

Nothing is Impossible: Life Story of a Syrian Language Learner

Ahmad Al-Mutairi

Note: **Q**= represents the interviewer's questions, interruptions, and comments.

R= represents the interviewee's answers, interruptions, and comments.

Audio 1-3:

1 Q: How old are you?

R: I am thirty now, thirty years old.

Q: Okay, what was going on in your family, your community, and the world at the time of your birth?

5 R: I was born in like June 24, 1977. At that time, I think there was like a little war or a small war between Syria, I mean, Syria and Israel, or what we call the Attrition War. Umm, this is the main I think incident at that time.

Q: Does it have like any impact on your family?

R: It's not an impact, because I lost my parents, or my parents passed away when I **10** was three years old, like two years or three years after I was born. They like, my parents like both of them they died. First my mother died, and I think she died of asthma, the disease, and then six months later, my, I mean my dad passed away, so it was like very terrible life for all of us. I am the youngest of course. All my other child, uh all my other siblings, I mean my sisters, two of my sisters at that time were **15** married, my youngest sister and my oldest sister. My middle sister is still at home, she's not married. Even my brothers, my middle brother, my eld--, I mean my oldest brother, they were

not married, but they were like very, very young. Because, ah, I think my older brother is maybe seven years older than I am. So it was I think terrible, not only for me, but for everyone, for the whole family. And my uncle, he's **20** not like my real uncle, he's like my father's cousin, he used to take care of everybody, this was before I went to the orphanage.

Q: Okay. Do you remember anything about your first year of life? I know it's hard to.

R: I don't remember, but I think my sister, my youngest sister, she all the time tells me **25** what was going on at that time. She told me once a story that a snake, really, because we have a wooden house, ah, there was a snake coming toward me, and she wanted to help me or protect me, and she got bitten by the snake. It was really terrible, and at that time, you know, there were, there were no, uh, like it was very difficult, because we lived in a rural area in the countryside, and there was no **30** hospital, nothing, or no medical centers, it was very difficult, so they took her to Damascus, which like is maybe 45 minutes away from where I used to live. So it was really terrible, and she laid in bed for maybe, maybe for two months because of that snake.

Q: But she survived, right?

35 R: Of course.

Q: Okay, what characteristics do you remember most about your grandparents?

R: My grandparents, I remember only my grandfather. I think he was like, not paralyzed, but he used to be in bed all the time, because he was very old. So, he used to be, he used to be in bed all the time, because he was very, very sick. I don't know **40**

what he had, but he was very, very sick. Of course my father used to take care of him, and when my father died and my mother died, I think maybe seven years later, he died; he passed away, like natural death, unlike my parents. Because my dad as I told you, or my mother died of asthma and my dad died six months later, because I think, because of a heart attack, he used to be a very heavy smoker. He used to smoke **45** a lot, three or four packs a day.

Q: Wow. Okay, how would you describe your parents?

R: Because they died very, very early in my life when I was like two or three years old, I really don't remember. But, my brothers or my sisters or my cousins or my uncle, they tell me all the time about them. For example, I told you it's a rural area, a **50** countryside, so they used to work all the time on a farm. We used to own a farm, so the main job at that place was farming. So they would go there, even the only means of transportation was like animals, donkeys, horses, so this is what they used to do, only working on that farm.

Q: Do you remember anything about your father's personality? Or, you don't?

55 R: I don't remember, it's like just what they tell me really. What they tell me. Like of course he was, like again, he was very, very kind-hearted. My mother the same. Ah, very, very hardworking, of course, he was also a government clerk. He used to work for the government.

Q: What do you think you inherited from them, based on what your relatives **60 told you?**

R: What they told. Maybe hardworking, because I'm very, very hardworking. And, very hopeful--they were very hopeful, very like, you know farming life is very difficult and at the same time is very hopeful, because you wait a whole year for your crops to yield, right? For trees, or whatever, all kinds of trees, so I think hope. Like **65** I'm a very hopeful person, and at the same time, a very hardworking, because a farm needs hard work.

Q: Okay, what feelings come up when you recall your parents?

R: Sometimes, really, I feel very sad. Like I feel very sad. Sometimes I cry. Even my wife sometimes, okay, "Your crying. Why are you crying?" I tell her, okay, this **70** what, I remember my family. I remember my family back home, or I remember my parents. Sometimes, it just happens, I remember them, and that, most of the time, I feel very, very sad, and very, very distressed.

Q: I can't imagine that.

R: It's very, very difficult.

75 Q: Losing a parent, parents.

R: Yea, they died when I was young, two or three years old.

Q: What is your earliest memory?

R: My earliest memory, I think when I was like three or four, I used to be very, very, I won't say dirty, but they would dress me very, very well, all clean clothes. I would go **80** outside, like, I come back, I come back, maybe three or four or five hours later, all mud, all dirty, you know? From head to foot, all dirty, I used to play in mud. Oh my

God, I think, you know hookah, I used to have my own hookah. I made like a bucket of water, I put like a pipe in it, and I would smoke like, okay this is my hookah.

Q: When you were twelve?

85 R: When I was like four or five. I still remember this.

Q: The youngest smoker in the world!

R: Really, it's not smoke. I did not use to smoke, but I used to imagine myself that I was smoking. You know, like, maybe because my father used to smoke.

Q: You do it to be like him.

90 R: Yea, even now, I smoke a lot, but at that time, really, I used to same thing.

Q: What is the ethnic or cultural background of your parents?

R: They're, I mean, well, they are Arabs of course. They are from Syria. Syria is like in the Middle East, an Arabic speaking country. It's like in the rural areas or in the countryside, we live in, ah, on the borders between the Syria and Lebanon, between **95** like two mountains, a small village, it's about 50,000 people, the population. It's like everybody is hardworking there, not only my parents...

Q: Yea, because of the life.

R: ...because of the life, right. It's a very rough, and harsh life. Very rough, it's very cold, and it's very, very, like and it's very cold in the winter, we get a lot of snow, like

100 we get maybe two meters of snow, maybe like six feet or seven feet of snow.

Q: Wow. That's a lot of snow.

R: Yea, right, a lot of snow.

Q: Okay, were any stories of family members, brothers, sisters, who immigrated to the United States of America?

105 R: I think my, I don't know what you call them in English, but my grandparents' brothers, they were all in like, ah, in America, I don't mean here in the United States, they were in South...

Q: South America.

R: Yea, right. In Brazil, maybe, they were in Argentina, most of them, there. The **110** only people who stayed there, were my only or my very, ah, grandparents.

Q: Was there a noticeable cultural flavor to the home you grew up in? Like in your family, do they, you know, cultural flavor? Have you noticed any cultural flavor for them?

R: Cultural flavor? Really cultural, is very, I think it's a very broad word, because we **115** have a lot of subcultures back home, like where I lived is different from where people live in the coast, or it's a very difficult world where they live on the border between Syria and Iraq, even the way the way they dress, the habits, the words, even the dialects they use, ah, the dialects are very different in terms of words, phonology, everything. I think the cultural thing only, they would dress the Arabic clothes,

120 because it's like a countryside village, in the countryside, all the time like in their work clothes. Because, like, it's like a continuous work all over the year. The only time they don't do anything is in winter when it's very cold. They stay at home. So

they work in the summer, the early spring, and like in the fall, and in the winter, when it's very, very cold...

125 Q: They do nothing.

R: They stay at home and do nothing, because they can't do anything.

Q: Okay. What was growing up in your house, or neighborhood, like? So when you were raised on your neighborhood or house, what was it like?

R: When I was maybe, before I left for the orphanage? Or when I was living with my **130** brothers and sisters? You mean, because I left them when I was four or five, so I remember only from like when I was two to when I was four.

Q: Do you remember that?

R: Not a lot. I remember, like the hookah thing with my neighbors. Like my neighbors, we do the same thing, we used to go and play in the mud, get ourselves **135** dirty, and come...

Q: Do you feel that these times were like fun times? Like do you feel that you like them?

R: I mean, I don't remember these times, of course, all the times, I have longing to that time, really I yearn for that time, I mean, I mean, every time I remember, I wish I **140** were a kid again, because really, that time, childhood, is an important stage in everybody's life.

Q: What are some memories of cultural influences? Do you just remember that, because you always mention or mitigating your dad, smoking?

R: Maybe one of the influences of that time, is that I'm a heavy smoker, not cigarettes, **145** but I smoke like hookah, every now and then. Cultural influences, and I don't know, it's like a very difficult questions.

Q: Okay, you mention that you've been transferred to, ah,...?

R: Right, my uncle, when I told you after my parents died, or passed away, I think 27 years ago now, after they passed away, like three years later, an uncle of mine, who **150** was very, very good, and he really has like a really big impact on my life or influence on my life, my nowadays' life. He took me to like an orphanage, this orphanage was not I think sponsored or funded by the Syrian government, it was funded by the European Union, and mainly like a German organization, or German-Austrian organization called SOS Kinderdorf. Which means like SOS, you know, **155** SOS, "save our souls", and like this calling for help: "save our souls". Kinderdorf, I think is German, it means "children's village", so it's like a village where people who are needy, who are orphans, they get a home to live there. They have a "mother", they have like an "aunt", they have even sisters, or siblings, sisters and brothers. They are not their real brothers, or real sisters, but we call them like **160** "brothers", "sisters", and we call the one who takes care of us as a "mother", so it's kind of like a substitute family for you. So I moved there when I was five. Of course when I first moved there, it was very, very difficult, because I felt like I didn't like it, or whatever. But it was really, really good. Of course, I adapted to that new atmosphere or new situation, and everything, I think, went very, very well.

165 Q: So, this leads us to ask the question about this, you know, type of culture.

What cultural values passed on to you in this type of environment that you were in?

R: this new environment?

Q: Yes.

170 R: The new environment, it was very different from the environment that I used to have before I was moved, or I moved to that orphanage. Like, the kind of care I got there, it was, like, I think the same. If we talk religion, it was like a Christian kind of environment, because all the sponsors, and it's funded by Christians, it's like a Christian organization. Although, I'm originally a Muslim, and my original culture is **175** a Muslim culture. My parents were Muslims. I'm a Muslim. So it was like a Christian culture. Let's say... I won't say like a freer culture or a... where people feel free, it was, I will say, only different, it was a different culture.

Q: A totally different culture.

R: A totally different culture. Even sometimes when my uncle, the one who took me **180** there, he used to go there and visit me, and he'd be surprised, maybe the way I dress, or the way I used to, the clothes I used to wear, very different from the clothes that I used to when I was with my own family.

Q: Is it normal clothes?

R: No, it's normal clothes. For example, shorts. I don't remember when I was a kid **185** and living with my brothers and sisters, my real brothers and sisters, that I wore, I don't remember that I wore any shorts for example.

Q: So it's like strange to you?

R: Really, yea, my uncle, it was a little bit strange for him, or me, and he was a very devout, religious person, so he would tell me, "No, don't do this, or don't do this". I **190** think it was different, because of religion.

Q: What family or cultural traditions were important in your life--whether in your old family, or in your new family? What cultural or family traditions were important to you in your life?

R: In the culture where I used to live with my parents, you know, all the celebrations, **195** all the festivals, all the feasts, were very, very religious. Like we used to have, what we would call, Eid al Adha and Eid al Fitr like after you do the fasting month of Ramadan, so these and maybe the Prophet's birthday, these were the main things. For example, I don't remember, or... I don't remember that I never, that I celebrated for example Christmas or maybe Easter or all these things, but when I moved out to that **200** orphanage, we celebrated all these things. We celebrated Christmas, of course, New Year, we celebrated Easter, we use to have the, we used to color eggs, it's like for Easter, what people do here. But when I used to live with my parents, with my family, my real family, we didn't have any of these things.

Q: When you were adopted in this new environment, did they also celebrate **205 Islamic?**

R: Of course, right, right.

Q: Eid al Adha?

R: Right, right, right, we used to do both.

Q: All religious celebrations?

210 R: Right, right, we used to do all religious celebrations whether Christian or Muslim.

Q: Okay, going back to your family, your original family, do you think that they're, your family was different than other families in the neighborhood? Or they are the same?

215 R: I think they are the same. They have the same maybe let's say traditions, the same kind of work, the same habits, people really, this is the same thing, people they would work, they would wake, they used to wake up in the morning, in the early morning, to go to their farms, and they used to come back home like seven or six or six or seven p.m., and they used to go to bed very, very early. And at that time, at that **220** time, there were no TVs, the only things they used to have, is only a radio, and not everybody used to have a radio, like you'd see, you'd find, maybe thirty people, forty people...

Q: Staying together...

R: ...right, staying together, and listening to the radio, right. Really, it's like, right. **225** Even I think there was at that time, no elec--, no electricity, so used to, people used to have oil lamps, especially in the summer, they would like, all in the yard, under the trees, listening to the radio.

Q: What cultural values passed on to you and by whom? Do you think that you adopted some cultural values from your old, you know, family environment or **230 from the new family environment for you?**

R: I would say both, but nowadays, I just practice the original, my original family's values, like the Muslim values, so to speak.

Q: I see. Okay, what was your first experience with death?

R: My first experience with death? It can with like a death for human being or **235** anything else?

Q: For human being.

R: Human beings. I think when, when my parents died, I don't remember anything, because I was very, very young, but I think when my grandfather died, I was maybe ten, but because I was away from him, and I used to live in the orphanage, and he **240** used to live in the countryside, I didn't feel that, let's say, that sad, or that touched.

Q: Because there is no close connection.

R: Right, because I was like living far away from him, this is my, like maybe it was in 19, I think, 87, about twenty, twenty-one years ago.

245 Q: So it didn't actually make any, any difference for you?

R: I think later, eh, death cases, they had more influence on me, like when my uncle, my good uncle, I mean, you know, the one told you he was very religious and very devout, when he passed away, maybe I think seven years ago, I think I felt like maybe let's say for the first time, I felt very, very sad that okay, nothing was left for me, **250** although he was not my father, not my mother, not my close relative, but because, really it's not like something, I think, even if a stranger takes care of you, you would care, you would love that stranger more than your father who doesn't care of you, doesn't take care of you, it's like something, really care is very important here.

**Q: Of course it is. Was religion important in your family? Yes, you seem to me, I
255 think...**

R: Right, this is right, right.

Q: ...a religious guy.

R: But not afterwards when I moved to the orphanage, when I moved to the orphanage,
ah, religion was important, but not like that important, or that something **260**
emphasized in the new environment, or in, in the orphanage I used to live, I moved to,
so okay, if you, let's say, if you fast, or if you don't fast, it's not a big deal.

Q: For them?

R: For them, right.

Q: Did you attend religious services as a child or as a youth?

265 R: Religious services, you know, religious celebrations or what? You mean
religious celebrations?

Q: Yes.

R: I think I attend them when I was a kid, when I was young, and when I was, I mean
when I was a youth and when I was a kid at the same time.

270 Q: What was that like for you?

R: I used to like it, really. For example when we used to celebrate the Prophet's, ah,
birthday...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...like you would get like, what you call, religious, ah, songs, you would do like **275** sing religious things. It's very good, I like the way, how it feels, the rhythms, or the melody and everything, and the words. It used to be, and I would feel very, very like solemn, and I feel very like, really I used to really liked it, really. Even nowadays...

Q: Excuse me, do you mean Islamic celebrations?

280 R: Right, you mean the, you know the Prophet's birthday, they do the religious songs?

Q: Yea.

R: Religious and anasheed "Islami songs", right?

Q: This is I think Sufism.

285 R: Right, I think, Sufists, Sufism, but it's there in Syria. Or you know when we go, after we do the month of Ramadan, you have to go to the prayer in the morning, and you celebrate this with your relatives, first you celebrate it with your family and then you go to the Mosque, and then, after you do the prayer, you celebrate everything with your relatives, your friends, everybody you see! You wish for them, Happy **290** Ramadan, Happy Eid, even kissing there is something like very, very popular. You kiss them, or whatever. Even people, whom you don't know, you kiss them, like you shake hands with them and at that time, even if somebody is very rude to you, or somebody used to be very, very mean to you, you have to be very kind to him at that day or during Ramadan. For example, you have to forget everything what other **295** people did to you in their life.

Q: Okay, is religion important to you now?

R: Nowadays, I do the fasting, for example, of course I do the fasting. Praying, I mean, I pr--, I pray, let's say every now and then, not all the time. I do the Friday prayer, for example. I pray, but not every, every day, because you know, there is no **300** reason really, sometimes I do it for like three, four days, I do all the pray--. We have to pray in Islam five days, five times a day, sometimes I do it for like a week, I do like all the prayers, and then I don't do it for, he, ten days, and then I do it for two days, something like very, very occasional.

Q: Okay, what cultural influences are still important to you today?

305 R: Cultural influence?

Q: That you think still important to you today.

R: Umm, something here for example, I am married, if it's today, I am married to someone from the United States, an American, for example, they believe, for example, in kissing everywhere, you know something to show affection, every, I don't **310** believe in this, for example. I don't feel comfortable. This maybe because of my original cultural background, because of the Muslim culture there. I don't believe in this, for example, I can't kiss everywhere. And, I always tell my wife, okay, this is how I was raised, and this how you were raised, and there is nothing wrong in how I was raised, and nothing wrong in how you were raised. And if I love for example, I **315** don't need to kiss you at everywhere to show that I love you, for example. You know what I mean?

Q: Yea.

R: Something like, everywhere, uh, kissing is not like everything.

Q: Right.

320 R: I can show you that I love you without...

Q: Without kissing.

R: ...right, without kissing you in public.

Q: Right.

R: Which is something I don't feel comfortable Really. It's like asking you to wear **325** the veil all the time, you won't feel comfortable for example, as a person, as someone from this culture.

Q: Okay. Did you feel, ah, nurtured as a child?

R: As a child, do you mean, from let's say age three or four to age ten?

Q: Yea.

330 R: This is like maybe childhood. That time was, that period of time, can be divided as far as my life is concerned, this time period can be divided into two stages as I told you earlier I think. The stage where I used to live with my parents from, I mean, from the day I was born to age four. This is, and then afterwards I was raised in that orphanage, that international orphanage. When I was living with my parents, **335** of course, I was nurtured, I was taken care of. I was very nurtured, but the problem is that, my family, at that time, didn't have a lot to provide or to give for, to give me. Like it was a terrible life not only for them, all the people there in the countryside, it was a very terrible life. For example, what they make in the summer, out of their like farms, they would spend it in the winter, so I think I felt nurtured **340** maybe in that, like if

we compare it to somebody else, it won't be any nurturing, it won't be nurturing at all, because some people got more, but for me, that I was very, very nurtured. I didn't have anything I want of course. Of course, I wanted a lot of things. I wanted like when I was four I think, I asked my dad to bring me like a pie, and it was very, very difficult for example for him to provide that thing, because like, **345** if he provided that, had to provide that thing for me, maybe we wouldn't have eaten let's say for a week or for two weeks, so it was like a terrible life. The only thing I got is really affection, they used to love me a lot, and they used to take care of me a lot. This was one thing, and the stage after I moved to the orphanage, I think things got much, much better.

350 Q: Uh huh, uh huh.

R: Things got much, much better. Uh, the SOS "mother" what you call the SOS "mother", the organization "mother", she used to take care of me, of course, because that orphanage was funded by the European Union, it was like funded by an organization, like a world organization, so everything I needed, I think, was provided **355** for me, everything I needed. Ah, like from school related things to all the gifts, even I had some people like who adopted me, they have something they call adoption, like you get people like from other countries to adopt certain children, they take care of them, they provide them a provide them with gifts, maybe money, all these things. One year or maybe, I got this adoption thing for maybe, maybe for six months, **360** months, but on ah, um, throughout all my life, that orphanage was like I think, lasted for almost ten years, I felt a little bit like ah, I won't say held back, not taken care of, I think I felt not taken care of very, very well, because I used to see like other kids taken care of more and they were adopted by people like fr--, let's say from the United States, people from Germany or Austria, and I was left alone, left by myself, **365** so I think it

was terrible, but I think that thing is what drove me to do better like in school, ah, like study-wise in school. Unlike other kids who were provided completely by everything, so I think need is what made me what I am now.

Q: What do you remember most about growing up with or without brothers and sisters? I think you have like brothers and sisters.

370 R: I have real brothers and sisters, but I... I did not used to live with them, because I was the only one who was taken to that orphanage. My brothers, my other brothers and sisters, they did not qualify to go to that orphanage or they were no eligible to go to that orphanage, because they were, I think, uh, older than seven years. Like they were maybe eight or ten, and they, there, there was that criterion, okay if **375** you want to be in that orphanage, you have to be at least, I mean, no old, no older than five. So that's why, I think, they did not qualify. So I used to live away from them all the time. Of course of it was very, very difficult for me when I first moved, moved to that orphanage, but I think things after, I mean, afterwards, things got, let's say, better, or I felt more comfortable to be, I mean, away from them. Ah, I have like **380** other siblings, other brothers and sisters, they are not my re--, biological brothers and sisters, but I used to live, live with them all the time, sleep together all the time, eat together, ah, so I have like, I used to have in the orphanage six brothers and sisters, and in my real fam--, real life, six brothers and sisters, so I, I have like twelve. So, it was really... difficult, but I have a brother, my eldest brother, he used to visit me **385** like every month, on a monthly basis. He used to visit me, like he would give me money; he would like give me presents, clothes, like he would call me.

Q: How old was he when he?

R: I think he was born in like 1969, so he's maybe eight, eight years older than I am, uh, he was, when I was maybe four, he was maybe twelve or thirteen. So when I was **390** in the orphanage, when I was six or seven, he was fifteen. So he used to come and visit me, of course the money he used, he used to give me was not his money, it's from my uncle, the one, I mean, the uncle I told you about, very, very good. So, it was really difficult life for me, but things got easier, got better for me when I knew the other people, the other sisters and brothers.

395 Q: Okay, what, you mentioned orphanage, and I would like to ask, do they like give you money?

R: In the orphanage?

Q: What type of services do they provide you with?

R: Ah, this is what I like, really. The orphanage, it's like, I told you, SOS Kinderdorf **400** International, it's a family-based, childcare. Family-based, so they, it's like a village, so like, ah, a children's village. This village consists of, or has, maybe twelve houses, each house has maybe seven or eight kids. Of course, males and females, girls and boys, and each house has, I mean, like a female or a woman. This woman we used to call mother, or mom. So she used to be like your, as a substitute, or as a **405** replacement of your biological mother. All the people, or most of the children there, they were all of them, maybe, I think they were orphans, some people like or some kids there were what we call foundlings, like they don't have any bro--, they don't have anyone at all. Maybe their parents, they just gave them up, didn't care about them. Some people they like have a mother, but their mother is in the hospital **410** with a chronic disease. Some people, like, are very, very needy. They were very, very poor. So it was

for the poor, the needy, the orphans, and those who are very like, were abused as children, like physically abused or any other type of abuse. It was for all kinds of kids. So in a family-based atmosphere, this is the good thing about this orphanage. You don't feel like you are in an orphanage, you feel like you are in a **415** home, you have brothers, you have sisters, you have a mother, and you have, you go to school like any, anybody else. You eat there, you clean the house, it's like your own house. I think it was very good.

Q: So each use includes...

R: Is run by...

420 Q: ...includes girls and boys?

R: Right, right, right, but they were not like all, for example, when we were there, when I first moved there, we were maybe seven. I think four girls and three boys. We were all like five or six or seven years old, all of us. We grew up together, ah, till I was maybe fifteen or sixteen. Other people were maybe fourteen, so it's like brother, **425** brotherly or sisterly relationships in the house. There were, they were like my own brothers and sisters.

Q: And what do they like give you money or pocket money?

R: Right, we used to have money, but you don't need money there, because everything is provided for you. Like money, of course, you get money like every month, it's not **430** like, I think, at that time, it was maybe five hundred Syrian Pounds, it's like ten bucks a month, it's nothing really, but it was really good. You feel like, okay, and this was when I was maybe, uh, age five to age ten.

Q: It's good.

R: Right.

435 Q: Did you get, did you get... along with your new family members at the orphanage? Did you feel comfortable?

R: When I, when I first move there, I did not feel any, any comfortable to be with them, really, because I was, um, I felt like I was kidnapped from my own family. Right. And, even I was very angry with my uncle, who took me there, because I used **440** I to say to myself, okay, why did he take me there? Why didn't I stay with my family? Or whatever. Of course I was very, very mad at him, even mad at my brothers, but I think things, as I told, things got better, got easier for me. So at first, we did not get along of course, because we are all different. Like, I was from a family, I have, there was a boy and a girl from a certain family, and all the other people were **445** from different family, so we were all like from different families.

Q: From different backgrounds.

R: Different backgrounds, right. Not only from the countryside, some people are from the countryside, some people from, ah, I think the city. So, like different people. I think it is even different religions, because some people were Christians, some people **450** were Muslims. But people there, I think, the atmosphere there, I won't say it was Christian, it was secular.

Q: Was there also unknown parents? You know in our religion, people make like, uncertified marriage, or you know?

R: Right, this is what I said, foundlings.

455 Q: Foundlings.

R: Right, foundlings, right. They, okay, some people would leave, they would find like babies, really like, two or three months, ah, babies by the side of the church.

Q: Sometimes one week, or two days...

R: Right, right, right, right, close to the mosque, close to the church, some people **460** would bring, right, right, right. They would take care of them of course.

Q: That's a beautiful thing.

R: That's really, right.

Q: How about your uncle when he left you in that orphanage, did he, did you feel that he was sad to do that?

465 R: Of course, he had no other choice. He did this for example, because, he told me later that he wished all our, all my other siblings, had been to that place, that I was placed, but he couldn't have, I mean, he couldn't do anything to take them all to that orphanage. So he said, okay, you were the youngest, you had like your life ahead of you, and you used to be, you had to be cared of, to be, I mean, taken care of, that's **470** why I took you there, and so and so. Be cared for, and so and so, so he used to tell me, giving me all these pieces of advice. Be careful, like you know, he was religious of course, I mean, do your prayers, do your fasting, take care of yourself, do good at school. All these like...

Q: Pieces of advice.

475 R: Pieces of advice, right.

Q: What were some of your struggles as a child, besides, you know...

R: The loss of my parents.

Q: ...the loss of your parents.

R: I, I think, it's need, because I didn't get everything I wanted, need. And it wasn't, I
480 won't say struggle, I was very good at school, but my mother at that orphanage,
she used to be very, very strict, when it comes to school.

Q: Uh huh.

R: So you used to, okay, if I, if I, if I get, let's say 9 out of 10, like she would beat me.
"Okay, why 9 out of 10? Why not 10 out of 10?"

485 Q: Uh huh.

R: So it was very good. And at the same time, when I used to get like 10 out of 10, oh
my God, we used to have a celebration. So it's really, really, really, this was really
important in my life, and I still remember those times like, okay, when I used to be,
what we call, get beaten, or maybe when we, when we used to celebrate my high **490**
grades, or my low grades, so I won't say, it's a struggle of course as far as school is
concerned, the struggle is need, school related. What else? Struggle of course, when I
first moved to that orphanage, like being away from my family members, also it was a
struggle for me.

**Q: What was the saddest time for time? Was it when you lose, you said that you
495 don't remember losing your parents? So, you don't...**

R: Unfortunately, no. But still when I remember my parents, I feel very, very sad.

Q: Now?

R: Now.

Q: No, I mean, in the time of action. Do you believe your saddest...

500 R: ...moment was the loss of my parents?

Q: Yea, or when the first day you arrived at that orphanage...

R: I won't say it's my saddest day...

Q: or something that we don't know about?

R: I won't say it was the saddest; I think it's one of the saddest days.

505 Q: Uh huh.

R: It's not the saddest day in my life. I think it's one of the many sad days in my life.

Q: What other sad days in your life, besides the day that you...

R: Like when my mother, I mean, I don't mean my biological mother, when my SOS mother...

510 Q: Uh huh.

R: ...the one who used to take care of me in the orphanage, when she passed away.

Q: Ahhh.

R: Because, like, she took, she took care of me for about for like ten years...

Q: Wow.

515 R: ...and she died, or she passed away, ah, so I felt very, very, really sad, because she was like real, maybe, maybe more than a mother for me, because like she took care of me more than my real mother did.

Q: Did you feel that she loved you as, as a mother?

R: Mmmhmm.

520 Q: She did?

R: Mmmhmm. Of course. She loved like all equally, all the same thing, of, I mean of course there were really hard times for everybody, and she used to get very, very mean, but I think everything was for our good.

**Q: What did you say, ah, what would say, ah, was the most significant event in
525 your life up to age twelve? Was it? Yea, I don't want to put words in your
mouth, you know.**

R: Significant? You mean?

Q: Event in your life, up to twelve, up to age twelve.

R: Hmmm, one day when I was, I think, this is age twelve, when I was in the sixth **530** grade, they told me there was, they would make like a celebration for my pass, I mean for passing the sixth grade, very, very successfully. They said, okay, we would do a celebration, I mean, kind of a party for this...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...for my passing, and they took me to the hospital at that time, I don't know if it's
535 significant, it's a, I think, I still remember that day very, very well. So...

Q: Since you remember, it's okay, it is.

R: I think it's very significant, although it's not like that good thing to remember. So,
they took me the hospital, and they removed my, ah, tonsils. They removed my tonsils,
of course, there was a doctor there. So they removed my tonsils, and they **540** didn't
tell me about this, I mean, they didn't tell me already, I mean, before that. And then, I
think, I stayed in bed maybe for almost two weeks. I was really in a very miserable
situation, but I think later, I know, okay, even when I really mad at everybody, because
they didn't tell me this...

Q: Uh huh.

545 R: ...but then, okay, they told me, okay, we didn't tell you, so that you don't get
worried, so and so and so.

Q: But did they say that they're going do a party for you? They're going party?

R: Right, they did. They would do a party, but they took me to the hospital, you know?

550 Q: Ahh.

R: ...and then, I thought, okay, they say, they didn't even, when I went to the hospital,
they told me, something like, okay, for us, it's not for you.

Q: Hmmm. hmmm.

R: And, I didn't feel anything until after the operation, after the operation had taken
555 place, and I think they like they kept their promise, we had a party, but after I had
the surgery, and the operation and everything.

Q: Ha, ha.

R: Really, so I think they kept their promise. I think this was one, was significant day,
and I still remember what that doctor had told me at that time. He told me, ah, because
560 you are from the countryside, so you are like, very strong or very rough, and
because you know all the people there, they have like smug--, they work in smuggling,
they smuggle things, because they live on the borders between Syria and Lebanon, and
other countries, so they would smuggle oil, and clothes, and all kinds of stuff, so he told
me, okay you are very strong, so we don't need to numb you during **565** the operation,
so we'll do the operation right away without anything, without anything anesthesia,
anesthesia, or whatever. Anesthesia.

Q: But, the doctor said was after, after, the surgery?

R: No, no, before.

Q: Before?

570 R: Before. He told me this.

Q: He scared you?

R: Ah, no, he was kidding, you know? He told me, okay, where are you from? I said,
okay, okay, I'm from this place, Serghaya. Ah, you're a strong guy, you do this, and
this, and this, and this. So okay, we'll start the operation right away, you don't need **575**
anything.

Q: So he was, he was.

R: Of course, he was laughing and joking. He was kidding.

Q: Did you make friends easily?

R: I think... I think I did. Friends, maybe, the friends, my friends, they used to take **580** advantage of me, because I was like very good at school.

Q: Ahh.

R: So they used, okay, he's a good guy or whatever, they used to okay, whatever I want, everything they would do everything for me, because they expect something in return.

I think they were not like very, very...

585 Q: Smart.

R: ...two friends. Right, they were not smart, that's why they needed my help everything, even in exams they used to take, okay, to help them in the exam, like to teach them, to tutor them. Even from a very stage, really, from a very early stage. Like what we call the multiplication table in, ah, the multiplication table, I mean, I

590 memorized this when I was maybe six years old.

Q: Wow.

R: And, oh my God, when I was in the first grade, like the teacher of the sixth grade would, she would come to the school, to the class, and she would take me to her class, and she would ask me questions in front of her sixth graders about like the **595** multiplication table, and she would say, okay, five times six? Seven times four? And I would like answer right away, and she would tell them, okay, this is a first grader, and

he knows these things, and you don't know these things. So, I think this like, I think this boosted up my uh motivation as a student, and this is, was, had a very good, or had a very big impact and influence on my life.

600 Q: So, what childhood or teenage friendships were most important to you?

R: Teenage, like fourteen, fifteen, sixteen?

Q: Yea, yea, or in your childhood?

R: Right at that time, I remember teenage, I left the orphanage when I was thirteen. I didn't leave it for good, I left it for another institution affiliated with the orphanage.

605 That institution I think we call it a "youth house". It's not a children's village, so it's now youth, for youngsters and young people, only males, of course, only males. So we used to live there, for I think I lived there from age thirteen to age maybe twenty or fourteen to age nineteen or twenty. Ah, I mean, at that time, I made a lot of friends.

Most of my friends, they were like, they were my original friends, we used to **610** live together when we were in the village.

Q: You mean, they're all brothers?

R: Right, not all, not only all brothers, from other houses in that village.

Q: Yea, yea.

R: Because, you know, that village, it has like a very big, we used to go there and **615** play...

Q: Right.

R: ...full court. You played there football.

Q: So you consider the people who are living with you inside the house is your brother, are your brothers?

620 R: Right.

Q: But the people who are living next door...

R: Right. The same. My neighbors, like my neighbors, we, so I would make friends, we would go walking, we used to go.

Q: But all close houses, as you mentioned before, ah, belongs to orphan, orphanage, right? Orphanage. 625

R: Right. You mean, all the other people?

Q: Yea, all the other houses, the twelve houses. You're saying that your?

R: There were about maybe eight or nine houses.

Q: Houses, yes.

630 R: They were all my, like, neighbors, so to speak.

Q: Yes, yes.

R: Right. I used to make friends, because they were like with me in the school.

Q: Yea.

R: We used go like, and they were, we were in the same class together, so we used to **635** have, we used to watch movies, like, altogether, not only my brothers, my siblings, there was a very big hall. We used to go there. We used to go do a lot of reading. There was like a reading hour everyday. Everybody would go there in that big, about fifty

people in that big hall, we used to read. So, most of those friends, as a child, those child stayed as my, those friends stayed as my friends when I moved to **640** the youth house.

Q: But there's, you know, special friendship that is considered to be important to you, or you didn't actually?

R: No, of course, I used to have very close friends, like we used to do all the stuff together, like really...

645 Q: Do you have contact with them until today?

R: Right. So. Like, on my Yahoo Messenger, Hotmail Messenger, Sk--, Skype, we have, I have them all the time. We chat all the time. Even they call me now. I call them. I have all there contact information.

Q: And they're still in Syria?

650 R: They're in Syria. Some people like they're still, they left for other countries, like the Gulf countries--Kuwait, Saudi Arabia. Right.

Q: What pressure did you feel as a teenager? Or where did they come from?

R: Ah, like any teenager, most of the pressure like, I think, from the other gender. You know?

655 Q: Yea.

R: And at that time, like as a teenager, you would try to do things, that, ah, things not approved by the mother there...

Q: Community.

R: ...or the community there. So it was, okay, like when you see like, like you know
660 harassing girls or whatever.

Q: Ha, ha.

R: You know, really? And you know as a teenager, you think, okay, I'm a man now, I can do whatever I want. You won't, you won't listen to people's advice. You think that you now everything. That's like a pressure, ah, it was like, they would, they used to,
665 hold me back. Okay, if I do this, don't do it, or whatever. Really, so, it was, like, real.

Q: Where you athletic?

R: I used to be very athletic. I used to have my own, what do you call, dumbbells, and everything, all my gym stuff. We had a very big gym there, so you used to go to
670 the gym. At that time, I think when I was maybe sixteen or seventeen, when I was maybe in the tenth or eleventh grade; I used to work even in construction.

Q: Mmmhmm.

R: I mean, I used to like really working construction, and you know construction, like, it builds a lot of muscles.

675 Q: We're going to talk about your work later on. But, if you can please, excuse me, and tell me, ah, ah, did you like you join clubs or groups or organizations at that time? Or just, do it, you know, personally?

R: There as an organization. I think it was ah, not funded, it was organized by the school, not the orphanage, the school.

680 Q: Yea, yea.

R: That or--, like for educational purposes, and because I was like, ah, very clever at school or very good at school, they used to have that, like we were a group of like five people. We used to go to other school to compete with other school students.

Q: In football, or?

685 R: Not football, we used to have it, ah, I think, I was, I was a very good basketball, I mean, basketball player, basketball, and education things. Like, you'd ask about all general knowledge...

Q: Ah, I see.

R: ...school related things, history, I like this. I used to, I was very good, I mean, this,

690 okay, when was the First World War? For example, take this, I used, to like right away, like right away. So I was very, very clever at these things. Even in English, I was very, very good, so we used to have like all these kinds of contests, inter-school contests, between, amongst schools. I think this is.

Q: Did you join?

695 R: Of course, that's why, and I felt very motivated like to go on and on for my studies, I mean, with my studies.

Q: Okay, what did you do for fun or entertainment?

R: In that orphanage, and afterwards in that youth house, like a basket, I used to like basketball, football, of course, when we were at football, I was a goal keeper.

700 Q: Football, you mean soccer?

R: I mean soccer, right. I was a goal keeper. Ah, for fun, this is, of course, we used to have, I used to go to the gym. I used to like going to the gym all the time, football of course, basketball.

Q: Mmmhmm.

Audio 4-6:

705 Q: Was social class important in your life?

R: For me as a person?

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: Social class.

Q: Like high class people, low class people.

710 R: Of course, as I told you, because I was in need all the time, I was like, my family was poor, all the people I knew were very poor, so we were like hoping to become like maybe, we were like looking at people who were rich and trying, okay, and think or maybe dream that we would become like them. Let's social class, I was in the, let's say, the lowest social class in the society. I don't think when I was living **715** in the--, ah, with my parents, with my family, original family, biological family, all people were like the same, like more or less the same, we didn't have like very very rich people, very very poor people, people all the same, all they have is their farms, they do their work in the winter, ah, in the summer, and in the winter they don't do anything. So it was like, I don't think I feel that the society or the community **720** there was like classified like upper class, middle class.

Q: So was your community, ah, isolated from the other like social classes, high people classes?

R: It's not isolated, it's like a town in the countryside, in like a very rural area, people mainly used to work, or to do I mean farming, so they were living on farming. So **725** people were all the same, like nobody had electricity at that time, nobody maybe had a TV at that time.

Q: In the late 1970s?

R: This is in the 19-, right, yea the late 1970s, and early 1980s, in the rural areas I mean.

730 Q: Yea. So you didn't like, so your community members, didn't expose to other social classes? How do they live or so they have dreams to be like them? Or something like that? No, no direct connect with?

R: There was no direct connect, right, let's say between the two communities, the urban community and the rural community. My sisters, for example, were married **735** from people from the city, so my two brothers-in-law, they are from the city, uh, I don't think, I mean, in the community I used to live, people were all more or less the same.

Q: The same class?

R: Let's say the money-wise, education-wise, maybe, and everything.

740 Q: What was the most trouble you were ever in as a teenager?

R: That's a very tricky question.

Q: You think so? Ha. Ha.

R: Trouble.

Q: Yea. When you were a teenager?

745 R: Can we skip this question?

Q: Of course, I said to you, you have the freedom.

R: This is very like, ah.

Q: What was the most significant event of your teenagers, teenage years?

R: Significant event or incident?

750 Q: Yea.

R: That something happened to me or I did something?

Q: Yea, which you can see it as a major event in your life? Positively, of course.

R: I think one time, you know, in Syria, the ninth grade is the let's say the most, the end of preparatory school.

755 Q: Hmm hmm.

R: Right, or the intermediate school, right, the ninth grade.

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: At that time, I mean I, I, I know I did really well, I knew I did really well, I had done really well. They had told me I had failed that grade or I failed the ninth grade, **760** so I was really, very, very, very sad, and the results for the exams, they come, or you can see the results in the summer, and at that time were in a swimming pool, we were swimming, and somebody told me, er, the real thing, that okay, so-and-so, we had to

recheck everything, so we checked everything, we went there to the results place to the...

765 Q: The score board?

R: ...right, to the bulletin board, and I found my name there, with even a very, very high grade, ah I think it was maybe 225 out of 290. So it was like, I think it was really good, but I mean, first, no you failed, or whatever, and I was very, very distressed, sad, so it was really a surprise for me, and when I know that I passed the **770** ninth grade, it was also a surprise, but like from a positive sense of the word.

Q: Okay, ah, what was being a teenager like, the best part and the worst part?

R: The best part is that like you try to do or to be yourself, like you think like any other teenager back home, you think like okay when you are thirteen or fourteen, you can do whatever you want, you are like a real man, you want to smoke, you can **775**smoke, or whatever. At the same time, I was held back, okay, don't smoke even like punished if I smoked or even, punished if was sitting or was playing with people who smoke.

Q: Who's punishing you?

R: Like you know the...

780 Q: The mother?

R: The SOS mother, in that orphanage, right that I told you about.

Q: So do they usually punish people who smoke?

R: Ah, usually, usually they do, like sometimes it's strict a little bit, some people like smoke and they don't care.

785 Q: So, they still smoke.

R: It depends on the mother, the SOS mother, I told you that orphanage is about eight houses.

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: Eight houses, like.

790 Q: Twelve houses or eight houses?

R: Eight houses.

Q: Ah huh.

R: There's about seventy, I think sixty-five students, or sixty-five children, males and females, boys and girls.

795 Q: So like, just in that area, what [...] in Damascus, or? Do they have like other branches?

R: Ah, nowadays they do. They have in Aleppo and they have another one, I think in Latakia, so they have maybe three villages back home in Syria.

Q: Actually, I would like to ah bring a question that I was supposed to ask you, 800 you know at the beginning when we talked about the orphanage.

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: But, I feel it's very interesting to know about it, so I recall it now, and I would like to ask you about it. What was your daily schedule at that orphanage? So what, like what time do you start have your breakfast, have your lunch, have 805 your dinner, what's your program, what's your activities during the day?

R: Is this in the summer you mean or during in the school days?

Q: In both. What do you during the school days and during school holidays?

R: During school. During school days, you know, school back home, you have, or you can't go to school, I think it was Monday, or Saturday, it was Saturday at that time, it

810 was not a weekend. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, you have morning school,

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, you have afternoon or noon school.

Q: So you don't go at morning times at these days to school?

R: No, you don't.

Q: Wow.

815 R: So it's like, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, you have morning, you go there at

7:30-8 am.

Q: Ah huh.

R: 'Til 1. And the noon school on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, you go there from 12 to maybe 4:30 or 5, so this is the difference, but the, let's say, it's Saturday, let's

820 say Saturday, we go there, we wake up in the morning, we have some breakfast.

Q: When?

R: 7:15, 7:20 maybe. Then we go to school, of course, before we go to school, we have some sandwiches, we put them in our book bags or whatever, or some apples and

bananas or whatever and some fruit. We go to school, there is a bus, which takes **825**

us to school to a public school, like any other kids.

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: Like any other kids, so the whole point there, in that orphanage, that you don't feel in an orphanage, or like facility, or an institution. The whole point is that okay you feel home, because it's like a house, a mother, brothers, sisters, and you go to school **830** like any other students, any other people. So, it's not like the school, the school was not built-in the orphanage. It was outside, outside the orphanage. So you'd go there, maybe three, four, until maybe 11:30 or 12, when you get back, we have lunch, and then we have like an hour or two hours nap, we sleep a little bit.

Q: Is this a must?

835 R: No, no, it's not a must, some people like study, some people like they go and have a nap.

Q: But you don't allow, do you allow to go out of your house or you have to stay?

R: You can. There is like some time you can't go out after maybe 10 or 9 pm.

Q: Who do your meals to you? The lunch and the?

840 R: The SOS mother, of course.

Q: She cooks?

R: Right, she cooks, I mean, she cooks, I had sisters, SOS sisters, I used to help her, so it's like, it's like a family. For example, you have your mother, your sisters help your mother.

845 Q: And your mother is staying with you?

R: Right, she has her own room.

Q: Twenty-four hours?

R: Twenty-four hours, right.

Q: Ahh.

850 R: She has I think only one day off I think every week or two weeks. And you get whatever, I mean another woman we call “aunt”, so it’s like your mother’s sister. So it’s really good. So we wake up at let’s say at 2:30 then we study until 5, then we go outside if you want to play or whatever, we come back for dinner, we study maybe for an hour or two...

855 Q: Do you have specific time? My question, my point of this question is do you have like a really restricted time?

R: I mean, right, right, right, like for example when you go outside, when the SOS mother tells you to go out like to play, for I mean to play with your friends, for an hour or two, or two hours like, okay 5, you have to come back at like 7, or 6:30, you **860** have to come up at 6:30, because we were kids, and it’s like okay, you know, like your own mother, okay. If you’re late a little bit, it does not matter maybe.

Q: And what time did you usually have your, ah...?

R: Dinner?

Q: Yea dinner.

865 R: I think it was maybe 7:30 or maybe 8. Then we study a little bit, we watch TV, I think we go to bed, maybe, maybe 10, I mean no later than 10, 10:30. This is in the winter, I mean, when we have school. In the summer, it’s like all fun, because you go,

we have a lot of like activities, we go swimming, we go visit like, we go visiting museums, we go to the beach, we go, I mean, we go vacations, we go camping.

870 Q: And you stay late night, you don't have to like sleep at 10:30?

R: No, no, in the summer it's like...

Q: It's [...]?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: Okay, going back to our previously question about best part and worst part

875 in your teenage years. You said the best part is that like feeling you become a man, is that?

R: This is a feeling, right, but the worst part is that you did not get the chance to feel this way.

Q: Ha ha.

880 R: Really, really. The best part... you feel like you are a man, I said. Ah.

Q: Alright, what special people have you known in your life?

R: Special people? I think when I was...

Q: You know, from the start.

R: When I was in the orphanage, when I was maybe five years old, this was in 1982,

885 you know, the President of Syria at that time, he visited that orphanage, because it was like funded, when they did the inauguration, like opening that orphanage, and there were like a lot of people from the European Union, from Germany, from the German

and Austrian governments, and so some people from the Syrian government were there, and the President was there, I saw him there, and we had pictures together, **890** so...

Q: You mean the former President?

R: No, no, with the former President, right.

Q: Oh.

R: Of Syria. That's one thing. Uh, some, another person I told my uncle was like, he **895** was like, he's like my dad, because I didn't know my dad a lot. So he was like my dad for me. He was very good. He was like to help me even when, this is like.

Q: What, what, what's his name?

R: Abd al-Ali.

Q: Abd al-Ali?

900 R: Abd al-Ali. So he was really good, all the time, giving me, as I told you before, giving me advice, and helping me out, helping not only helping me out, but also helping my family out. When I was in the orphanage, he used to visit me every two weeks, although he had kids, he has family, and let's say his financial situation was not that good, but he used to help, and he was very, very good guy, even at a later **905** stage, when I did my military service, uh, he helped me and he asked some people and I got like a very good military service, it was very easy, hopefully, so everything was okay.

Q: So, do you consider previous President Hafez al-Asad and your uncle are the most important people in your life?

910 R: Right. I mean the former President, we just, okay, it was very occasional, he just visited us, we have some pictures with us, and that's it. You know, at that time, I did not have a lot of..., but the person whom I used to see all the time, maybe every two weeks, every three weeks is my uncle.

Q: Hmm hmm.

915 R: Is my uncle. So my uncle, my uncle was one of the most influential people throughout my life. Uh, because.

Q: And the old President Hafez al-Asad?

R: Right, right. The, the late President Hafez al-Asad. Ah another person, of course, I mean, my wife. Like, we met here, maybe two years ago, and we got married, and **920** she's like, of course she has lot of influence on me, as a person, like you know, all kinds of support, not only emotional support, all kinds of support.

Q: That's really good. Ah okay, who shaped, I'm sorry, I asked this question, who are the heroes, ah, ah, who are the heroes that you think they guide and help you in your life? Or who are the heroes that you believe or respect them...?

925 R: Maybe they are, maybe dead heroes now?

Q: Ahh. In any field of the life, who are the heroes that you, you, you like most in your life?

R: I mean, I think this something has to do with politics, but ah you know Syria was under the French Mandate or French occupation?

930 Q: Mmm hmm.

R: In the early 19, or the in the early 20th hundred, I mean 20th century, until 1946, and one of the really heroes, he's from Damascus, he's called Yusef al-Azmah, he's the one who stopped maybe the French army to get into Syria from the place where I used to live. You know, I'm from the borders between Syria and Lebanon. Lebanon **935** at that time was occupied by, by, by France, so it was under the French Mandate. So, he stopped the, all the French army, with like, he was like only with three or four hundred people with some very, very traditional guns, traditional weapons, they stopped that army with all its artillery, with all its weapons, maybe for, maybe for a week, and then he like, he was like what you call a martyr, so he died in battle, so **940** really this is one of the heroes for me as a person, and we have a lot of historical heroes, like as person from the Arab world, from the Muslim world, we have like Saladin.

Q: Who is it?

R: Saladin, Salah al-Din ibn Ayyub.

945 Q: Saladin. Yea.

R: Saladin, like, we... very, I mean, a very important historical figure in the Muslim world, the Muslim culture.

Q: Right, okay.

R: I hope I answered your question.

950 Q: Yes, you did, thank you, and how about the helpers, who do you think, ah, the helpers that you believe...?

R: Who helped me out? I mean in what sense?

Q: In your life, yes.

R: In what sense, financially, emotional?

955 Q: In any sense, in any sense, that you feel you know appreciate their...?

R: My uncle.

Q: Your uncle.

R: He was like, I told you, helped me financially, I mean emotionally he was like a father for me, not for me, for me and for all my siblings, my brothers and sisters, ah, **960** he was like the guy or the person when you need help or you are in help. So my uncle was very influential for me, and he was very helpful emotionally, financially, ah, not only for me, for me and other, my other family members, and really this is a good reason, because or this is a good question, because even now for example, I'm doing my master's, I'm almost done with my master's, I was helped by that orphanage, **965** by those who are in charge, or were in charge, in charge of that orphanage to come to the United States, so I got that scholarship maybe to finish my master's here in the United States, so it's like I told you, SOS Kinderdorf International, and it's like an international or world organization working in the field of helping children, needy children, orphanage children, and poor children all over the world, and they have a lot **970** of villages, children villages all over the world, they have about I think four-thousand children villages.

Q: Wow.

R: And each village like about eight, eight houses, about seventy or sixty people, or sixty kids. So, of course, that organization was very, very helpful for me, not only for

975 me, even they sent other people, some of my friends, they send them even to the United Kingdom, they're doing their Ph.D.s there, master's degrees there, so they sent maybe to Canada, to the United States here, maybe they have five hundred ah students, SOS students, they are all sponsored by that one organization.

Q: Wow, that's really good. What social pressure have you experienced as an 980 adult?

R: Social pressure.

Q: Pressure.

R: The only social pressure, I mean, even when I was doing, even as an adult, I was in that still, in that orphanage or that youth house, I told you that institution affiliated **985** with that organization. So as an adult, like, maybe, I won't say repression, like somebody ah represses you, I mean, you can't do, you can't be yourself, like you want to, maybe okay at 11 you have to come back home, 11 pm, but what if you want to stay outside, for example until 1 or 2, so that like it was a social pressure on me, because I was not allowed to do everything I wanted, maybe to go, to go partying, to **990** go swimming, to the swimming pool every time I wanted. It's a, I would say it's social, because there were people who, okay who used to practice this thing on me, okay, "don't", so the word "no" was always there, don't, don't do this, don't go to the swimming pool tomorrow, so it was like, I think it's social pressure. I don't know if this is what you mean by social pressure.

995 Q: Did they have a restriction that you have to be at house let's say at 11 pm still uh applied to you even when you become like 19, 20, 21.

R: No, no, no this is like a really good question.

Q: Until when did you stay did you stay at the orphanage?

R: It's a very good question, because when I was in the, I mean, I stayed in that **1000** orphanage maybe for fourteen years, or thirteen, I think thirteen years, when I was four to when I was six-, sixteen, so it's maybe twelve years, for twelve years, eh, when I was, I stayed in that orphanage from age four to age I think twelve, so it's eight, eight, eight years. Then I moved out to that youth house, to that other institution.

1005 Q: But it's still under that parentage of that first orphanage.

R: But you're youth, only for young people.

Q: Yea, right, yea.

R: So I went there, I stayed there for maybe three years.

Q: Four years?

1010 R: Three or four years. So it's like twelve years total.

Q: Ah huh, ah huh.

R: When I was in that village, or in that orphanage, as a child, maybe 10, you have, 10 you have to be in bed, sleeping, 10, but you come back 7 pm if you're outside, not 10, okay you come back home, you're not allowed of course.

1015 Q: Right.

R: When I was in that village, that youth house, maybe 11, 10:30, 11, you can come back, but maybe sleeping, you can stay up til 1, or 1:30, 12, right.

Q: But you stayed.

R: After I mo--, after I left the youth house.

1020 Q: When did you left the youth house?

R: I don't rem--, when I was I think in the 11th grade, so I was maybe sixteen.

Q: You left the youth house when you were sixteen?

R: Right.

Q: Where did you live after that?

1025 R: My brothers and sisters, with my brothers and sisters, with my brothers of course. My family house.

Q: So you went back to your biological family?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: And you stayed there with them?

1030 R: I stayed there with them.

Q: And you continued your high school?

R: I continued my high school, on my own, I finished my B.A., my undergrad on my own.

Q: So you stayed with your brothers until you got your bachelor's degree?

1035 R: Hmm hmm.

Q: I see. And then after that when you got your Ph.D., did you move...?

R: When I got my B.A.

Q: Oh I'm sorry.

R: When I got my B.A., I did what we call, we have back home, what we call **1040** diploma, so I finished a diploma in linguistics.

Q: Ah huh.

R: And then I, we had, I mean I had to do my military service, which lasted for two years. Even during my military service, it was like...

Q: But when you move, when exactly did you move from your brothers, did you **1045 move from your brothers to your independent house? Or you stayed there until you came to America?**

R: No, no. I stayed with them, I lived with them until I came to the United States.

Q: I see.

R: We have what we call a family house, for everybody, my sister, you know, I told **1050** you there is a sister, who never got married.

Q: Ah huh.

R: Who stayed single, my middle sister, my brother, my older brother, he's married and has kids, he's living there, and my middle brother, he's not married and he's living there, so all of us.

1055 Q: All of you live in that house?

R: That's a very big house.

Q: Yea. In your old farm that you had been born in?

R: Right, you can say this.

Q: Ah, okay, when you finish your degree, the B.A., where did you work?

1060 R: Even when I was...

Q: To live off of, what did you do?

R: First I think, I would say something about high school, because I did two years of high school on my own, I used to work in construction, in fact I was a construction worker, all my brothers, like my two brothers and I, we are construction workers. So,

1065 this is what I used to do.

Q: So you were studying at your university, and at the same time you were...?

R: The first two years of my university and the last two years of my high school. So 11th grade, 12th grade, freshman year and sophomore year, second year, but when I was in third year and the fourth year, there was like what we call a translation center

1070 back home, what we call, I think it's called Al-Anwar, establishment for university services, I used to work in translation, like, I translated what other friends, other translators, or maybe two or three novels for the English department, we used to proof read all the lectures given by the teachers in the university.

Q: And this is in which year? In your second year?

1075 R: The third year, and the fourth year and afterwards, so maybe for a year or two, when I was doing my diploma in linguistics.

Q: So you worked in construction in your 11th and 12th years in the high school and your fresh, ah fresh--...

R: Freshman year.

1080 Q: ...freshman year, and sophomore...

R: Sophomore year, right.

Q: After that you said you started to work in translation.

R: Right. Right in my field.

Q: You left, left, left that construction?

1085 R: Hmm hmm.

Q: Alright, when you finish your degree, oh let me ask what, what was your, when you go back to your, to your biological family, where there any difference, did you find any different feelings when you go back to your biological family?

R: Of course.

1090 Q: From the orphanage?

R: By the way, my original family, I didn't get along a lot with my brothers, especially.

My sisters, we are like very, very good terms.

Q: Uh huh.

R: I visit them, although they live maybe uh 45 or 50 minutes away from where I live.

1095 I used to visit them, I visit them all the time, maybe every week, I go there for

maybe a day or two, on the weekend, I used to go there. My family, my brothers, I did not get along with them a lot.

Q: I'm sorry, you mean your first, uh the one the people that you stayed with them one day or two day?

1100 R: My sisters.

Q: Your sisters? Biological?

R: Right, my married sisters.

Q: Yea, okay.

R: My married sisters, right.

1105 Q: How many are they?

R: Two. They are two.

Q: So you have your married sisters two? And your old sister didn't get married?

R: No, no, no, my middle, my middle sister did not get married, yet.

1110 Q: So you have three sisters?

R: We are three.

Q: Two married and one not married.

R: We are three brothers including me, my older brother, my oldest brother is married and has three kids, I think now.

1115 Q: So you are like three siblings, three females and three males?

R: Right, and I'm the youngest.

Q: Among all of them?

R: Amongst all of them, right.

**Q: Okay, so I'm sorry, could you please continue, you said that, you did not get
1120 along with your brothers?**

R: Right, we have like some let's say problems to do with the, what we call, the inheritance.

Q: Mmm hmm.

R: I think it's like, most of the time, it was, it has to do with financial issues.

1125 Q: Mmm hmm.

R: Um, this is especially after I finished my B.A. and after I did my military service. So it was I think in the last maybe in the two years before I came here to the United States, it was maybe 2004 to 2006. Because I finished my military service in 2004, so it was only for two years when I was working as a teacher, I mean as a high school **1130** teacher, English teacher for the Ministry of Education in Syria.

Q: So you mean you had like problems with your ah...

R: Right.

Q: ...brothers?

R: Right, we fight all the time. Right.

1135 Q: About the, you know, the inh-, inh-.

R: Right, for example they would do things all the time without telling me, they would like sell a piece of land, like a farm, without even telling me, without even consulting me. So, this is what.

Q: Which is in our Arabic conditionals, traditions, and cultures is not accepted.

1140 R: Right. Right, I mean, you have to at least consult me to say things to me. Not only me, you even have to consult your sisters, if you want to do anything like this.

Q: Okay, and uh, but you got your, you got your money, your share of the money.

1145 R: No, unfortunately, I did not.

Q: Ah.

R: It's okay, really, I forgive them. I forgive them of course, forgive, forgiving is very important. I forgive them for everything they did, and hopefully, I'll try my best to help them, provide them.

1150 Q: Even though...?

R: Even though they were mean to me, but they're still my, what we call, my family. My original family.

Q: Yea.

R: So after I finished my B.A., uh, and I did the diploma, I went to the military **1155** service for two years.

Q: Four?

R: For two years.

Q: For two years?

R: Or 2002 to 2004.

1160 Q: What did you do in?

R: The military service, the first sixth months are only training, like combat training, maybe, just training about different weapons or whatever, and then the next, because it's two years, the next year and a half, I used to teach English to, I mean, at a military academy, to cadets. So, I used to teach English, very basic English, and at the same

1165 time, I used to teach Arabic, advanced Arabic syntax, Arabic grammar, to the, to the cadets, and when I finished this, I mean, during, when I was in the army, I applied for like a high school teacher, and there was like a contest for selecting high school teachers, so I went to that contest, and I came first in that contest.

Q: Like personal examinations?

1170 R: Right, you have an examination, and everything, and an interview and everything.

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: And the result was very, very good. I came first.

Q: How did you feel when you got the job?

1175 R: Oh my God, it was like, it was like very important to me. So, the moment, or the day I finished my military service, I went to the Ministry of Education and I was a high school teacher. Right away. So the next day.

Q: Wow. That's.

R: I was teaching. The next day I was teaching, and I taught maybe for two years as a **1180** high school teacher. I taught English of course, mainly English grammar and English literature, of course. Uh.

Q: Okay, let me ask about the military service, what was this experience like?

R: I think it's, I won't say terrible, because in the military for example, the salary you get is not enough, like I used to teach a hundred hours every month, or maybe **120** **1185** hours every month, and I used to get paid like \$15 a month. Of course, like your food, your, the place you sleep is all free, you don't pay anything, but still it's nothing. So we have like a saying back home, if you want to go to the army to do your military service, you have to forget about three, four or five years, because you two years to prepare for the military service, and in the military service you are not doing **1190** anything productive, and after the military service you have one or two years to be, you know, to start over.

Q: Yea. To live like a civilian. To go back to civilian life.

R: Right, I mean, really, it's like, I don't mean it's physical like it's physically tiring.

Q: No, no, even emotionally.

1195 R: Even emotionally, I mean, even mentally, because it's very hard, I mean the army is a very harsh life, I think, it's a very difficult life to live.

Q: Do you think it affects your personality and make its more...?

R: Maybe only...

Q: ...more strong? Or, being you know live like militarian person? Or.

1200 R: Maybe only in the army, you feel like.

Q: Just when you were in...

R: Right, in the army. In the army, right. Some people are very good army people, for example, military people. For me, I can't. I mean, I was a lieutenant in the army, I didn't feel like I can be mean, let's say to other soldiers, okay. Do we, when you **1205** know we take the role, everybody has to be there. I was very, very flexible. Other people they would, other lieutenants, or other friends of mine, they would be very mean to the...

Q: Soldiers.

R: ...soldiers. Right. Or what we call the other recruits.

1210 **Q: Uh, so when you work as a teacher, EFL teacher, did you enjoy your, your job?**

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: Is there a difference between, did you feel a difference between your military service as a lieutenant and between your life as an EFL teacher?

1215 R: Hmm hmm. The similarity is that in both contexts, in the military context and the civilian context, I was a teacher. But in the army, or in the military context, I used to teach about, I used to teach 150 people at the same time.

Q: Wow.

R: Or even 200 people, a very big long hall. Some people used to sleep, and they are **1220** all in their dirty clothes, you know.

Q: Their work clothes.

R: They're sweating, they're maybe tired, so it's the smell, I mean the atmosphere was really really bad, not healthy at all, this is one thing. And, in the army, for example, sorry, I mean in the civilian context, like maybe you have thirty, forty **1225** people, most of them, they're there to learn, because they want to learn unlike those people in the army, because most of them they don't care about learning English, they just want to pass to the next year, to the third year, and then to become lieutenants in the army.

Q: Which does not have anything to do with English after that?

1230 R: Right, because, I think.

Q: You feel like they are not interested in English?

R: They are not interested at all. Even money-wise, I used to get \$1500, I mean, \$15 to teach a month, to teach 120 hours a month, but when I was in the civilian context, or working for the Ministry of Education, I used to teach maybe 70 hours a month, **1235** and I used to get paid, maybe much much more, maybe I would say 15 times more than what I used to get paid in the army.

Q: Okay, how much did you get when you work in the construction and when you work in the military service, and when you work in the?

R: In the construction it was very good by the way, it was I used to make maybe like **1240** ten bucks every we--, every day, day, which is still a good thing. Like for a Syrian, Syrian individual.

Q: Keeping in mind that you are working in the Syrian, in Syria.

R: Syria. Right. Like ten bucks a day, it's too much. It's a good income, it's good money.

1245 Q: How bout in the military? How much did they pay you each week?

R: About fifteen to twenty dollars a month.

Q: Wow, so...

R: But you get, like I told you, for example, your food is free, your board is free, like you don't need to pay for an apartment, or pay for your food, everything is available, I

1250 don't mean like best food, but it's food.

Q: Ah, and as an EFL teacher?

R: As an EFL teacher, I used to make maybe \$200 a month, but I used to do a lot of private tutoring, I used to work also in private institutes to teach English.

Q: No, no, no, I mean in your formal job, as an EFL teacher.

1255 R: As an EFL...

Q: From the Ministry of Education?

R: I used to make maybe \$200 a month.

Q: This is from the Ministry of Education?

R: Which is nothing, very bad.

1260 Q: Yea. And, uh, you also said you made like private tutoring for students?

R: Private tutor, I used to.

Q: Private tutoring, how much was that?

R: Private tutoring, I mean you get this on an hourly basis, like every hour or every tutoring session, so I used to get every tutoring session about ten bucks, or ten dollars,

1265 every tutoring session.

Q: By tutoring session you mean an hour?

R: I mean an hour and a half, or two hours.

Q: Ah, so.

R: I mean, like one hour right. A session, a tutoring session is close maybe to two **1270** hours, which I...

Q: From one hour up to two hours?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: And you got ten bucks for it?

R: Right, ten bucks for that. Even in the private institutes, I used to teach in, I used to **1275** get the same thing, like an hour or a session, let's say for an hour and a half, I used to get ten to fifteen bucks.

Q: I see. So you were working as an EFL teacher for the Ministry of Education?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: You were tutoring privately students?

1280 R: Hmm hmm.

Q: And you were working at a private institution?

R: Hmm hmm. Private institutes.

Q: So you were doing three jobs?

R: Hmm hmm.

1285 Q: Well, was it hard?

R: Of course, but you have to make your living, it's really...

Q: Did you feel when you did three jobs, did you feel that these three jobs', you know, income made you, ah, live in, you know, the style that you did like want to live?

1290 R: Hmm hmm. Right, I mean, I believe this.

Q: They are, in other words, are they enough for you? The money that you got out of three jobs?

R: For me as a person, I think I mean, for one person...

Q: Is it enough or more than enough?

1295 R: No, no, I think it's a little bit more than enough.

Q: A little bit.

R: A little bit more than enough. It's not like very, very a lot, very, very more than enough, no it's like a little bit more than enough. I used to make maybe \$500, all these three jobs, about \$500 a month.

1300 Q: How about the job, the EFL job? How do Syrian people look at the EFL teacher?

R: People like, first, I can tell you about the status...

Q: I mean is it attractive, an attractive job?

R: I think so, right, because even people like, for example some people they were,

1305 they are engineers, civilian engineers, they studied let's say in the United Kingdom, or they studied in like Scotland, when they get back, they teach at private institutes.

Q: And they also work as an engineer?

R: They work, you know, you know, so private tutoring or to work as a teacher at a

1310 private institute, you don't need to have a degree in English, or to have your undergrad in English or English literature.

Q: Just have, if you have English...?

R: Depending on your proficiency in English, whether you're proficient or not. And unfortunately proficiency is taken for, like only in the way you pronounce words or in

1315 pronunciation.

Q: So, but, I think, is EFL teacher job...

R: Right.

Q: ...a respectable, respectable job...

R: Right, respectable job.

1320 Q: ...in the society?

R: Right, it's a very respectable job in the society, because teachers, by the way, teachers in general.

Q: Uh huh.

R: They are very respectable. They used to be very, very respectable, but I think in the

1325 last seven or, in the last maybe six or seven years, people like they started looking down on teachers, because they are not making enough, they're resorting to other, they're resorting to other means of getting more and more money, like by, so people they would say, people would say, the teachers now they don't teach at school so that they get private tutoring.

1330 Q: They make more money?

R: They make more money. So people like teaching...

Q: So the honesty of teachers or the values...

R: ...of teaching has become like a way of cheating, way of manipulating, or way of...

1335 Q: Okay, how did you, how did, what did, how did you feel when you were a lieutenant and you go with your formal suit in the street?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: Do you think that people at Syria look more respectable to lieutenant in the military or EFL teachers?

1340 R: Ermmm, I think teachers. I think teachers.

Q: Really?

R: Hmm hmm. Really teachers are very important, and lieutenants in the army, I told you, it depends on where that lieutenant works.

Q: Okay, alright. Okay. Thank you.

Audio 7-9:

1345 Q: Ahh, how do you use your leisure time?

R: You mean my free time?

Q: Yea.

R: Nowadays.

Q: Ahha.

1350 R: Most of the time since I am a master's student, it is like studying. I like the Internet, so I am most of the time browsing the Internet looking maybe for news maybe reading, reading via the Internet and of course reading books. Most of my time is occupied by studying.

Q: Okay. Is a sense of community important to you? Why? And how?

1355 R: Of course, here in Indiana for example we have what they call MSA (Muslim student Association) and the Muslim student community in Indiana for example being a

Muslim myself I hang out or I most of the time have contact with all the Muslims here, all the Arabs here.

Q: So okay why?

1360 R: Why? Maybe because I feel home because for example now I feel homesick, away from my, my home so I think here so when I meet those people from like Arab countries, Arabic speaking countries or other Muslim countries I feel home and I think this is the feeling you feel amongst those people.

Q: And how you made this connection with this community members?

1365 R: We sometimes go praying in the mosque we sometimes have some gatherings here in the HUB Hadley Union Building maybe every two or three weeks because we have like dinner meetings.

Q: Okay what is your first memory of attending school? And...

R: My first memory school you mean graduate school or when I was in the first grade.

1370 Q: Yea when you first started school, the thing that comes to your mind right away?

[Pause]

Q: Nothing actually serious?

R: Of course like any other kid I wanted to go to school because it's a different stage

1375 in your life and it is the first time in your life to be away from your home your house.

Q: Did you enjoy school in the beginning?

R: Of course, in the beginning I enjoyed school and I still enjoy school but when I first went to school in the first grade I was like very very happy and I don't know why **1380** I still actually enjoy school that's why am doing my masters now.

Q: Okay did you have a favorite teacher in elementary or adult or high school?

R: I remember this thing in the intermediate school in the seventh grade there is like this English teacher I used to hate English and in the seventh grade I was studying French because there you have to choose or it is either you study French or English **1385** and that's why I was studying French but I didn't I like it so in the eighth grade I was I was studying English, and there is this teacher who made everything easy in the way he used to teach like he's always fun and, all the time and that's why he made me like English really like from the eighth grade or he also taught me in the ninth grade and at that time I really liked English and I wanted to pursue like studying English.

1390 Q: Do you remember the teaching methodologies that he was following with you or he was doing in the class?

R: It was like maybe 18 years ago all maybe 17 years ago and at that time we didn't have a lot of what we call audiovisual materials, he to help, he used to get like a cassette player or a CD player at that time and he used to like make us listen to music **1395** with some posters or some papers with like colors so it was really fun the way he used to do it, it was all fun, and he used to have quizzes all the time so that all students had to study so like every other week we used to have a quiz, and sometimes we used to have like pop quizzes all of a sudden and if you get like 23 out of 25 because 25 was like the whole grade he used to give you a present so he would choose **1400** to make motivation and make us more motivated to learn and study English.

Q: But you don't. Connecting these teaching activities or the teaching approach that the teacher, you know, was following in teaching you English and connecting this with your knowledge now about teaching English as a foreign language or as a second-language, can you characterize or categorize this or the 1405 way that he taught you English with one of the models or the approaches that we've learned?

R: the main methodology used back home at that time and I think it's still used what we call the Grammar translation method so when you go to the class there is like a passage, a literary passage or maybe a scientific passage depends on your school if it **1410** is scientific or literary, then you have some translation of the passage, some questions about the passage, and all the answers are of course in the passage and then you have some composition to write, some derivatives like for example they give you a list of nouns and you have to give a list of adjectives or verbs so you have to derive the words and give opposites of course like they give you a list of words and you have **1415** to give the opposites to these words.

Q: Can we say that he was following the audio lingual method?

R: Yea the audio lingual more then the grammar translation method because as I told you he used to bring with him a cassette player all the time. We used to listen to songs and try to understand what the songs are about and all that time his main concern was **1420** to make us communicate in English in the class. You know what I mean?

Q: Yea.

Q: So that's how he, the influence that we can say that this teacher had on your personality is....?

R: The way he taught me, the way he taught us English.

1425 Q: And then he made you love English and major in English?

R: even I saw him when I was doing, when I was in the 12th grade, and he taught me like for two months in the 12th grade, and he was very very, I won't say, surprised like he said "Okay you are very good at English and I hope you get a masters degree in English and so and so. So even from that time he knew okay that I would be able to **1430** go for my graduate studies.

Q: So what are your best memories of school?

R: I don't know if I told you earlier that we used to have small gangs in the school like these three, four, people they group together and maybe they study together they even defend each other like when there is a problem, they are all the time together. Another **1435** thing is that I used to have what we call, now I know this, what we call "community of practice". We used to have seven or eight teachers I mean English teachers, even math teachers and Arabic teachers, even physics teachers, we were maybe seven or eight and we used to meet at someone's house like for example it is at my house and next week it is at my, the Arabic teacher's house and so on, and we **1440** used to meet and talk about like everything, school related things, maybe politics. We had a dinner at that time of course like we discuss everything, everything that goes to our mind like we discuss the news and so on and so forth. I think this is, this was very good for me like to develop myself both as a teacher because I taught like for three, four years and as a person. So through this I think I developed myself **1445** both professionally and personally.

Q: So you mean these memories of school was in the university level or ...?

R: After the university level even when I was doing even my diploma, I told you I had a diploma in linguistics.

Q: But it was started in the university level?

1450 R: Right it started in the university level because at the university level all the students were English major and that's why we are like six, seven teachers and we used to discuss everything.

Q: Did you find the teaching methodology for English language as a foreign language in Syria different from the teaching methodology when you were 1455 intermediate or in the middle school?

(The interviewee's cell phone rings)

R: Of course the way I was taught like when I was doing my high school, when I was in the high school and at the University level are very, very different from each other because of many reasons. The most important reason is that at the University level the **1460** number of students was very, very big like we used to have almost 400 students in one big auditorium, whereas for example when I was the 12th to grade we used to be maybe thirty or 25 students in the classroom. I think it's different because at the University level like my major was English and English literature so it was more specialized than the English taught at the high school level. The English taught at the **1465** high school level was, I believe it was very general like we used to take everything grammar, poetry, literature all kinds of literary genres, grammar. So it was very, very general, but when I was in the University level it was more specialized or more particularized. Though I used to study English and English literature, we still have grammar courses and literary courses, but more or the emphasis was more on the **1470**

collaborative work there. We used to have like sometimes group discussions not all the time, especially we used to have this when we have seminars. In a seminar, we used to have like twenty, twenty five or thirty people so we used to have group discussions, you could talk or say whatever you want like okay when we are discussing a short story you can discuss or say or speak up your mind about how you **1475** think or what you think the story or the short story or the poem is about, whereas in the high school level I think it was more, the teacher was more authoritarian, he can't be negotiated, he or she can't be negotiated, what they tell you, you have study and that's it.

Q: Okay, you learnt English when you were undergrad as your major. Did you **1480 make any connections with native speakers at that time or..?**

R: Unfortunately, I didn't have any contact with native speakers like from English-speaking countries. There was someone I think from South Africa but there they have English and French as official languages. We used to, or I used to converse with him all the time or something like this, but native speakers like from United Kingdom or **1485** the United States of America I, I don't think so, I didn't have any contact with native speakers. We had like native speakers, I mean native speakers, professors who were native speakers like they used to teach for two or three or four weeks and then they leave.

Q: Visitor professors?

1490 R: Right, right visitor professors especially not in grammar but in poetry and drama like plays Hamlet, Shakespeare mainly. We used to have like I think most of that time they were from United Kingdom; I didn't have the chance to be taught by United States professors.

Q: Did you feel that there was like a difference between the Arabic culture and 1495 English, I mean Arabic literature and English literature in terms of poetry, drama?

R: Of course there's a difference, a lot of difference. In terms of drama, I think we don't have a lot of drama as they do in the English literature. In Arabic literature, we don't have a lot of drama and plays. We have a lot of poetry, and poetry we have. I **1500** think like we have, or I myself used to make this connection between, or to connect between the two kinds of poetries: the Arabic poetry and the English poetry in terms of rhymes and how they are rhymed together or whatever. I think they were similar in essence but they are two different things because as you know the Arabic poetry has mainly to do with the environment the poet or the poetess lives in, **1505** whereas I think in the English literature it was more general. I have this example. In the Arabic literature, the Arabic poetry the poet first starts to talk about his, maybe his horse, talk about his house or household, the environment, the immediate environment he lives in and then he would talk about war for example because at that time the Arabic tribes were all that time in war.

1510 Q: You mean 15 years ago?

R: No this is the poetry, like the classical Arabic poetry, whereas in Shakespeare he would talk about love, or another English poet would talk about more and more different things.

Q: Okay do you have, or how many languages, foreign languages do you, do you 1515 speak?

R: My native language is Arabic, and I speak English of course as a second language and I have like I think a good or very good commands of German because I studied German for the three or four years.

Q: Where did you study German?

1520 R: At the university level when I was doing my B.A. in English and English literature, I had to take another foreign language together with English, so I had the choice to choose between, I think there was Russian, Spanish, and German and French, and nowadays they have other languages like Chinese and Japanese. So I, I think I chose German because we had something like the history of the English **1525** language and how the English language is very close to the German language, and that English is originally a Germanic language. So I wanted like to see how these two languages are similar and different in terms of grammar, and this even helped me in my English courses, especially in the courses that had to do with the history of the English language.

1530 Q: But what do you enjoy more, English or German?

R: Of course English because I am all the time in contact with it. For example, here for two years I have been all the time in contact with English-speaking people like people from here, people from the United Kingdom or even people from Saudi Arabia or Kuwait or Jordan, we used to here for example, we are used to communicating in **1535** English all the time.

Q: Do you have like any special experiences in learning these languages?

R: When I was doing my underground, I used to read a lot really, I think more than with I do now. I used to read a lot especially the newspaper at that time. In Syria, we have

like an English newspaper, and it's called Syria Times, it's all in English. So I **1540** used to read a lot that newspaper, and whatever I don't know I check it in the dictionary all the time. There is something that I used to do all the time, even my friends they used to make fun of me. For example, they used to, or whenever they come to visit me I am lying on my bed and browsing the dictionary itself, looking into the dictionary page by page, it is just like reading and all the words get stuck in my **1545** mind right away.

Q: Ha ha ha the words stuck in your mind or what?

R: Right. But the words, the vocabulary in the dictionary they get stuck in my mind because like when I read this word I try to visualize this word in my mind like these are the letters and how it is written, and when I need a word I don't read the word **1550** without any context so I read the word and a sentence to use the word and the other derivatives of the word like if we have any word like "able" I used to read all the other words "enable", "ability" "disability" "abled" disabled", "the disabled" . So I used to like to make connections between words and I used to concentrate on derivatives as well. And I think this is why they used to call me all the time "the **1555** walking dictionary" because I used to know all the, I mean a lot of words and I still do, I know a lot of words.

Q: but when you get the words, you said you would put them in context like in sentences, do you come up with your sentences yourself or you use the examples in the?

1560 R: I use the examples in the dictionary, then I try to make up my own sentences based on the sentences in the dictionary.

Q: what are the good and bad things which happened to you during your language learning process?

R: good or bad things?

1565 Q: Ummm.

R: Ah regarding the bad or the good things that I have encountered in my learning English, I think there was a very big and wide gap between what I have learned back home when I was doing my undergrad and when I was doing a graduate degree, a diploma in linguistics on the one hand and the, and my actual being here in the United

1570 States. For example, back home when I used to study English, unfortunately it was out of context and even if you study how language is used or you study grammar, how sentences are structured and how sentences are made, I didn't have any chance, unfortunately you don't have any chance to communicate in English because all the other people there are like Arabic speakers. So when I came here it was very difficult

1575 for me. Even though I know the words, I know what to use, I won't, I used to feel afraid to speak up or to say things, so I maybe used to be hesitant all the time. I think now it's like things got like much much better and I feel more confident, I don't feel of course afraid at all communicating in English. I think this is one of the bad things

because there was no way for me back home to communicate and to use the **1580** language. The good thing about learning English is that learning English for me was like a window to talk and to communicate with other people from other cultures who speak the same language, I mean English, especially here in the United States. Back home, I didn't have any other cultures, and the only nationality was Syrian and people speak Arabic. Here you have different people from different cultures. You **1585** have

Chinese speakers, speakers of English, you have Japanese speakers of English, you have Arabic speakers of English, you have Indian speakers of English, and they are all different from different cultures. So I think this helped me as a speaker of English to not only to communicate but also to benefit from other people's cultures, and we have I think a saying in Arabic that every language you know makes **1590** you a different person like if you speak English only you are one person, if you speak English and Arabic, you are two persons at the same time. So language is by itself like, or it defines your identity.

Q: where you worried about changing your identity when you learn English as a second language? In other words, did you feel that if you learn English, this **1595 might change your Arabic identity and culture?**

R: I don't think so. There are some people who believe this. Personally, I don't believe this. I used to believe that learning a language would open doors for you that might have been closed if you don't know these, if you don't know these languages. So I don't think so. There are many people who do believe what you said like okay "why **1600** do I need to learn English, English is the language of, let's say, our enemy" maybe because of the US presence in Iraq or other Muslim countries. So some people used to believe this, and even when I was teaching some people used to not attack but would say "why do you do this? This is the language of our enemy" so they would forget all other, the good aspects of learning a language and they would concentrate **1605** on the... So I think they believe and they are very, very narrow-minded to their decisions or in their talking about this.

Q: Uh, so do you encourage people to learn second language?

R: Of course, I encourage them to learn any second language, not just English, any other language besides their native language.

1610 Q: Why?

R: I told you why, because knowing a language is like would open more and more doors for you as a person and would make you more and more acquainted with other people's cultures, traditions, and customs, so learning, I think learning the language would make you aware of who you are in the context of the whole world, as it were.

1615 Q: Okay, you said that after your graduation, and got your B.A., you taught English?

R: Hmm hmm. I taught English in the army, like, for two years when I had to do my military service, and then I taught English after I did my military service, I taught English at the high school level for about...

1620 Q: Did you feel any difference in your personality as a student when you were sitting on the student's seat in compared to be a teacher?

R: I think there is a lot of difference, but I personally, I strongly believe that teaching is not only the knowledge you have as a teacher, so I believe that teaching is knowledge, as well as art, because it's not, it's not enough what you know, as far as **1625** the target language is concerned, but what is more important is how you make your students' learn a language, so it's the "what" question is important, but what is more important is the "how". So, when I, okay, I used to know, I used to believe that I knew a lot of things, I used to believe that teaching is okay easy, because I know a lot of things for example, and okay, but I forgot this important aspect of teaching a **1630** language of

how you teach. That's why some people or some researchers, they would say that teachers are artists at the same time.

Q: Ah, so did you apply your feelings about teaching English in your classroom as a teacher with your students?

R: Feelings?

1635 Q: Yea, I mean, eh, how this changed you from your old teachers who taught you English in terms of teaching methodology? Did you use any other methodologies different from what you had been taught through?

R: I think there is a lot of research that says that, um, people use, or people teach, or teachers teach the way they were taught. I personally, I do this, either consciously or

1640 unconsciously. I teach, um, I teach let's say um the way good teachers taught me in the eighth grade or the ninth grade. Uh, I used to like employ or I used to engage all my students in the classroom activities, although it was very difficult for me to do this, I used to do it, ah.

Q: So you were following the collaborative learning approach?

1645 R: Of course.

Q: To some extent.

R: Of course you can't fully employ this, this ah approach, because of many, many reasons. Because of the curriculum, curriculum that made or designed by the Ministry

of Education, so there are things that you have to do, and in the classroom, **1650** you're not all the time to do what you want.

Q: Were you students motivated to apply the collaborative learning and cooperate with each other?

R: First, it was very difficult for the, it was very, very difficult for them, and of course, I tried to make easy for them by like okay having if like we have pair work, or **1655** what we call peer, peer review or peer response groups, like two-three people or two-three students comment or give each other feedback. So I used to do this with another student, so it was first difficult, because I think it's a cultural thing, because in the Arabic culture students, they don't believe, okay to be corrected by other students.

They would think, because the teacher is there, has always been, described as the **1660** authority in the classroom, and by authority, I don't mean the only dominant authority in the classroom, but I mean, authority in terms of knowledge. So teachers are supposed to know everything, and sometimes students would ask you questions, very, very like, I won't say difficult questions, very dictionary questions, okay what does that word mean? So, they think that the teacher has to know like all the words in **1665** the dictionary, to know everything, and which is not true.

Q: So when students ask the teacher about specific words, he does know it, do you think that would change the students' opinion about this specific teacher?

R: Unfortunately, I think it does. It does change uh how they feel about this teacher. Personally, I didn't care about this. So, if they asked me something, and I wasn't sure, **1670** I would tell them, okay, this is what that words means, ahh, okay but I want to check this when I go home, and tomorrow I'll tell you what it means. So, some teachers, no, they, I think it's up to the teacher, himself or herself, to believe like, some teachers would give students wrong things, or incorrect things, thinking that okay, they

would give their students the wrong, ah, the right, if they would tell their **1675** students that they don't know, or they would say, okay, I have to look it up in the dictionary, they would look down at the teacher or they would even underestimate the teacher.

Q: Okay, you said to me that ah, ah, okay, ah, when you finish, before you come to the United States, were you, were you still working as a teacher at that time?

1680 R: Hmm hmm.

Q: How did you get the scholarship to come to the United States?

R: The scholarship is like, I told you I was raised and brought up in that orphanage, that orphanage was funded and financed by, by the German and Austrian governments...

1685 Q: Ah huh.

R: And it's like a worldwide government, it's called SOS Kinderdorf International, and um, uh, I got that scholarship, because of many reasons. The most important, or two of the most important reasons are the first thing is that, because I was one of the peo--, one of the orphans there, who finished their undergrad, I mean, who were very **1690** motivated to learn, or study or pursue their studies, uh, another thing is that it was kind of like a humanitarian aid, as a student, as a person, or as a child in that village, or in that orphanage.

Q: Alright.

R: Another good thing I believe is that my GPA, I mean what you call the average **1695** there, it allowed me for example, when the committee in that organization, looked at my let's say credentials, my, hmm, sorry, my credentials, my undergrad average, or my, my let's say my education history, even my job history, I've been

teaching five years, in the army, and in the civilian life, ah, my B.A., the diploma I got there, so they wanted to like help me, so they were convinced, so they met me, I think **1700** the president of that organization, he's from Austria, and he met me for like five minutes, and then he said, it's okay, two, three days we'll send you the financial guarantee, you can apply for the visa and so on and so forth.

Q: Of course, sorry for the interruption, how did you know about the scholarship that the orphanage provided? First time, how did you know about 1705 this?

R: Ah, I had a friend there, he's uh, what you call a civil engineer, and he was, they sent him, I think to Cambridge University in the United Kingdom, and he, now he's almost done with his Ph.D. I think it has to do with road construction. So, he told me this, we used to have lots of emailing together, we used to a lot of emailing, he used to **1710** email me all the time, I used to email him back all the time. So he told me, why don't you just apply, or just tell them that you want to do this, and you won't lose anything, just try this, try your chance, so I applied, I told them there, I told the Syrian Association of Children's Villages, and they told me they don't have any problem with this, but they have to check, and they told me to apply for universities in the **1715** United States, because I think they said it's cheaper here in the United States than other countries, in terms of living expenses, tuition fees, and that's why I applied for three universities here in the United States. I applied for Indiana University of Pennsylvania...

Q: Excuse me. This was before you get approved for the scholarship?

1720 R: Right. Right. Right. I just, they, I just told the Syrian officials there, I mean, responsible for this, uh, back home, and they told me, okay, just apply now and we will

see. Usually wherever you get admitted, they would provide for you in terms of tuition and everything.

Q: From the Syrian government? Or from the?

1725 R: Orphanage. From what we call the German and Austrian governments, because the orphanage in Syria is funded fully or 100% by the German and Austrian governments, so I applied for the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, San Francisco State University, and there's another school in California, Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS), and I was approved or admitted to these three **1730** universities, and then when I got everything, I, I went there and I told them, okay these are my I-20s, and I've been approved and admitted there, and then they contacted the SOS people, then, then there was a kind of shock for me, because they told me the SOS, or this organization, supports or provides for you either tuition or living expenses, so it was kind of like a shock for me. I think two years later, a year **1735** and a half later, to be more precise, they contacted me, they said, okay, the president of this organization, ah, is going to visit Syria, and they, I think it was on May 10th...

Q: That the president?

R: The president of SOS Kinderdorf International organization, and he was very **1740** convinced by this, so he saw all the my, my resume, he saw all of my credentials, the I-, the admission papers that I had, from the three universities, and he told me, okay, everything's okay, this is a very rare case, he told me this a very rare case, usually we provide only tuition or living expenses, but in your case, we'll do it like for a master's degree, full coverage for everything, tuition, living and everything.

1745 Q: Okay, so... the next step was to get the visa, right?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: How did you get the visa actually to come to the United States?

R: First you have to have an I-20, an admission paper from the university, then you have to have financial guarantee, and I think you have to have a TOEFL score, you

1750 have to take the TOEFL score, before you apply for your visa. It was not that bad for me, although like Syria is characterized like as a bad or evil country, it took me like a week to get my visa and other people, like, oh my, it would like take them four, three or four months. So first, I went there to the U.S. Embassy there in Damascus, I applied for interview, and then three days later, I went there for the **1755** interview, and the, what you call, the consulate officer there, he told me, personally I believe everything that you said, and I'm ready to like issue a visa for you, but we have to do or undergo, what we call, a security check on you, and the Embassy will call you from two weeks to four weeks, and if they don't call in three weeks, or four weeks, you can contact me again, and three days later, they called me, **1760** and said, okay your visa is ready, just go there and pick it up. So it was very easy process for me, because I had everything ready, my financial guarantee from the organization that sponsored me, my I-20 from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and so on and so forth, and my TOEFL score.

Q: Ah, so you applied for the TOEFL?

1765 R: Of course, before I applied, because part of the application for any university is...

Q: You have to have TOEFL score. How much did you get?

R: 620. Paper work. I mean paper test.

**Q: Okay, when you got your visa, how long does it take for you, from the day
1770 you received your visa until the day you traveled from Syria to America?**

R: Like, a month and a half. Because, I got my visa on like July 11th, 2006, and I was in the United States August 18th, because we had the orientation here at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, I think, August 21st, 2006. So, I came like here three days before like the orientation started, and um, during after I got the visa of course, I **1775** had to get all my stuff, I bought a lot of things of course, I mean everything, and they provided for me, by the scholarship, they provided, they paid for my air ticket, they gave me like pocket money before I came there.

Q: How much did you get?

R: It was like, I think, \$700 dollars. So everything was okay, and during that time, I **1780** used to email uh, my sponsor, my sponsor's representative in the United States, I think she lives in New York, even nowadays, even now, I call her, or email her every now and then, because she's responsible for me here, because she [cough] is the U.S. Student's Coordinator, she sends us like application forms for like the fees and everything, for the money and like everything that we need, and if you have any **1785** emergency, we have to contact her.

Q: Okay, when you first arrived to the United States, how did you feel in the first period? Let's say the first month, let's say the very first day when you got out of the airport?

R: When I arrived at the airport, I won't say afraid, I was afraid, because, I wanted to **1790** say things for example, even at the airport, at the customs...

Q: Which, which airport did you arrive in?

R: Chicago...

Q: O'Hara Chicago?

R: Chicago. So, I was there, I wanted to say things, I wanted to say things to the **1795** customs officer there, I felt that I was like speechless, I couldn't say anything, that's why like, okay, I know things, I know how to say things, but I didn't, maybe I couldn't or I didn't have the courage to say things, so that was I think the, the problem for me at that time. Even that thing lasted for maybe like the next week, or maybe two weeks.

Even after I got to the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Even during **1800** classes, the first three or four weeks, it was very difficult for me, although I had, I told you, my B.A. was in English literature, and I had a diploma in Linguistics, okay, I listened to the professor and I didn't understand anything, the first maybe three or four weeks. Then everything got easier and easier. And I remember an incident, even back home, at the university, everything is taught in English, so the **1805** first three weeks or four weeks back home, I was doing my undergrad, were the most difficult for me. I couldn't understand anything they said, and then everything got better and better and easier and easier for me.

Q: When, when did you become accustomed to your new culture, your new environment? A month or two?

1810 R: You mean to get used to the culture here? Of course, this is what they called, or what they told us at the orientation here, what they called “culture shock”. Right? So it was difficult. So there are things that are forbidden in the Arabic culture or the Muslim culture, and here everything is like, you do whatever you want. So it was not only in the academic level, but in the, in the, I mean, outside the classroom. So in the **1815** classroom, it was difficult for me, because I couldn’t understand anything, or everything, and outside, okay, I would see things, maybe, I did not used to see back home.

Q: So, um, did you feel any big difference between your culture back home and here?

1820 R: Hmm hmm. There’s I think, a lot of difference between the two cultures. I think this culture is, what we call, more secular than the culture we have back home. The Arabic culture, or let’s say the Syrian sub-culture, is very religion-driven, that’s what we call Muslim culture, there are things that you cannot do, not because of culture, not because only of religion, because of the way people think. This is like **1825** how people think, traditions, here, I think it’s more secular, it has nothing to do with religion, back home, you can talk about religion, here, religion is something, ah, not I think, you’re not allowed, I won’t say you’re not allowed, it’s not something you can talk about all the time, unlike politics here for example. Back home, politics is something very like forbidden to talk about, and religion maybe you can’t talk about **1830** it, here it’s the other way around.

Q: Ah, so.

Audio 10:

Q: What has been your most lesson in life outside the class, outside of the classroom?

R: I personally believe that, the or that life is the most influential teacher of all. I have **1835** like this, this incident that happened to me maybe six years ago. In 2000 or 2001, I applied for a scholarship, that organization they told me to apply, so I applied that I was accepted and so on at the universities here in the United states, and they told me and when I went there to tell them okay I was accepted they told me that they would cover only my tuition or my living expenses, and either way it was very **1840** difficult for me to come up with the money for either tuition or living expenses. So I was very very shocked and sad because like I, I worked at that time maybe for three, four months applying for universities, and then it was all in vain. So my uncle, the one I told you about, I think I remember I told you about him last time, he is like very, very influential in my life. He told me don't worry, do not be sad. Everything **1845** happens for a reason, and maybe there's something, this something you like, I mean you like this thing a lot, but it might be maybe bad for you. So you don't need to worry about these things. Just try and hope for the best and prepare for the worst, and everything happens for a reason. And I think four or five months later the terrorist attacks in the World Trade Center in the United States took place. And I think I was **1850** fortunate not to get that scholarship because if I had, let's say, if I had got that scholarship at that time, maybe I would have been in a very bad situation here, maybe I would have been under arrest or under suspicion from everybody, because of these terrorist attacks that took place.

Q: Ahh okay. Let's start talking about love and work. Do you remember your **1855 first date? You don't ...?**

R: I don't believe in dates like as the word means. Personally back home, I didn't, I did not have any dates, or I did not date anyone. Here, when I first came here, for example I had some of my friends, we used to go like partying together, we used to hang out all the time together in class, after the class. So I think it was a new **1860** experience for me.

Q: Okay. Are you married?

R: I am married now, right. I have been married like for, I think April 27th, it will be our first anniversary.

Q: Wow. Great.

1865 R: Maybe in 15 days or in 13 days, it will be our first anniversary.

Q: How did you meet your spouse?

R: We had a class here together. When I first came here in the first semester, there was a course taught by Dr. Jerry Gebhard. This course I think it was ESL/EFL Methodology, teaching methodologies. We used to, we took this class together, and **1870** we fell in love.

Q: Okay, okay. What was it about her that made you fall in love? She's going to be happy I think when she hears you know.

R: She always asks me this question, okay, why do you love me? Or I ask her why do you love me? Actually, I think, because she's very kind, nice, she's very kind-hearted, **1875** she cares a lot about me, and I care a lot about her, and...

Q: Okay, you don't have children do you?

R: No, we don't have any children yet.

Q: Are you planning to have children?

R: I think not now, hopefully in the near future. I mean in the near future, maybe **1880** when I am done with my Ph.D. hopefully, in two, three years.

Q: When you have children, what values or lessons do you try to impart to them?

R: I think our children will be very, very fortunate to be exposed to two cultures.

Q: To different cultures?

1885 R: To different cultures, two different cultures of course, this U.S. culture or my Arabic or my Muslim culture. So they would be very fortunate to be maybe bilingual, to speak two languages, Arabic in addition to English.

Q: Ah, okay, I forgot to ask you a very important question. Since you are a Muslim and from an Arabic country, and your wife is American, how did you do **1890 the marriage ceremonies?**

R: Uh, by the way, we had two ceremonies.

Q: Ah that's so great.

R: So on April 27th, it was a Friday, 2007, we had the Muslim ceremony, and like a week later, it was May 5th, 2007, we had the American ceremony. It was in the yard, **1895** it was in the yard, it's like, what we call a yard wedding, we invited all our friends, our classmates.

Q: Great.

R: It was two, we had two anniversaries, or I have two anniversaries to come, on the 27th, and on May 5th.

1900 Q: At least the Arabic world and the American, ah, ah, the United States of America, are united in your marriage.

R: Right.

Q: Ha ha ha.

R: Love has nothing to do with like okay cultures or what media says, or the...

1905 Q: Right.

R: Right.

Q: What has been the best and worst part of marriage?

R: Thank God, so far everything is good. Everything's like, it's good. I think the best part that you always feel that you are taken care of, and you always feel that there is

1910 someone else whom you have to take care, so it's like mutual respect, mutual understanding, and mutual care all at the same time. So you're, so you feel respected, and you feel that you respect someone else, so it's like mutual understanding and all these things. So everything's built on mutual things.

Q: Uh.

1915 R: And sacrifice of course, you have to sacrifice for the other person, the one you love, or the one you are married to.

Q: Uh, is there anything else about your marriage you would like to add?

R: No, I think this is all. That's all.

Q: Did you have any dreams or ambition, ambitions as a child or adolescent?

1920 R: Personally I never felt, or I never felt that I would get married some day. Maybe because when I got married I was thirty, and I thought thirty, oh my God, I would never get married in my life. So, and I got married, so it was something that happened, very, very fast, and for example, my wife was the last to get engaged and she was the first to get married, so it was like a quick and good, and quick and fast **1925** thing.

Q: Okay, what did you want to be when you were in high school?

R: When I was in high school, really I wanted to be an English teacher.

Q: Oh.

R: That teacher told me, really, that teacher me you're very good, he really motivated **1930** me, he told me, you're very good, maybe you'll get your master's degree or Ph.D., even when I was in the 12th grade.

Q: So you did achieve your ambitions?

R: So far, right, I'm almost done with my master's. I applied for the Ph.D. program here at IUP, I was accepted.

1935 Q: Okay, do love and school fit together for you in your life?

R: You mean, as a student and as a husband?

Q: Yea.

R: Of course, I mean, it's like very difficult to, I think as a married person you have to make a compromise, or you have to compromise, so okay, you can't have all the time **1940** to your wife, and you can't have all the time to your school, so it's like a compromise, you have to make a balance between the two. For example, my wife today asked me to go with her to visit her aunt in Altoona, it's about an hour from here, I told her can't, she told me no, go, go, go, so I said, no I have study to do. So, sometimes you have to make compromise for one thing and not the other.

1945 Q: Okay, what is the most important thing given to you by your family?

R: You mean nowadays family or my original family?

Q: Let's take your original family and your new family?

R: I mean, my original or my biological family, my brothers and sisters, unfortunately they did not have a lot of things to give, or maybe I told you, because of the poor **1950** situation we were in. And the financial situation, we were in, was very, very bad, the financial situation. In the SOS family, you know, remember I told you the people who raised me in that orphanage, everything was provided, but still everything, material things were provided, but sometimes I did not feel that I was provided with affection, you know, care, I don't mean "care" as in physical things, **1955** material care, I mean emotional care. So I did not feel as connected to them as I should have been.

Nowadays, in my nowadays family, I feel that I am taken care of, that I'm taking care of somebody else, I feel like everything is provided for me, emotionally and I won't say financially, even the financial situation is bad now, but I think what matters is the fina--, the emotional, emotional factor, affection, love, care, **1960** emotional care, of course.

Q: Do you recall any legends, tales, or songs about people, places or events in your community?

R: I don't know. I don't think so. I don't remember any.

Q: Ah, okay, what has your life, okay, what has your life contributed to the 1965 history of your community?

R: I think.

Q: Or it's still too early?

R: I think it's still too early, because I'm still young, maybe, I'm thirty years old. I think like, maybe, being a teacher at the high school in my village, or in the, my home **1970** village, I think it was very important for the people there, I was very, very famous there, and renown because everybody okay wanted his children like to be tutored by me, like I told you, I was first, I came first in that Ministry of Education contest for selecting high school teachers, and my name was in the newspaper, so everybody in that village, it's like 15,000 the village, I think it's about 15,000 people, **1975** so everybody knew me, and everybody knew the problems and the financial situation I was in, and how I came to be what I was, you know what I mean?

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: So, I was like an example, okay, he didn't have, they would say to each other, he didn't have anything, he did everything by himself, he's a very self-made person, he **1980** built himself by himself, because of his like his self-determination, because of his strong will, to be something.

Q: Okay, what primary beliefs guide your life now?

R: As a teacher?

Q: No, as a person, what primary beliefs guide your life?

1985 R: I'll start by talking about as a teacher.

Q: Hmm hmm.

R: As a teacher, I very, I mean, I very much believe in this there's a good saying, there's a saying, "To teach is to learn twice" or "Teaching is learning", so as a teacher, I learn through teaching, and teachers are supposed to know, I mean undergo a **1990** continuous process of development. And I also believe that I have to develop myself, not only professionally, but also personally, so I have to develop what I am as a teacher, as well as who I am as a person, and how I communicate with people, how I get involved in the social life.

Q: Do you feel you have any strength, strength inside your body?

1995 R: I have this motivation in myself. I feel motivated all the time, and I think motivation is what made me what I am now, or what made me reach what I've reached so far. Really, I think motivation is the most important drive, ah, or the most important factor driving people to be what they are. And another thing is that I believe, for example, I told you I was in need, in financial need all the time, I think **2000** need is also important, because sometimes need is what makes you who you are, and need what makes you want to be something or to be somebody influential in your community. You know what I mean?

Q: So we can consider or we can say that need is one aspect of motivation?

R: Right. Right.

2005 Q: Or a primary factor for motivation?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: Do you feel you are in control of your life?

R: In control in what sense?

Q: Financially, emotionally?

2010 R: Emotionally, I think.

Q: Socially?

R: Hmm, I can say so, because financially, I'm working, I have this scholarship, and I have got a teaching assistantship in the fall to be teaching Arabic here at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, so I think financially I am in control, of course **2015** emotionally, of course, I'm married, I have a wife, we care about each other, we love each other, uh, socially, of course, I have a lot of friends, I am like involved in or engaged in the Muslim community, not only the Muslim community, people from all over the world, from different cultures, from different countries, they speak different languages, what unifies us here, is the fact that we are here together, we are studying **2020** here together, we maybe speak maybe the same language, even though our native languages are very, very different, but English is what unifies us here as students, or as people here in the United States.

Q: And the same goals?

R: Of course, it's like a Community of Practice. So we, all the people here, we **2025** constitute what we call a community of practice, we have shared maybe problems, we have shared...

Q: Same concerns?

R: Right, shared opportunities, shared concerns. Right.

Q: Did you ever have any doubts about achieving your goals in life?

2030 R: Sometimes I have this doubt, because I feel, okay, even for example when I finished my B.A., I think okay, I finished it, because I am like an accident, I finished it, I finished it accidentally. I did not do what I was supposed to do. So I always have this doubt, whatever I get, it's not because I deserve it, it's because this is how things are going to be.

2035 Q: But you were working hard toward your B.A., right?

R: Right, but I have this feeling all the time, that okay, whatever, I have this feel whatever I do is not enough, I should have done more, and more, and more, and more.

Q: That's good. What were the crucial decision, or let's say, the decisions in your life?

2040 R: One of the most important decision I have made in my life is marriage, because marriage as you know, and you're married, marriage is a lot of responsibility.

Q: Right.

R: It's not like, okay, a short term process, it's a life term process, it's something that is going to happen for the rest of your life, so it's not something okay you do it for a year

2045 or two and that's it. Or you do it for three or four years and that's it. So it's something that's built on a lot of mutual things, respect, care, understanding and so on.

Q: Have there been any mistakes in your life?

R: Mistakes... I don't know what I consider mistakes. I can't think of any now.

2050 Q: How have you overcome or learned from your difficulties?

R: I told you need is what made me what I am now. So okay I felt that I am in need for, everybody used to tell me, okay education is what will make you what you want to be. So everybody insisted that I go for, go further and further into my studies. So, I think even, not only need, and support, everybody used to support me, I mean here **2055** emotionally, just do it, you can do it, you're very good, you're very clever, you're very smart. I did my B.A. for example, and then why don't you do your diploma in linguistics? Your post-graduate diploma in linguistics? You're very good at linguistics, you like linguistics, you like semantics, you like syntax, you like phonology, so do it, and I did it, and it worked. And then okay, I wanted to do, I mean **2060** go for my master's, it was difficult there, then I had, okay, a lot of people really, people support, people used to support me. Then okay, why don't you go and finish your military service, although it was two years. I went there, I used to teach, I got a lot of experience there, I mean teaching experience, life experience in a very like military atmosphere, and then my okay, my Ph.D., my master's the same thing, so **2065** people supported me because I was in need, and they supported me most of the time emotionally, and now I am being supported by my wife, she will tell, she will tell me all the time, you can make it, sometimes, okay, I will feel very stressed about coursework, because like graduate coursework is very, very, I think the course load is very big, so she'll tell me,

no you can do it, you can do it, and I do it all the time, **2070** okay, you can do it, the same thing here, I told her I don't want to apply for the Ph.D., no just apply and see what happens. I applied. I got accepted. I applied for the teaching assistantship, and I got accepted, so people are very important, especially those very close to you.

Q: Do you feel happy in this period?

2075 R: Hmm hmm. Because, I think...

Q: You are...

R: I am on the way to achieving what I want to achieve.

Q: Your master's degree?

R: Master's is almost done, I am done in May, the graduate ceremony in May 10th, on **2080** May 10th, and I told you I was accepted into the Ph.D. program here in Composition in TESOL...

Q: Yea, that's nice.

R: ...at this university. I got also a scholarship from the university, because I will be teaching Arabic, so this teaching assistantship would be like a scholarship, a full **2085** scholarship, they will cover my tuition fees, they will give me a monthly stipend, even my original scholarship, they say they would fina--, they would partly, financially, support me, they would give me like \$400 a month.

Q: That's good.

R: So I think, I think everything is getting better and better.

2090 Q: So you are, these circumstances, like motivate you to go ahead and continue your...?

R: Continue, right, to achieving my goals. Right.

Q: So after you finish your Ph.D., what are you planning to do?

R: I think, hopefully if I get a good job here at the university level, I will stay here and

2095 teach, hopefully, and if I don't get, hopefully, if I don't get a good job here, I am planning like to go somewhere in the Gulf, in the Gulf countries to teach there.

Q: The Arabic Gulf countries?

R: Right, right, right, the Arabic Gulf, right, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, so hopefully, my wife also she's willing to go there and teach there, although it would be

2100 very difficult for her, but everything would be there temporary, we would go there like to teach, it's like maybe seven, eight months a year, and then we come here for like vacation. So it won't be like okay we live there all the time.

Q: So you believe that your life is going as you planned it to go?

R: Hmm hmm.

2105 Q: And the circumstances always help you?

R: Of course, this is very different, right, although all these circumstances I've been through they were very difficult, I've been always in very difficult circumstances, but surprisingly, everything went as I wanted it to.

Q: Okay, how do you handle disappointment, if you feel that you are

2110 disappointed, how do you handle it?

R: When I am disappointed, let's say, by course work, I sleep all the time.

Q: Ha ha.

R: Really, sleeping is my...

Q: Cure?

2115 R: Is my cure in this case. And, thanks God, it's because I was, I am married now, that disappointment has no place in me, so whenever I am disappointed, whenever I am overstressed, whenever I am worried about something, my wife would reassure me would...

Q: Would standby?

2120 R: Right, standby me, or sit by me, okay, or tell me this is what you can do, and you can do it, so she would encourage me, motivate me, and support me emotionally.

Q: What has been the happiest time in your life?

R: I think the happiest time is this past year, because really marriage is really interesting and a very fun life to live, I think the happiest time in my life is the day I **2125** got engaged, or I proposed to my wife, it was one of the happiest day, one of the happiest days, and of course, she accepted, and like three months later, after our engagement, we got married, we had two ceremonies, we had a lot of friends there. I believe my life started or my life has started since I got married. I don't believe that I lived any life before I was married.

2130 Q: I have a next question, but I think you've already answered. What relationships in your life have been the most significant?

R: This very relationship I told you about. It's very serious, it's very important, it's... it's very important for me as a person.

Q: So what have been your greatest accomplishments?

2135 R: On the academic level or on the non-academic level?

Q: In any field, what do you believe the most important accomplishment in your life so far?

R: On the academic level, I think I'm, it is the fact that I'm almost done with my master's degree, and that I'm going for my Ph.D. this coming fall, this coming fall

2140 semester. On the non-academic life or level, I think marriage is the most important and influential accomp--, accomplishment that I've done so far, or that I've achieved so far.

Q: Has there been any special person that has changed your life?

R: I think I remember I told you about this earlier, about the uncle, I told you about.

2145 And, not only my uncle, my uncle, he passed away maybe six, seven years ago. Nowadays, one of the most important people in my life, influencing how my life goes on and on is my wife. I think she's now the most important, influential person.

Q: What is your biggest worry now?

R: My biggest worry now is whether or not I can go and achieve or get my Ph., Ph.D.

2150 degree or not, and my other worry, or my other concern is that whether or not I would find a job after I would finish my Ph.D., so I think my greatest or biggest worry or concern is the Ph.D. program itself.

Q: How do you feel about yourself at the age you, you are now?

R: I believe that I passed the expiration date, because I'm thirty and I'm starting my

2155 Ph.D. very soon of course, so I feel like, okay I'm thirty, when I finish my Ph.D.

I'll be thirty-four, so but sometimes when I look at other people, they are forty or forty-five, and they are doing like their master's, even really I have a friend in the master's program, they are forty or forty-five years old, and they are in the master's program.

2160 Q: Some, some people are in the even in the bachelor's in their B.A. studies still.

R: Right, so when I look at this, oh, I feel relieved.

Q: In what ways are you changing now?

R: I think on the non-academic level, I'm not changing a lot, because I'm married, let's

2165 say I've reached a static let's say stage in my life. Um, on the non-aca, on the

academic level, I'm changing, because I'm going from one graduate degree to another graduate degree, to a higher graduate degree. Um, of course, in my, of course I'm

changing of course, in the way I'm thinking about the world, in terms of, not only in the

way about, the way I think about the world, the way I think about myself, both as **2170**

a person and as a future teacher, and... I think I'm always in a continuous process or a

continuous process of learning and changing, hopefully from what we call good to

better, so hopefully from like one stage, one good stage to a better stage.

Q: What has been the greatest challenge in your life so far? The greatest challenge.

Okay, let's...

2175 R: I can't think of any now.

Q: What time of your life, would you like to repeat?

R: I don't think I want to repeat any time of my life, I mean, and have it over and over again, I'm satisfied with what I am now, with what I have achieved so far, so I don't think of any time that I would like to repeat or live again.

2180 Q: What is your view on death?

R: I believe in death, and I believe it's something inevitable, something that will happen sooner or later, something that will happen whether you are here, on the moon, in Asia, Africa or any other place in the world, so I believe of course, death is a very... I mean a very difficult thing, not only, it's a very difficult thing to live, so to **2185** speak, to imagine also.

Q: What do you want most to experience before you die?

R: Experiencing?

Q: Yea.

R: I'd love to like see my own children.

2190 Q: Hmm hmm.

R: You know, like to have the chance to see them, to have the chance to raise them and to have the chance like to have them all the time by my side. I think children are very very important to one's life.

Q: How long do you believe you, you will live?

2195 R: I think that's very difficult question to answer, because love, ah life or death is inevitable, and life or death is unpredictable, so I think it's very, I'm not sure really, I

maybe I might die in a second, I might die tomorrow, I might die, it's a very difficult question to answer.

Q: How would you like to die? Ha ha ha.

2200 R: I'd like to die peacefully, like sudden death, I don't wanna like die in a lot of pain, I don't want like to die because of chronic or malignant disease, so I'd love to die peacefully, but at the same time, everything happens as God wants it to be, so I don't have the choice to choose the way I die. I die, I believe that I would die as God wants me to die.

2205 Q: Do you consider your stay in U.S. change your personality, I think you answered this question?

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: Ah, but what aspects? When you come to the United States and you stay I think so far two years...

2210 R: Two years.

Q: What aspects have changed in your personality?

R: Um, the way I look at the world, and the way I analyze or look at things I think is different, is very different from the way I used to look at things in the past before I came here. Ah, because I told you the different cultures I face all the time, every day,

2215 not only on the academic level, but also on the non-academic level, you meet a lot of people from all diff--, from all over the world, so this would broaden your horizons, and it would broaden your views and perspectives and points of view, and you would have like different points of view about the same thing, not very fixed or

petrified kind of static state of mind, I think I believe I'm now in a more... changeable
2220 process of mind or state of mind, because all the things here you hear different things from different people about the same thing or about different things, so I think my mind is changing and is being enriched, and is being broadened, broadened by many many different things.

Q: How many kids do, do you like to have in the future?

2225 R: Hopefully, two, three, or hopefully two or three.

Q: Boys, girls?

R: I don't mind really, boys or girls.

Q: What do you want them to be? The kids?

R: I want them to be what they want to be. So it's their choice, of course, I'm, I'm **2230** their father, and my wife is their mother of course, but I think I would like them to be what they want to be. I want them to choose. Like in my case, I have chosen what I wanted to be, so I wanted, I wanted, I would want them to be what they want, or to choose for themselves, of course I would be there to facilitate things for them to guide them, but not to dictate what they wanted to be.

2235 Q: Okay, is there anything that we've left out of your life story?

R: I think we've talked about a lot of things, my life story, both on the academic and non-academic levels, and I think you're lucky enough because we talked about, my, my three different or my three different stages or my life, I told you I have three families, my original family, my SOS family at the orphanage, and my nowadays **2240** family with my wife here in the United States, so I think each of these, each of these stages

would be a life story by itself, so I think it's very, very enriching to have these three different stages of my life.

Q: Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?

R: I believe so.

2245 Q: What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?

R: I think it's very interesting, sometimes okay, I, for example, I used to have things in my mind, okay these things are very private, these things are very difficult for me to discuss with someone, this interview made me feel relieved because I talked about **2250** things I never had the chance to talk with anyone, even my own wife, so I think this interview made me feel more relieved, more comfortable, even more...

Q: I'm happy. I'm happy to hear that really.

R: Thanks a lot really.

Q: Thank you very much for your invaluable time, I know that you are very 2255 busy with your projects, doing a lot of things, and you gave us really a lot of time, you know maybe we reached now three and a half or four hours.

R: Hmm hmm.

Q: So really I appreciate this, and thank you very much.

R: You're more than welcome.

2260 Q: Thanks.

R: Welcome.