Did your parents encourage you to work growing up or did they discourage it?

R: They had no problem with it. I started working when I was in high school, I worked at a grocery store, and they were fine with it as long as it was a good, safe place to work. The hours weren't long, my dad didn't like anything past 9 o'clock, that was pushing it.

I: Did you ever work for or with your parents?

R: No.

I: When did you start to drive?

R: As soon as I could. I don't remember! You get your permit at 15, and I got my license a little after 16.

I: Who taught you how to drive?

R: My dad, my mom was too paranoid. And my dad, oh my God, it was so scary, he was so paranoid, and he would freak out at everything I did.

I: How did they feel about your driving, did they encourage it or discourage it?

R: My dad encouraged it. My mom was just freaked out. She was like, "I am not teaching you; you are not driving with me until your dad says you can and until you have your license, and you are experienced."

I: How would you describe your parent's involvement in your education (e.g., helping with homework, being part of parent-teacher organizations, school activities)?

R: They were very involved. They both helped with our homework. We did more after school activities when we were younger, there was like pizza night or something and my parents would take us. Definitely wanted to see the grades, if they weren't happy about something they went to the teachers, they were very, very involved in every aspect.

I: In what ways if any did you parents influence your choice of a career or major in college?

R: I started out doing computer sciences as my major, because that's kind off the rout my dad heard, "Hey you should do computer science." And I didn't really know what I wanted to do, so I started in that route. It's really, really hard, I didn't like it. The only thing I liked of it was all the math classes, and I didn't want to be a math teacher. So, what would you do with a bunch of math classes? So, then I looked into accounting, and I loved it and ended up doing that.

I: In college or in school, were you involved in religious or cultural organizations?

R: In high school, definitely not. In any of my schooling there was none. In college there was an Arabic class that I was able to take, so I jumped on that opportunity, I liked it. But otherwise, there wasn't too much going on.

I: In what ways if any does your culture or religion influence your choice of friends?

R: It influences it greatly. Obviously, I am not going to hang out with somebody who want to go partying and clubbing all the time. I don't do that. We can be friends, but we have to find somewhere else, something else to do because I can't enjoy that with you. I have a couple of American friends here and a couple of Muslim friends but, I notice all the American people I gravitate towards end up being people who don't drink a lot. My best friend and her husband don't drink a lot because her husband's dad passed away of alcohol poisoning or something, so he doesn't drink at all. She would have, I have seen her drink at her wedding like a drink or something, but they actually don't keep it in the refrigerator.

I: Do you make a conscious point of having friends who are from the same culture or religion as you are?

R: I don't make a point, if I meet people and I like them and we mesh, then we end up hanging out. But it's not like, "No, I can't hang out with Americans, or no I can't hang out with such and such culture." We just have to click.

I: The next few questions are about you parents and your grandparents, so we can learn a little more about your history and about your roots. What are your parents' current status? Are they working, retired?

R: No, they're both working.

I: Where did they migrate from, or were they born here?

R: They were born in Palestine. My dad came here when he was in his twenties I think, and then went overseas got married to my mom and brought her here.

I: How did they make a living in the U.S.?

R: I think my dad was working with somebody who had stores and then he ended up buy his own convenient stores.

I: And you said your mom also works?

R: My mom is a teacher. She just started working kind of after we grew up. She works for an Islamic School.

I: What is their level of education?

R: High school.

I: How do you think they identify themselves? This is similar to the tough question we had previously. So, for them, would they identify themselves more with religion, more with culture?

R: I would say a good mesh of the two. Maybe my mom more so, I see her becoming more religious the older she gets. She just started wearing hijab maybe 12 years ago. But yes, they have their sense of... especially my dad, he is open minded in certain aspects and in other aspects, like I just heard him if he sees somebody drunk, he gets irritated. I am like, "calm down dad, they aren't doing anything to you, so whatever."

I: Do they participate in cultural or religious activities, organizations?

R: If there is an event, they'll go. My mom works for an Islamic school, so the masjid is right there, they go pray, and my dad goes to pray Friday prayers as well. Cultural weddings, they go to.

I: Growing up did they often mention their homeland? If so in what ways?

R: Always. They were always calling their families, both sides of my grandparents. Whenever fighting broke out, there was just this eeriness about being home, not being home with them like they were doing anything but like you could tell they were both on edge because they're worried about what's going on at home. They taught us about... I hear countless stories of, "We didn't get driven to school, we had to walk in the snow, and it was taller than me." And I was like, "Okay dad, do you want me to walk to school in the snow? Because I will"

I: Did they ever specific historic events such as major wars in the Middle East, anything like that? Aside from the actual present fighting that was happening.

R: I'd say more so the present. We heard some about previous stuff about grandparents, but mostly it was what was going on in the present.

I: The next few questions are about your grandparents, again to just to get to know you a little more. Did any of your grandparents immigrate to the U.S.?

R: No. My grandma is a dual citizen, US and Palestinian, my grandfather was too. Then my mom's side is not.

I: Did they come to the U.S. then?

R: They'll come yes, but not like stay. Just visits and stuff.

I: So, when they were younger, they didn't come here to work or anything like that?

R: No.

I: So where did you parents settle when they first got here?

R: I think New York is where they started out because they have cousins there and my dad was working with cousins. So yes New York, then they went to North Carolina

I: We'll talk a little bit more about cultural clothing. You did mention thubs, so do you have any traditional or cultural clothing aside from the thub? More like an abayas, anything else?

R: I have an abaya for like prayers and stuff. Prayer cloths, thubs, that's pretty much it

I: So, you did mention the abaya for prayer, so when and how often do you wear them, I guess your thubs and whatever else?

R: Just weddings, henna parties.

I: How do you feel when you wear them?

R: I feel good. It's fun especially when you go to a hotel for function and American people are gawking, "Wow what is that?" And then, I don't even mind when people ask, "What are you wearing?" I am like, "This a Palestinian dress."

I: So, what does tradition and cultural clothing mean to you? Why are they important to you?

R: It's important because it separates me from my American clothing and stuff. It's kind of a reminder that, "Hey, this came from overseas, it was made overseas." It's a piece of my background.

I: How does culture and religion play a role in your choice of everyday clothing?

R: Culture and religion. Definitely more so religion. I am not going to wear something that's going to show cleavage and I am not going to wear shorts. Definitely try to be as modest as possible for somebody who doesn't wear a hijab.

I: So, what influences you to wear your cultural clothing, aside from weddings?

R: Honestly aside from weddings, I have no reason to wear it, except if we talk about when we were younger that's what we wear for Eid.

I: Does your mother wear traditional clothing?

R: She wore more modest clothing because she does wear a head scarf, she doesn't walk around in a thub.

I: Where do you get your thubs from? Do you purchase them from here, overseas?

R: There is a lady in Chicago that makes them. And there are stores in Chicago that you can buy them from. But typically, from overseas, they always have the latest trends and stuff, so you always want to go over there and get them.

I: So, were any handed down to you or did you just purchase all yourself?

R: It's funny that you asked that because my grandma just decided to start handing down some of hers. So, I know my sister took one, and she redesigned it, it doesn't fit her, so she kind-of modernized it a little bit, but it's still a thub. And she is supposed to be giving me one next year when I go so, I am pretty excited about that. I like that it's an older style because things change and a lot of thubs nowadays are becoming more mermaid and whatever, and it's like, "It's not really a thub anymore, it's just a mermaid dress with Arabic embroidery on it." So, it's nice to have that where it's real it's whole.

I: Would you pass down your cultural clothing to your children?

R: Definitely. I actually still have a little thub from when I was a little girl and I have it and I am like, "I'll give this to my daughter one day."

I: Is there anything else in your history, or in your background that you would like to share before we close off?

R: No.

I: Are there any particular services or resources do you think that AMWRRI could and should provide to meet the needs of women in Milwaukee?

R: I think it would be nice to have more programs for, there is Sunday school obviously, I am not going to go to Sunday school with a bunch of little kids. It would be cool to have some sort of program even if it's once a month to talk about religion and stuff like that just to keep us grounded. We live in America; we are surrounded by everything that is not Islamic and not cultural. I think doing something like that would be good.