



Oral History Project Interview

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

Number of Interview: 201503

Date: September 29, 2015

Gender: Female

Name: Anonymous

Country of Origin: Jordan

Year of Immigration: 2011

Abstract: I had the opportunity to interview young women who migrated to the United States from Jordan in 2011. She initially met her husband online and after many visits to her home country he asked for her hand in marriage, after seeking the approval of her father. Being that he was born in the United States and Muslim convert, she was faced with objections and hesitation from close family members. There were concerns for her safety and if her husband would be strong enough to maintain his faith and take on the responsibilities of raising a family. However, she followed her heart and started her journey out West to start a new chapter in her life. She speaks freely about settling in a new country, marriage, adapting to the food, culture and fears and challenges that many mothers share, of raising two Muslim children in America. By being consistent and passionate in her teachings her faith, she was able to quickly establish herself within the Muslim community in Milwaukee keeping her identity yet embracing her new life.

Key Themes: marriage, family, faith

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

I: My name is Tonya Bingham and behalf of the Arab and Muslim Women's Research and Resource Institute in conjunction with Marquette University I am conducting a live interview. So, my first question is where is your homeland?

R: Jordan.

I: Okay, and also is there you were born?

R: Yes.

I: Okay, so tell me a little bit about the places and buildings where you spent a lot of your time during your childhood?

R: I spent a lot of time at my grandmother's house and playing with the kids in the neighborhood and by the neighbors.

I: Okay. So, is your grandmother still in Jordan or is she here in the United States?

R: No, my grandmother passed away two years ago in Jordan, yes.

I: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. So tell me a little bit about your school there, did you get your education here in the states or was it in Jordan?

R: I got it in Jordan.

I: Oh, and is this college or is this kindergarten through twelve grade or...?

R: I got it from 6th grade until college.

I: Okay, and then have you ever lived in any of the other; excuse me, any other countries prior to coming to the United States?

R: I've lived in Saudi Arabia from the age of zero to ten.

I: Okay, then. And then when did you immigrate to the United States?

R: In 2011.

I: So, I just wanted to circle back to when you said that you were in Saudi Arabia. How different was that, going from Saudi Arabia to Jordan was it, it very different or similar?

R: Yes, it was very different because you can't, for us women we can't really like, walk outside too much without like a man and we had a normal life it just, like it was too closed than in Jordan, like everybody is outside and everybody's like okay, women have more rights in Jordan than in Saudi Arabia, and that's it.

I: Got it. That's interesting. So, did your family then just make the decision to move to Jordan or were they originally from Jordan?

R: Yes, we were originally from Jordan, yes.

I: Got it. And you don't have to answer this but about how old are you now [interviewer and interviewee both laughs]?

R: Twenty-six.

I: Okay. Got it. Were you the first in your family to come to the United States?

R: Yes, from my family yes that's, that was the first.

I: Okay got it. And then did you come alone, or who else came with you like?

R: Yeah, it was just me.

I: Okay.

R: I came with my husband, but yeah.

I: So after you came to the United States, did any of your other family members come here?

R: For visits, yes.

I: Okay. But anyone to live or...?

R: No.

I: Got it.

R: And then are you married, I know, yes because we discussed our husbands before?

I: Yeah.

R: And were you married when you immigrated the United States?

I: Yes.

R: That was the reason why I came here [laughs].

I: And then, okay we already know that one [interviewer skips over a question] and then, do you have any children?

R: Yes, I have two kids.

I: And their names and ages you don't want to disclose their names and that's fine you can just disclose their ages?

R: Yeah, my son is three and a half and my daughter is one.

I: And of course, they both reside here?

R: Yes.

I: Okay got it. [pause] And then, so we talked a little bit, so I know that you went to high school and that you also went to college in Jordan. So, what did you study in Jordan?

R: Special education.

I: And then, is the college in Jordan, I don't know if it's like here for the United States we have college and universities is it similar like that in Jordan, or how long does it take?

R: Yes its similar, I went to a university so it was like a four year bachelor degree, yeah.

I: And then did you do any work in Jordan as far as in regards to the field of special education?

R: Yes, yes, I worked at a kindergarten specialized for blind kids.

I: You said for blind kids?

R: Yes.

I: And then, tell me a little bit more about like, your workplace or what you did, was there any, any fond memories that you have or?

R: Yeah, I have beautiful memories there, it was like such an amazing experience. I learned more than what I taught. And I loved it. It was like a good atmosphere and my, the principal that was in charge was so ambitious all the time about learning new stuff to teach the kids, and the kids themselves taught us too. That was like one of the most beautiful experiences I had in my life.

I: Good, and are you in contact still with anyone?

R: Yes.

I: Okay, and I want to circle back to one thing. I did want to ask, as far as your schooling, did you have like, what was your attire, like did you have to wear uniforms, or you know just regular?

R: For my schooling, in like regular schools like before college, yes, I had a uniform.

I: And was it a salaam school I'm assuming?

R: Not it's just a dress.

I: So, in regard to right now, are you currently employed or working outside of the house?

R: Full time mother [smiles].

I: That's enough [laughs].

R: Yes, so far that's my job— looking into another one, but yeah this is my job.

I: And I know that you also mentioned that when you first got here that you taught at the mosque?

R: Yes, correct.

I: And then can you tell me a little bit more about that?

R: Yes, I taught Arabic and Quran since I have an Arabic tongue and then, I enjoyed it too I taught at different masjids', and I loved it. I met, I got to meet good people and new people and it was good. Good experience.

I: Good. Okay, so now I am going to just really focus on some of your decisions on why you decided to come to the United States.

R: Yeah.

I: So, okay, so why or how did you decide to settle in the United States?

R: Well, because my husband is from Milwaukee, so we had to just come here. And so, we got married in Jordan then just came to the U.S., to Milwaukee to stay here.

I: And then can I ask you a little bit about how you met or you wanted to share that or...?

R: [interviewee hesitates briefly] We met through the Internet, Facebook, through mutual friends and that's how it was.

I: Okay, good because I actually have questions about that coming up, too [laughs] and then I'm assuming you came to Milwaukee because that's where he's from, correct?

R: Yes, that's where he's from, and he has a job here so we just had to come back here.

I: Okay, got it. And then have you ever lived in any other places within the United States?

R: No.

I: What about visiting, have you guys ever gone on vacation anywhere else?

R: Ah yes, we went to Arkansas because my uncle lives there, we go to Chicago a lot, because I have another uncle— his wife lives there because he passed away, and we went to Atlanta, Georgia, because he has his cousins there. We went to St. Louis just for visiting, and Florida. So we've been around.

I: All over. So, when you first came to the United States, what was that like for you?

R: It might sound funny, but it's just too big, that's the first thing. It was— I'm used to buildings all over, I'm used to brick buildings, and people close, to each other. Here it's more kind of cold. When I got here, like cold in relationships, cold in like weather, cold in kind of feelings. I just felt like, kind of lonely when I first got here and then by the time I met people and I made my own friends, then it was a little easier, yeah. But yeah, the difference, the main thing was in the beginning it was too big and too empty when I got here.

I: Yeah, are there any obstacles that you faced, or any challenges, like when you first came here?

R: Yeah, there were some things, because I didn't drive when I first got here, so that took me about a year or two, before I started driving. So, that was like too big, because you know you can't get anywhere here without driving. So that's why I was stuck in the house most of the time, that was one of the obstacles, and then another one is understanding a new culture for me. So, that was another one but then once I understood, it got better.

I: So, I have to ask you, did your husband teach you how to drive because I taught my husband how to drive when he first got here [laughs].

R: Yes, yes, he did because back in my home, my sisters know how to drive, I was just always scared of driving, that's why I never did. But my sister, my mom, and everybody knew and I didn't. So then yeah, I had to be brave enough here.

I: Got it.

R: Yeah.

I: And so, before we started recording, we were talking a little bit about the whole gas station situation. Where my husband is from, in Jamaica, they normally don't pump their own gas, and you kind of said you had that same experience. Are there any like, small quirky things like that that stood out that was a little different?

R: Yeah, probably the main one is gas, and then I can't think of what's in my mind right now. I can't remember.

I: That's okay, no— no that's okay.

R: I know there's some, but I just can't remember it now.

I: What about things like, and I'm just trying to think back to my own experience like the streetlights or how they're positioned? Where I went to state once where they were hanging up, and then like ours are down the pole and I got a ticket because I'm like, looking for the street pole light like right in front of me so.

R: Yeah, it's kind of the same.

I: Okay.

R: The same, yeah.

I: Good, and so were there any problems, or any issues related to the kind of place like, were you prayed, lived, or shopped, anything that was different than what you were used to?

R: Yeah, where I shopped, yes. Because, like I said, it's too big, so like a, you're like what's that, the grocery store that's like the mall like it's, it's humungous and I'm used to like you know I have like a little tiny shop in front of right across from my house that has like, just basic stuff. Like, the other bigger groceries, like down the street, but there's always these little shops all over and I could walk everywhere where I lived. Because I lived right in the center of Ahmad. But, we're close to the center, so I always walked here like, your either going to freeze or like, die because you walked too long. Because you can't get to like everywhere you wanted. Like where I prayed, no it's the same but yeah.

I: I laugh because you think of a place like Woodman's where it's like too big for me, and it's like a gazillion aisles so...

R: It's too big.

I: Well, next actually speaking of Woodman's, like in regard to things that you used to buy at home that you were used to buying, did you find that a challenge when you came here even as far as like food, and you know?

R: Yes, yes, because I didn't know that there were some Mediterranean grocery stores that we have here when I first got here, so I had to go and kind of manage. I just had to eat American

food most of the time, like whatever I could find in the store so I could cook until I find like the spices and stuff. I figured it out in that store and then once I found like the Mediterranean grocery, then it was like a lot easier [laughs], I could then make anything now.

I: Good, so we talked a little bit about like, when you first started to learn how to drive what were your feelings, was it overwhelming, scary, or just it's too big?

R: It's once I learned how to drive, I felt like, no it got a lot better, yeah.

I: And then what about your husband? How did he feel about you starting to drive, did he encourage it or discourage it?

R: Yes, yeah, he encouraged it so much because then that took weight off his shoulders, I didn't have to ask him to take me places, I could just do it by myself now.

I: Exactly, exactly.

R: Yeah, I felt better, I felt more independent once I did it, so that's why I was like, happy.

I: Good, so once you arrived here did you pursue more education, or any kind of training, English classes, anything like that or...?

R: Not really. I tried to volunteer in a blind school for kids, but it didn't work. They didn't take me. But anyway, I tried some stuff it just like, got me really busy in classes in the house with the kids and stuff. Then, I took some other education— I took some Japanese language, because I love languages, so I always like to learn more. I try to teach myself some Turkish at the house. So yeah, I like, I am trying right now to go back to school, so I can just get more education in my field.

I: Good, now I know I am kind of probably jumping ahead, but you stressed that your family had a strong emphasis on education.

R: Yes.

I: So as far as your education, if you think back to when you were back home, what role of your family— did they have any decision in what you were going to school for?

R: Not really, because everybody went for what they want to study, as long as it's a good thing. If they know like, it's something we have in our heart because like, my mom we always knew that my oldest sister, she likes to draw things, and she's like really good at it, so she is an architect now. She went for architectural engineering, and she is an architect. My brother loves animals, so he went for animal production. My mom knew that I loved babies and kids, so she thought I should go for childhood education, and that's what I did for the first two years and then I saw the special education field and I just switched and I loved it.

I: Probably very rewarding too.

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, so does your family still have the same level of involvement or have things changed since you came here?

R: Involvement in what direction?

I: Any influence as far as just like, how you know, how do you do things like what do you want to work or do they have any kind of involvement?

R: No, they just give advice you know, like tell you push you more get more education.

I: That's what parents do.

R: Yes, always go for more, don't stop. That what they are, but you know, but like not more than that.

I: So, I know we talked a little bit about your son, not your son, your husband's and I wish that we would have recorded about this, but if you wouldn't mind just telling the story about your husband and what he— because the question is what kind of jobs has your spouse had since immigrating since you came here. But I thought it was very interesting when you were saying that when your husband promised your dad that he was going to go back to school that was important to you that he fulfilled that obligation.

R: Yeah, yes, yes, I was really happy because he wasn't too much into it because he loves to read, he loves to learn, he just didn't want to go to school too much. And then once we came

back and he knew I was pregnant, he just knew that he'd just want to go back to study and finish his education or start the journey, because you can never finish.

I: Yeah.

R: He started the journey, and he was happy he always stays like okay, you can never stop you have to. You always have to go for more and he's good at it, I guess.

I: Good.

R: He loves it.

I: So, thinking about your life shortly after you came to the United States, tell me about places and buildings where you spent a lot of time during the initial years? After first coming here I don't know if there is one place where you visited frequently or if it was just, I'm going to stay at home and not deal with all that.

R: I visited the masjid so much, that was like a big place where I felt comfortable in it. I felt comfortable at the house because that's the family house because I lived with my in-laws for the first year so we can get to know each other. And, whenever I go there, even though like you can go through like ups and downs in it whatever, it always feels like house for a family and I love that place. So, it's good, yeah.

I: Okay, so next let's go to marriage, which is my favorite part because I don't know, I just want to hear about the ceremony and everything. But so, basically in your culture how are woman viewed, and what is their typical role?

R: In my culture, you know a housewife, is that the answer. Okay the housewife is taking care of the kids and taking care of the husband, and then now it's more that, she has to have a job because she has to be independent and like, you know not forget herself so, now that this is a big role in my culture right now, that's how it is.

I: Okay, so what are some, what are some ways in which you balance your faith and your American identity?

R: Just don't— I learned that you really can't mix culture and faith when you are American because I have a different culture and I like to keep it, I like to live in it, but I don't like to force it. With the American culture, things are separate. I can live them both, but I have to live with them separate too. Especially when I'm dealing with Americans who are not Muslim, because to me, I grew up that my culture is my religion, like it's like, so mixed that you can't really take them apart.

I: Yeah.

R: So that's a little different than the American culture.

I: That's very interesting you say that cause I have heard that so many times in the last couple weeks, I guess or week, is that people are separating culture from their religion. And it's so important that I think that sometimes people do mix the two.

R: Yes, they do mix, because my religion is part of my life. Because for me, I have learned that it's a way of life, it's not only a religion. It's a way of life that shapes you. So, it shapes your morals, it shapes your acting, it shapes everything. So that's how my culture is. That's how my culture took it from.

I: I admire that, I like that.

R: It's still the same.

I: How do you like, how do you describe yourself, like if somebody, I don't know, if you had to describe yourself as a American citizen, or an Arab Muslim American, or how do you describe yourself?

R: Yes, I always like to describe myself as a Muslim because I am always proud of it, and it teaches me so many things. So, yes, I am a Muslim and now I am an American, and I'm a mother because I feel like there's so many things to be proud of. That I have to have so many responsibilities now that I have to make it so challenging, so I can grow up with and yes, I like to be passionate, I like to study more, read more, learn more. so hopefully that's who I am.

I: Again, this is of course your interview, I admire that because when you ask most people you know, describe yourself, they right away describe their profession. But it seems like with you it's

coming more from your heart. Like I'm a Muslim, and everything else you know is afterwards. You don't see that a lot. We should try that as an exercise, ask ten people what are you and they'll tell you what they do, and not you know what I mean. It's just a difference and I can see it where it comes from your heart so. So, what does marriage mean to you?

R: It means it means everything, actually. Because when I first met my husband, I was like kind of a kid still, I go to college I didn't get to get a job myself yet. I just like, you know, I went from high school right away to college and I had never been independent before, and I just fell in love. we got married, and I just felt like I learned from my husband so much, that I felt like he was, he's everything to me. And we moved here, I moved from my home country to the west all by myself with a man that I just got married to, and it was like, so he was, he had to be my dad, my brother, my sister, my mother, my friend, my husband, he's, he was everything. He was like the family that I wanted and or I needed when I was alone, and he was. So, marriage means a lot to me. Means like understanding each other, means loving each other when you hate each other [laugh] I heard that once, and I loved it and I thought it was like the right thing. Yes, marriage is so many it's like a school.

I: Yeah. I can learn a lot from you.

R: Oh thanks.

I: What factors play a role in marriage?

R: What, I'm sorry?

I: It says what factors play a role in marriage. You kind of talked about the things that are important, but like what are some of the key things?

R: Listening [laughs], listening, and understanding, and the main thing is giving excuses to each other. Because you can't be stubborn in marriage, you got to let go, and you got to understand the background, because everybody has a background that is like the root in them, and if you don't understand it you can never get along or you can never have a happy marriage, I guess.

I: You're very wise.

R: Thanks.

I: So, what are the first characteristics that you look for in a husband?

R: Oh, look for so many things, yeah.

I: The first couple?

R: The good things like always understanding. Like I just felt like I said that word so many times right now but I just feel like the marriage is like loving, giving, helping each other no matter what, yeah.

I: Ok, good. And what about any physical appearances that you look for, that's my own personal question?

R: Like um.

I: A smile or is there anything that you look for in particular or...?

R: Yes– happy face, smile. I'm an affectionate person so I like affection most of the time so it doesn't happen anyway but yeah.

I: Let's see, you oh well, you actually kind of answered this but the question is would you move because of marriage?

R: Yes, yes because that's if no matter what the place is if you love the person your moving with its going to make the place good.

I: Okay, so now this is my favorite part so tell me a little bit about your wedding and the ceremonies that you went through– you said this was in Jordan, correct?

R: Yeah, yes it was in Jordan. I wore my traditional dress I didn't wear a white dress, I wanted to have like cause that was almost a farewell party too, so, yes it was a family party. I didn't have so many people like everybody else would have, I just wanted it to be like close. More because my husband didn't have his family there so he was all alone, I didn't want to make it too big and then like, you know he's going be all alone. And it was nice, fast, but it was good. I loved it because it was, it was more intimate than what I expected so it was good.

I: Good! So, you said you didn't wear the traditional white what color was your dress?

R: It was ivory.

I: Okay.

R: Close to white, but they had so many decorations on it so that was kind of colorful.

I: Wow, I would love to see a picture of that for myself.

R: I'll show you one.

I: Okay, and how many days did you celebrate, was it just a one day thing? I know you said it was fast but?

R: Yeah, it was a one day because well, we actually as a culture, we have a day which is engagement and then that was like a year before the ceremony. That was a year before the wedding.

I: Okay what is that, so like an engagement party or?

R: Yeah, yeah it was like so close to— yeah it was an engagement party. And then like a year after I got like, like all the papers done and stuff and then we had the wedding. Yes, so it was like only one day, one day we didn't have like so many days.

I: Okay, got it and what about the food there?

R: Oh yeah, we had the traditional food which is mansaf.

I: I have to try that one day. Okay, and then what marriage ceremonies or rituals that are most important to you that you just had to have at your wedding, where you wanted to keep that tradition going. Was there anything important or anything like that was like a ritual that you, whatever you always had to do, or wanted to do.

R: Oh, huh no, because it's all like the same. It's like okay, we dance, we eat, and then we dance again, and then that's like that's the ceremony of the wedding mainly.

I: Got it. Is it similar like here in the United States like you know the bride and groom dance first and then you're supposed to have the mother and all that other?

R: Yes, yes.

I: Do you remember what song you and your husband first danced to?

R: Yes, yes.

I: Do you!?

R: Yeah, it was an Arabic song, so it was like yeah, Nancy Ajram. And then, yes I love that song. Yeah, I still remember it because he chose it, and I don't know how he understood the words, but he said he looked up the lyrics and the translation for it and he liked it so.

I: Awe.

R: I was like okay, it's kind of funny but that's good. He listened to it too much when he was in taxi cabs in Jordan, so I think it got stuck in his mind [laughter].

I: Is there anything that you would have changed or done differently?

R: What I would have changed— the salon I got my hair done in and the makeup. Yeah because it just wasn't like, exactly what I wanted. But that's the thing is anything else is not- not important yeah that's really important to me.

I: Good. Okay was your marriage ceremony similar to other ones within your culture or did you do anything outside of the norm?

R: Yeah, one of the things I did outside of the norm is that I didn't wear a wedding dress I wanted to wear myuh. Traditional— it's a traditional Jordanian dress or Palestinian actually, and it was a gift from my ma. Like we went together and we chose the design and I got it all custom made and stuff, and my mom wanted to give it me as a gift but I wanted to wear it for my wedding to appreciate it, so she liked it.

I: And do you still have that dress?

R: Yes.

I: Do you think that, and I'm so bad, so I know you said you have your two children one is a, you have a boy and girl correct?

R: Yes, a girl.

I: Do you think this is something you would like to pass onto your daughter?

R: Oh yeah, if it fits because its super tiny [laughs]. Yeah, I would love it because I was going to wear my mom's graduation dress and I always wanted since I was a kid. And it was a white one with like beautiful like– I think it was made in but it was from France or whatever, but it was so pretty and it was white and like flowy and I was like mom, I really want to wear it for my wedding because it fits and it's like something I dreamed of. And she was like no, you got to wear something new in your wedding. And I'm like I know, but I still wore something different because I always wanted something not traditional, like other people would do. But yeah, I would love to do that.

I: Okay, and I know like you said, your husband at the time you guys got married, he had already converted.

R: Yes.

I: Okay, correct so.

R: He was converted, he converted before.

I: Okay, so the next question is how open are your parents or would they have been if you would had married outside of you religion?

R: Oh, I don't they would have been open. I don't think I would have done it, but because the main thing, the main purpose when I met my husband was just to help him with Islam because that's what he wanted in the beginning. And that's how we became friends and then we, yeah, we fell in love, and we got married because that was my purpose in like in the beginning. So yeah, I don't think– I don't know if they would've been open to another religion because they're always open to having friends, knowing other people, but not like marriage or like intimacy ...close to much. Yeah.

I: And then how were, were they accepting that he wasn't from Jordan?

R: Yes, they were actually accepting. The thing is my dad was super scared and worried about me, like he was like, why're you just going to like, you know you going to go with somebody we never met before. Like, you know, we don't know him growing up, and he converted to Islam, are you sure like he's as strong or you just going to go somewhere. You know they might hurt you because you're a Muslim, you know you're going to go to the west because there is like the stereotype of being a Muslim in the US. It's kind of dangerous sometimes in some areas that you going to be like assaulted, or hurt, or whatever. So, my dad was scared about this point like okay, so you're going to be a Muslim in the US— they might hurt you because you have a scarf on or all these things, but my brother was the main one who was so concerned. We were so close, and he was terrified he was like no, even though he was his friend because they been friends for a long time. And he was like, he is my friend, but I don't want you to go. what if he what if something happens once and you got hurt? I'm not going to be able to just come and help you because it's so far and I'm like, you know he's not going to hurt me he's like, no there lots of things happen. I'm like, I know but you know, he's going to be there to help me too when these things happen. So yeah, but other than that no, they were fine as long as he's a good guy and a good Muslim. They didn't care about nationality and stuff.

I: Have you ever experienced any of those like, discrimination or anything here in the states or any of the things that your father feared?

R: Yeah, yeah, not as extreme no, but some words here and there from some family members but not like more than that.

I: You call me next time [laughs].

R: I know, but not more than that, because they just didn't understand it in the beginning because that's the first Muslim they interact with. But one time I was in Pick 'n Save, and I was like walking with my mother-in-law, she met her friend who she told me like, so why you still wear that on your head. I'm like, what do you mean? She's like well you didn't have to wear it because you're out of your country now, you're, here you're free, you can just take it off. I'm like, well who told you I'm not free there? I am free. I put it on out of freedom because I chose it. And she like, oh I didn't know that, so it was just out of not knowing it's not out of hurting or like insulting it was just like, well you know, I didn't know. I'm sorry I just I thought you were like

forced to do it because that's how I always think. I'm like no, people are not forced anymore to do these things they're all free you know. I have cousins who don't wear so it's not a big deal.

I: That's interesting. Guess where I'm jumping ahead– did anyone influence your decision to get engaged or marry your husband or is that something you wanted to do and this is what you're doing?

R: Like good influence you mean?

I: Good and bad, I guess.

R: Good, my mom was a good influence, because she always thought like, you know if you love somebody and they're for the good because and they're good people you just get married you know, like you don't wait to mature.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, my friends were good influences. There were some people like, you know they didn't want it but, yeah.

I: I'll tell you a story once were done too we have a lot of similarities which I'm finding. Nope there, yes, we know you went to college we have that. Did the possibility of having children influence your decision to marry? Kind of an odd one but.

R: Yeah [hesitates].

I: We can skip that one, sure.

R: Yeah.

I: So, is your husband older or younger?

R: Older.

I: Older, okay. So, then the question is that, well I guess you would marry someone older is there like a, how many years do you think should be between partners. Like I would never, for example, like if you were like I would never marry anyone over ten years older than me or what's the range that you think is acceptable?

R: Range is between three and six.

I: Both directions, would you marry someone younger than you?

R: Younger I don't know, because sometimes I always notice that the woman matures faster and more than the guy. So, if he's already younger, means like he's not as mature as her. Like, but if she's younger than him she might be in the same level of matureness. [laughs] So, like so, yeah. Like sometimes you'd be like, because I know like my cousin, my sister-in-law she's married, and her husband is younger like within the same range that my husband is older than me. So, like I always notice like she always thinks like she's the boss like she has to like to make the decisions and he has to follow it. Like, like there's some things like no matter what he's the man and he has to have the last word but it's like you can see it sometimes.

I: That's interesting.

R: But if the man is too old like ten years it becomes hard for them to do the things together. Like the fun stuff like, the hey let's go, you know kayaking, or let's go jet skiing, or let's go, you know he'd be like I already did that, you know like.

I: Yeah.

R: So, like there's not going to be like the same interest anymore.

I: Got it.

R: Sometimes, it works it's just my opinion

I: That's funny. So, when it comes to marriage when you think of like your marriage who makes most of the decisions. Do you think it's mutual, or is it you, your husband or...?

R: [laughs].

I: We like to make them think it's them actually, but it's really us.

R: They like to think that even though like you say, the opinion as an opinion not as a decision. But then they like to say, oh I think, and he would say the same word you said. And you'd be like oh that's a good idea, and you just go with it because if you say like, I said it, he'd be like no you

said it that way. And he'd be like he just added in in the middle like you know sometimes it's a fifty-fifty, although they like to have the last word it's a fifty-fifty.

I: Oh, this is a good one. Do you think like the internet and Facebook and social media made it easier for Arab and Muslim Americans to meet future mates?

R: Yes, I am an example.

I: And then do you think communication types such as cell phones texting, Skype, they also made it easier for male and females to get to know each other before making the decision to marry?

R: Yes.

I: I agree with that one too. do you think community events are places where people tend to see, future spouses and then proceed from there or...?

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: Oh, here we go. So, a family who has more than one daughter, do you think the marriage restrictions and process are different between the oldest daughter and the youngest daughter or they about the same?

R: It's about the same.

I: Alright. So, next we will discuss parenting.

R: Oh God, I'm still new at this.

I: I know, tell me, I don't know. I wish it, I wish kids came with like a little guidebook– like if your kids say this you respond like this. So, in what ways do you think boys should be raised differently than girls?

R: That they have to be responsible more, and they have to protect more, like they have to be that umbrella, yeah.

I: That's good. Okay. So, your children are still fairly long, I mean fairly young. Do they go to like any, like daycare or anything like or are they at home with you?

R: Yeah, they go to my in-laws once a week.

I: And then you get a break.

R: Yeah [excitedly] and then go shopping.

I: You're like, yeah [laughs].

R: My eyes are lighting [laughs].

I: It's funny, I've seen like the light through the phone when you texted me like, my husband's watching the kids, where do you want to meet [laughter]?

R: Let's leave [jokingly].

I: Oh, what are major issues, and I know we talked about this a little bit, with our you know, the in-laws and our parents and stuff but what are some of the major issues you faced when raising your children being, well and if you want to think exactly like, being Muslim and raising them Muslim in America?

R: Yes, yes raising them Muslim in America with Christian grandparents in, you know in a public school, and so many things. And then with the different language, so they have to be bilingual and it's just a nonstop job. It's a nonstop, orders it's a nonstop talking, it's always explaining why when I grew up, I just took it all as it is because, that's how we're living in it. Although my mom has to do more work because she had to teach us extra, because she always learned extra, she always wanted extra. So that's how we learned more than anybody else, more than, not anybody else just more than my family range. Like my mother's sisters, or their kids, so we always have to like to have more in it. But here it's like a whole different story. It's a whole new story, a whole new chapter, and so I keep saying and keep telling and— it's just a big job. I hope, I hope I can learn how to make it good.

I: Now how do you, and I know like, again your kids are so young and I kind of had similar issues with my son too, how do you protect them or like you know what I mean with like helping them maintain their identity and who they are?

R: Awe, yeah.

I: You know like, how do you do that in in the world, the crazy that we're in today, you know.

R: Yes, yes, it's a scary world.

I: Or what are, even if you want to think further, like what are some of your fears?

R: Fears never end, you just keep telling them about who you are and who are they and if you show them that you're proud of who you are, they will lead too. Like show them how proud they can be. Show them that the good things that they're, they're holding right now. Where like, they're going to learn, or going to experience in their lives, and it's just, tell them to understand and people can do whatever they want but there's always limits. Like there's always good and bad that limits us, and yeah, you just keep telling them. And I think that's what I'm learning right now, I'm just repeating myself every day. I'm like okay don't say this word, I'm like you got to say it this way, or you got to— you can't eat that or even when it comes to food that we get turkey slices which is bacon, but its turkey, but its halal food. So, how I would tell my son, but I don't want to say its bacon because if he, he's young and he goes to school if he hears that kids are eating bacon, he wants to eat it because he thinks like we eat it too. So, I always say okay, because my husband is used to saying it like, bacon when he grew up, but then he was like I was talking like okay don't say bacon, because he would think that he can eat it until he grows up and understands that there's some things are different, just say turkey slice.

I: Makes sense.

R: Or I keep reminding myself okay, there's hot dogs so I can say Ahmad, do you want halal hot dogs? So, I always put that word in so he can know that we eat this. So, he would say it. I try different methods until I find like the right one.

I: When you say halal, and I've heard this, this is my own ignorance, I hear my husband say it all the time can you— what is halal like?

R: Yeah halal is the way that Muslims are required to have the food is that mainly is the, it's not cooked with wine, it's not cooked with alcohol, or its not pork, it doesn't have any pork, and it's, it's slaughtered the Islamic way. Which is slaughtering like cutting the throat and letting the blood out because if it stays in, it ruins the meat, it ruins the produce. So, because some, some factories, like cow factories or whatever they shock the animal, so it keeps the blood in. They

you know, electroshock shocking so it keeps the blood in and that's not good, that's not healthy at all that's why there's things they would say, like organic is cut the right way. I'm not sure.

I: That makes sense to me, yeah.

R: Yeah, so halal is this way, and halal has to be, well, there's halal and then there's basabah, which is, I think of it as it has to be the same way. But yeah, there's the basabah but it has to, with all these things, it has to face the Kiblah. And you have to say Allahu Akbar, like you have to sacrifice for the sake of Allah. Like even with halal, like that's the thing, that's the main one too, that it has to be for the sake of God when you sacrifice it. Like you have to say the name of God on it.

I: Okay got it. Thank you. I'm going to let my husband hear this part of that. Alright so, okay what kind of husband or wife would you like for your children.

R: Oh, for my daughter, I would her to have a husband like her dad. You know, good, understanding, loving. And with my son, I would just like him to find the right person he loves and he knows he wants to be with. As mothers, we always think like okay you would like this and he'd be like no, I like that so like no, you like this so no matter what I have for him he always, he's going to have like, the thing he wants.

I: Yeah. Does it matter what type of like religion, I'm assuming you want them to be Muslim as well?

R: Yeah, I would love them to be Muslim. I would love them to be the same religion. I would teach them that, but it's going to be their decision in the end.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, for my daughter, yeah. I would love him to be a Muslim, [laughs] he has to be.

I: Yeah, oh it's my favorite one. Well, I have a lot of favorites. So, what language or languages do you speak at home? Well first, what languages do you speak in general? I know you said you were studying Japanese for a while.

R: Yeah, I took Japanese, I studied French, we studied English at school anyway, Arabic is my language. I did a little bit Turkish. The thing is, if you don't practice any of those you can forget, I'm really fast. So, yeah that's about it. I don't speak them fluently, I can read them.

I: I need to remember that for my son [laughs]. So, what language do you speak at home the most to your children?

R: Arabic.

I: Arabic, okay got it.

R: Yeah, my son today he was saying, he came from school, and he was talking to us and then he was talking to his dad and he was explaining something in English because he know his dad speaks it and then I don't know, what did I say to him. And he was like no I'm, I don't want to talk arabee [Arabic] I want to talk "Englishe" like English and I was like, I was like why? He said because bubba speaks Englishe English, not arabee and I'm like no bubba can speak Arabic too, and he was like no, and I asked his dad, and I was like do you speak Arabic? And I said it in Arabic, and he was like, a little. [laughs] My son was like wow, okay. Because one time he was like, I don't want to arabee because he went to school and everybody speaks English and nobody speaks [Arabic] and I was like you know, smart kids speak two languages and more, so if you can do that you can be smart too. And he was like okay then I speak two [laughter]. And now he knows who he can speak Arabic and English to.

I: Yeah, yeah that's funny.

R: I hope, we always fight but yeah, he's still doing it.

I: So how would you describe your religious life? Do you attend the mosque on a regular basis or...?

R: Yeah, I try to go every week, like once a week for Friday prayer if I can with the kids. It gets really hard, that why women are not obligated, like the men, to go like they have more of a choice because they usually have kids to take care of. And if you, you're not going to go like you know shopping on the day of Friday, because if you can go shopping you can go to prayer so

that's not the right thing. But if you're like, you know, you can't leave the house because of chores and because if you have kids, yeah it tends to stay in the house more.

I: And then, and then do you have any, or do you participate in any community activities? I know we met at one?

R: Yes, yeah, I go with MARUF most of the time.

I: And do you do have anything else that you do, do you always do like the call of duty?

R: Yeah, I started last year, excuse me not last year. I started in the winter with MARUF, and I loved it so now we try to go whenever they have an event, yes.

I: Okay, and then in regards to prayer, do you pray five times a day or how are you?

R: Yes, thank God I do.

I: Inshallah.

R: Inshallah, yes [laughs]

I: Okay, how would you describe your political participation in the United States? Like do you vote, do you not care or...?

R: No, I...

I: I'm so awful...

R: I know I'm not, I try to stay away even though like, I'm a little liberal about it. I would like to vote if there's somebody really impressive coming out, so far I don't know if there is.

I: No.

R: So, I don't know what is going to happen.

I: Good, so it's not bad. We're almost done. Do you read the newspaper daily?

R: I read the news on my phone.

I: Yeah, I have a question, do you find that are you connected with the news back home?

R: Yes.

I: Do you like and how do you obtain that information?

R: Facebook.

I: Facebook, okay. Sorry, and do you find that you're more connected with the news back home or the news like, here?

R: I try both actually, yes.

I: And then no you weren't here, it says were you in the United States during Gulf War. So then I know that you were not here, like for 9/11, but do you remember like, because you were in Jordan?

R: Yes.

I: You're still fairly young, too for 9/11 because that was 2001.

R: Yes, I was, yeah. I was, I think eighth grade.

I: Did that...

R: Seventh or eighth grade.

I: Did it have any effect on you anyway?

R: Oh yeah, we watched it on the news right way. It was like we were just sitting, and then our neighbor called us, and she was like open the, open the TV right away, just turn it on. They bombed the U.S., I don't know what she said exactly. And then when we looked, it was like for hours on the TV and it was showing it on and on. I was saying like okay, history is changing. We're starting a new era because of this, and yes, we had so many changes after that. Main thing was is Iraqi war when George Bush started it with Sudan Hussein because I heard the flights, I heard the bombs. Because it was like, going from Jordan it was like you know the F16 or like, I forgot what kind of- I heard it and I was terrified I was scared I was like.

I: Like really loud, or was it?

R: Yes, it was super loud because when they leave, it was right from Jordan, and Iraqis like they have borders with Jordan, so it was not too far. And yes we would hear the... it was scary it was really scary. So like yeah, it was, it started affecting us, and then we grew up with it we know that things are going to change towards us because once they said it's Muslims, mom, mom said that's the war like they're starting a war against Islam, or they are starting conflicts against us so we got to be careful. We got to be— said he should always show the right, don't be like the bad people, even the bad Muslims who were like, would be like, always yeah so.

I: So, I know you talked a little like when you said you could literally hear it, was there anything, I don't know, I don't want to say special events but was there anything specific that you remember? Like a certain day that stood out more, like it was really loud you know like or anything?

R: Yes, I don't know. I think when they took down Bagdad, because we heard the, when the flights were leaving, it was like dawn time. Like fajr time and my sister and I, we couldn't sleep; we were just literally like just like a piece a wood in a lake that's like terrified because the noise was too loud in our house. And then after that it calmed down, and then we went to my grandma's house we all met there, and my aunts were crying. They, like, they took down Bagdad, that's it. You know that's the capital of Iraq, and Iraq used to be so big because it had free education, it had a high education, it can afford it. It can like, provide. So, people from Jordan used to go and have education there, and when they took the capital of Iraq, it was sad it was heartbreaking. I saw it in people's eyes. I saw, like I had an Iraqi friend at the class who just like collapsed in the class. We were like it was sad it was just, I will still remember every moment of those days.

I: Thank you for sharing, I appreciate that. And now were talking were almost done, I promise you. So, next we're going to move onto cultural clothing, okay? And my first question, obviously they can't see it, you have your hijab on, when did you make the decision to cover?

R: I was seventh grade, yeah. And all of a sudden, I just made the decision. I told my mom, I'm like I want to wear the hijab, I think I'm ready. And she was like, okay you just have to be sure. And there is no going back and I was like yup, that's it, and that was it.

I: And your dad, I think expressed another, was he against it or...?

R: He just said don't you think you're too young for it? Like you know you're young for it. I said like, no, and he was like okay then. It's your decision, like it's up to you.

I: Cool, and then do you have any like traditional clothing, like a [shows interviewee paper].

R: Yeah Dishdasha, Abaya, I have an Abaya and a thobe because that's what I wore. the thobe is what I wore for my wedding.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah, they call it thobe. And I have an Abaya that I wear sometimes, if I'm like in a rush, and sometimes I wear this stuff.

I: The next questions is, how often, well it says, well how often— how much do you wear it, every day, or is it just?

R: Yeah, I can wear the Abaya every day, just like, I like to change. I like to wear like, regular clothes and colors, and all that stuff. my thobe is kind of more, because its more traditional, so I wear for occasions.

I: Got it. And then also how do you feel when you wear them? Like do you feel powerful, do you feel like, how do you feel?

R: Yeah, I actually feel really— it changes, that's right, I feel happy. I feel good when I wear it. I feel like I'm expressing my culture and since I know like, when the thobe, I have it is I think its specific for a town, it's a city in Palestine. Because each city in Palestine has a different design for these thobes, so yeah. Mine I think is from Ramallah yeah, I think so.

I: Sweet, okay. And then, what is it, I mean does it... well actually never mind, you kind of spoke to it, you said that with traditional clothing you kind feel like your expressing yourself, so?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. And then who influenced you to continue to wear your traditional clothing even after you came here?

R: Oh ah, my sister probably.

I: Is this younger or older?

R: Older.

I: And does your mother, does she wear any of the traditional dresses still?

R: For occasions, yes.

I: Okay, got it. And then, actually we talked about this. But the next question is that did she pass on any dresses down to you?

R: Not really, she kept it [laughs] we see it, we watch it from the closet but yeah. Essentially in my grandmothers, closet where they keep like the clothes they wore for their occasions, like my mom and my aunts.

R: Yeah.

I: Yes.

R: Especially like, for their graduation party from university, or like these kind of, yeah, they kept it at my grandma's, yes. In her closet. So, we go we try them on, then we put them back.

I: And we pretty much are done but is there anything else like about your history or anything else that you would like to share or to tell me? Or if there's anything that you think that. Actually, now we'll leave it at those questions first. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

R: I think I said too much.

I: No, you did perfect. And then are there any particular services or resources that you would think the Arab and Muslim Women's Resource and Research Institute should provide to meet the need of communities to which you belong in? Even if you think about like, you know, your experience when you first got here where you like, oh I wish there was a community or organization that did this. Is there anything that you can think of that you think would help other Muslim women coming here to maintain their identity but yet, you know, still be comfortable here in the United States?

R: I think we're comfortable because we meet each other fast. The thing is that I just didn't know about this institution and Marquette. That would be something that a lot of women should go and visit.

I: More visibility?

R: Yeah, yeah because I went to Marquette the other day and I went for the tour, but they never brought it up so. I don't know.

I: Okay, so I'll let her know.

I: And then I think we're done. I know here, I'm going to hit pause so know we're going to order cheesecake we can take it to go though, because I know it's kind of late in our day.