

**Interview (Part 1) with Hajar Abulfazl on March 30, 2023**

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Good morning, Hajar.

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Good morning, Professor.

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it's so nice to see you. It has been a long time, and I am so glad that you have the time to talk today about your story.

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Thank you so much for being here. I'm going to begin with a short biography.

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Give a little bit of background about you, and then we will begin the interview.

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You're originally from Kabul, Afghanistan, and you now live in Oakland, California. You moved to the United States in July of 2017.

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You speak Farsi, or Dari, and English.

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You began studying at Montgomery College in the spring of 2019. I was so lucky to have you in my class. And today you live with your husband in Oakland, and you work as a soccer coach, and as the coordinator of a girls program with

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Soccer Without Borders, and I look forward to hearing about the work of Soccer Without Borders. You're majoring in Community Health, at Montgomery College and taking remote classes.

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That's wonderful! I understand that you had the opportunity to live in Oahu Hawaii last year, and coached soccer.

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That must have been amazing. I look forward to hearing more about that experience. And I also understand that you're going to graduate with an associate degree from MC

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in the fall. And I know you don't have a lot of spare time, but in your spare time I understand that you enjoy playing soccer,

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of course, hiking and exploring San Francisco and other parts of California.

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So, that's wonderful!

Let me just begin with a little introduction again. Thank you.

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So much for taking the time to tell your story. My name is Heather Bruce

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Satrom. I teach an ELAP, English Language for Academic Purposes, at Montgomery College.

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This project is called History in the Making: Documenting Stories of Immigrant and Refugee Students at MC.

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The goal is to help others better understand the experiences of immigrants and refugees in Montgomery County, Maryland, and in other places. Telling your story will enable others to better understand the challenges that immigrants and refugees face, and better appreciate the

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persistence of people in your community. And again, I'm so grateful for your participation.

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Today is March 30th, 2023.

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Could you please begin by telling me your full name and spelling it for me,

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Please?

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Sure. Thank you, Professor, for giving me the chance to be part of this project.

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My full name is Hajar AbuFazil, and spelled as h,

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a, j, a, r. And my last name, a, b, u, l, f, a, z, l.

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Wonderful! And do I have permission to record this interview?

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Yes!

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I just want to emphasize that you've seen the questions,

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but, if at any point you would like to skip a question, just tell me to skip that question, and we can move on to the next one. And if you need a break at any point, also just let me know.

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Okay.

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Okay, so, do people in the United States have trouble saying your name, your first name, or your last name? And if they do,

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have you, do you use a nickname? Or have you changed the spelling?

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Yes, not all the time, but a few time

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I had the experience when I said, "Hajar," and they couldn't repeat it the same way I did, or they cannot pronounce it.

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Then, in some of my classes, or where I work in the east coast,

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I put my name "Haju," or sometimes "Haji," so they don't go to the 'R', because sometimes, they forgot the 'R' and then I said, "Haji," but the majority of time I prefer it to,

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people and my friends, they can use "Hajar."

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Thank you so much. It's important for us to pronounce it correctly.

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Let's see, so tell me when and where were you born?

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I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. Kabul is the capital of Afghanistan, at 1993.

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And can you tell me a little bit about the place where you were born, and what it was like growing up there?

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Describe Kabul to us.

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Sure. Kabul is in northeast of Afghanistan. Is the capital of Afghanistan, and it is really beautiful, and has 4 seasons, and generally in in the city,

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I was raised, it was, has a lot of opportunities.

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But, when I was born in 1993, that was exactly in the middle of the war, and we immigrated the first time,

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all our family, to Pakistan, until the war finished,

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then, during the war, we moved two times from Kabul to Pakistan, then to Iran. But in 2001, when The Taliban was gone and the new the government came in Afghanistan,

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we moved back to Kabul, but that time everything was destroyed by war, and there was not really way

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we can go to school and continue our education. Everything was completely a disaster for us, and we couldn't stay there.

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Again, we move back to Pakistan for a few years to get education, until Afghanistan got ready to open schools and have teachers in the school and have students.

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Then we came back and I finished my high school in Kabul at a very "golden time,"

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I could say. When we came back around 2004 or 2005,

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everything was going to get better in the community, and all people were ready to rebuild Afghanistan.

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You grew up at a time of great change in your country, so I look forward to hearing more about your experience in this place and time.

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When you were growing up, can you tell me who was in your family?

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How many siblings you have? Tell me a little bit about your parents and your family group.

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Sure! When I grew up, my family is a big family, and I have 8 sisters, 4 brothers and my mom and my dad. Totally,

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we are around like 13 people, and we live in the same house. In Kabul we had a huge house.

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It was around 12 or 13 rooms at that house, and we had a big yard in front of our house. I had my own room. My mom gave me one room for myself, but for my other siblings, 2, 2, people were in one room

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living together. We lived in Kabul, in the north part. It was very beautiful and cooler than the other parts of Kabul.

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What number are you in the family?

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I'm the third one.

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And you got your own room?

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It was, the reason my mom gave me because I was so busy, and my stuff was a lot, because I was playing soccer,

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I was going to school, and I had a lot of travel at that time that my stuff, or my equipment at home, was so many.

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Then my mom gave me the opportunity to have my own room if I do anything, and I if I miss out, or if what I put my sport clothes anywhere at the room, it will be okay, because my sister was not okay with my sport clothes because it had a little smell. Then yes,

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that's why they give me a private, own room.

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That's a great story. Thank you for sharing that.

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Did you enjoy growing up in such a big family? Was it fun?

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I I could say first thanks God to give me this family, and I'm really glad my mom or my dad make this big family, because, growing up with a big family is a privilege, and I had that one, because that time I didn't feel I need a frame from outside, or I didn't

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feel alone all the time. Always there's someone to talk with me, or there's someone around me, or while we are cooking dinner or lunch, or breakfast,

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there's so many people around you. I get a lot of inspire from each of them.

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My older sisters, my younger sister, my mom, it's a big inspiration for all of us, because she's kind of has a huge energy in her body or her mind to always encourage us and get us out in the morning, and feed us and send us to the education centers

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or school. Or even when I started soccer in Afghanistan,

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she was a part of all my journey to support me and feeding me well, giving me good clothes, or for any part of growing up as a soccer player, or as a student at the school she was there to support us. My sisters altogether, we are a big,

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I could say, strong... We have a strong community just from our own family, which is really beautiful, and I'm thankful for my parents, too.

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That is beautiful. I'm sure your mom is gonna be so happy to hear this interview later.

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Can you tell me a little bit about your father? What kind of work he did, or when you were growing up?

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My father was part of government, recent and past years.

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He was working at the Ministry of Defense, and he had a high profile in Afghanistan. The reason he was part of government or part of a big a party in Afghanistan,

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we received a lot of opportunity, and also a lot of risk in our life to being a daughter of a high profile in Afghanistan, in all this past 20 years. We received both side of good one and the worst part of it,

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but he was there even he was part of army in Afghanistan.

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He was part of making the army of Afghanistan strong, but at the same time he was a dad of 13 people, and he was managing us and encouraging us all the time to go to school and stay in school to learn. And again, when you get out of school, teach other people. He was not

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focusing just for army and focusing for making a good family, as well.

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Thank you for sharing that. That's also a beautiful story about your father.

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When I think about large families, I think about the household chores having the house run smoothly, and the meals.

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Did you have household chores when you were growing up, or responsibilities in the home related to cooking or cleaning, or running errands, or things like that?

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I could say, I remember the first time I cooked for my family, I was in the first grade, and I cooked for all of them.

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And I still remember how mature we were at that time, so we could go to the kitchen and cook for everybody, and serve dinner for all of our family.

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At that time, we were not a big family. We were like 5 people, my dad and my mom, like 7 people.

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We had always responsibility to clean home, wash the clothes, wash the dishes, and cook for the family.

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That's why I feel now that I'm a really good cook, and I could cook any where I would go if I'd be alone.

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I could handle all the dishes, or I can cook a lot of different meals from Afghanistan, because all my sisters and I included, we had a schedule to what we had to do at the week, separated. My Mom gave us the day

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to work. For example, we are 6 sisters and they give us Saturdays for Hajar,

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Sundays for my other sister, Thursday, Fridays.

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It was divided for 6 people to do all the stuff, breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

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That sounds like a really important skill that you learned, in terms of managing your time, as well.

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Correct! Plus, because we have to clean the home and (broom) it,

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I know my schedule, and I have to do it.

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I will, most of the time, I was doing it the night before, because I had to go to school, and I had to prepare for other stuff, then I was doing my duty the night before. I said, this is a good time,

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everybody is asleep and I can finish my stuff.

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Can you tell me about any memories you have about a holiday growing up?

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Were there important days that you celebrated? Do you have any memories to share about that?

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I have a lot of memories from the holidays in Afghanistan, because we

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are celebrating so many occasions, like New Year is Nowruz.

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we're celebrating very big and we are having picnic outside and inviting a lot of people at home, or we are going to visit our families.

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And we have two big Eids, which is, one of them is after Ramadan and one of them is two months after Ramadan.

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We are celebrating big and everybody is home. Even the families, my cousins,

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my uncles, all of them coming home, and we have to cook for everybody, which is so enjoying, and I could see this as part of our culture, to have a gathering for any reason. Even Friday is our Holiday.

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Here it is Saturday and Sunday, we have Fridays off.

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Then Friday is huge, everybody is around everybody,

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the family is coming. After the two Eids, we have the two big celebrations at the winter time, when it's the last day.. the day is the longest night is

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21st December, I believe,

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we are celebrating what we call Shab-e-Yalda. Then we stay up all night because we feel this is the longest night, and it's not finishing.

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We get together and cook a lot, and reading phones and celebrating that day with everybody. I could say, we have a lot of celebrations,

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which are all big. And when we have a wedding or any good, or happy celebration, like engagement or wedding, that is a bigger celebration, because everybody is involved, and everybody get together to support each other. The bride's family or the groom's family, they get together and

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make that happen. I have a lot of good memories with all of them.

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It's a springtime now and I understand that Nowruz is a celebration of the spring. Is that right?

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Yes!

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Can you tell me a little bit more about what you would do on Nowruz?

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Nowruz is on March 21st.

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This is the first day of the new year in Afghanistan. In a few countries, it is the New Year.

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We celebrate this new spring, new year, and new day. How we celebrate it?

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One thing so popular in Afghanistan is we make Haft Mewa.

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That means we soak seven dried fruits in the water two or one day before the Nowruz, then that is the meal we are eating, or we are feeding our guests or our relatives who are coming to visit us.

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That is the meal we have. Plus, at the day we make very good food, a lot of food, and all the families get together.

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It looks like Thanksgiving here. We have Nowruz for the big family, like Mom or grandma. They're cooking and making all the good meals, and all the children and all the grandchildren are coming together, and stay and have that day together.

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In Afghanistan, the same day or other days, people are going to picnic outside

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and visit the new blossoms, or all the new grasses growing up. They stay in nature, as well, to welcome spring and welcome the new year.

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That's beautiful! I love that. What a lovely description! Thank you!

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Thank you!

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Can you tell me a little bit about.. and I think this is something that interests a lot of people about your education in Afghanistan.

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Tell me about when you went to school? What you studied?

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Tell us a little bit about your educational experience there.

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Sure. In Afghanistan, I came around,

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I started my seventh grade in Afghanistan, in Kabul,

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then I graduated my high school in 2010.

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Then, as soon as I graduated from high school, I went to the medical school. I studied 7 years in medical school in Afghanistan, and then I moved to United States.

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About the education in Afghanistan, in our family education is a culture.

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You have to have it, and you have to go there. One day, if you don't go to school and feel like you are missing a big thing in the school, my mom and.. my father was the bigger supporter or the bigger to not force us, but always motivate us and

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always encourage us to go to school, plus go to the education centers to learn some skills, learn English language, and learn math. When we learned and I was in the eleventh grade, my mom, because Friday is off day in the morning, she would say

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"Hajar, now it's a free time. You can go to the mosque and teach math to other people." My oldest sister, me, and my younger sister, the three of us had experience to go to the mosque and invite all people and children in the mosque, because mosques had

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big halls there. When they're coming to the pray,

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we would talk about how we have math classes,

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we have English classes, and if you want you can send your children and we can teach them.

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We were teaching them for free, and made our mom happy to see that we are using our free time at the mosque teaching other children. This getting knowledge and teaching other people is the culture, and all of us had experience. My sisters all of them graduated from bachelor and three of them

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have a master's degree. My older sister has a Ph.D.

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in women's studies from Iran. When they came back to Afghanistan around 2018 or 2019, they started teaching at the university in Afghanistan.

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Two of them had experience as professors in universities and teaching other people, which as Prophet Muhammad was always saying, "learn and teach..."

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We had to follow that. My family encouraged us and always supported us for being in education centers or being around to educating people and get education.

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Did you say, I just want to clarify that you began school when you were seven years old, or you began school in 7th grade?

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I started school at five years old, but because, when I started school, I was in Iran, then I studied until 4th grade in Iran.

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Then we came back to Afghanistan,

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but, the education system was not really. Then we moved back to Pakistan, and I studied three years there.

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Then I moved back to Afghanistan. In Afghanistan,

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I started at 7th grade.

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I see. Okay, thank you for clarifying that. I know you mentioned that you went to medical school, as well.

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Did you graduate and get a degree?

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I finished all my courses in Afghanistan. I couldn't get the degree because I moved to United States, and I couldn't go back to Afghanistan after I came here.

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Then, my university said "anytime you come, you can have your degree," but I couldn't go back all these years.

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That must be very frustrating to have to restart the educational process after going through medical school to begin again here, taking community health classes.

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I imagine that's a frustrating experience for you.

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It was so hard for me, because I spent a lot of years to get education, to get a degree, and pursue your career as a medical doctor.

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Because at the same time I was studying in Afghanistan,

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I was working at the same the same time. For four years I had experience in a hospital working in different departments, but when I came here, I was, because the only thing I didn't have is a paper to show to the college or for the workplace to show that, yes, I have this experience, and I

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have this paper, but nobody accepted without paper. If you have experience, and if you have the knowledge and you don't have that paper as a degree or as a diploma, or anything, they couldn't accept it, then that's why I came back to MC

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and started to get education. First, English classes,

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continue after taking English classes. The main while I was taking English classes, improve my English, and I started to get the Associate's and the Bachelor's.

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Then I have to continue that. But, at the same time, I was trying to get my degree from Afghanistan, but I couldn't make it. It was so hard, and still, I'm feeling like I wish I had the time to stay in Afghanistan

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and not come to United States until I had my degree, and then I came here,

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then I could evaluate it to some of a degree in United States.

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I heard before, if you are in the other side of the world, and you come to the Western, or you come to the United States, your degree, or your education is not equal to the education here, and you have to start it from zero. But right now, after years when I met a lot of people

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in different parts of the United States, I moved in seven states in the United States, and I worked for seven states in the United States.

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Right now, I feel, or I wish I had a good mentor, or I wish I had a better person, or not a better person, but if I could say, I had a good mentor to show me how to go to college, and which classes you can take to not waste a lot of time for

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just taking classes that are not important for me or not direct me in a good way to

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finish my education. Plus, because, it is not the feeling

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we can give to the newcomers or to the refugee,

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you have to restart everything. Wait! There's nothing restart, because you built something in your life,

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as education, work, and experience. All of them.

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You build something in your life in that country. Here is everything is really,

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I feel it's easy to do something. It's it's not a big obstacle to go to school, because school is open and they're inviting you to come to school, and there is nobody to stop you, or ban the school.

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Plus, after school you smoothly go to college,

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and smoothly you go to the next level of your education, and it's not big deal. But when we are coming here, we have that experience, which we struggled, or we challenged ourselves and our community to get education.

0:27:07.000,0:27:11.000  
But how it's possible, they can give that word

0:27:11.000,0:27:12.000  
you have to restart. Now, I meeting everybody, and now, right now, in the Soccer without Borders, in Oakland,

0:27:12.000,0:27:24.000  
I'm working with newcomers. All I want is to tell them, "you don't need to restart.

0:27:24.000,0:27:43.000  
Just go find a good college, or find a good mentor to guide you better and guide you well to use that experience you have in Afghanistan, or in any country you are, to put it here, add a little more certificates or more courses on top of

0:27:43.000,0:27:49.000  
that if you can graduate faster, then you have to restart again from the bottom, like from 1st grade."

0:27:49.000,0:28:05.000  
It is a little hard to accept it, but I have to go through all these years, and I found a college myself. When I came to the college, I asked how to register for English classes. Then after that,

0:28:05.000,0:28:12.000  
I found myself in the college. I spent two years, going around and around, and I couldn't find a college.

0:28:12.000,0:28:14.000  
But in 2019, I found it. I always said, I wish I found it a year ago or two years ago,

0:28:14.000,0:28:21.000  
not wasting my time around.

0:28:21.000,0:28:22.000

0:28:22.000,0:28:29.000  
Sorry.. making sure.  
Yes, I started medical in Afghanistan,

0:28:29.000,0:28:39.000

but hopefully, I finished my associate's, then I get my bachelor's. Because my goal is to get my master's degree in public health, and work in the WHO

0:28:39.000,0:28:44.000  
and in bigger projects internationally.

0:28:44.000,0:28:57.000  
I hope that will happen for you soon. I know it's been a long journey for you, and probably very exhausting and frustrating at times. When things got really difficult for you, and you were feeling frustrated,

0:28:57.000,0:29:01.000  
what helped you to keep going, to keep pursuing your education?

0:29:01.000,0:29:05.000  
What gave you the strength to do that?

0:29:05.000,0:29:11.000  
It is really hard for anybody who is strong,

0:29:11.000,0:29:18.000  
who has support from family, who has support from community.

0:29:18.000,0:29:28.000  
Anybody has a hard time, and I am also a normal girl in this country, and I feel a lot of time alone.

0:29:28.000,0:29:35.000  
A lot of time, there's no support for me, or there was no right words, or not

0:29:35.000,0:29:41.000  
the right people in front of me to tell me what is good in this country, and what is a good way

0:29:41.000,0:30:01.000  
I can go and get the experience, get knowledge. And how always my family encouraged me, and always when I go back to that country I came from, and the family I came from, what I see behind in the past always encouraged me.

0:30:01.000,0:30:06.000  
And I tell myself "Hajar, America is not another universe.

0:30:06.000,0:30:17.000  
This is the same earth. We are in the same earth, and everything is a little.. the level is a little different, like the level of education, the level of the lifestyle.

0:30:17.000,0:30:19.000  
But we live in the same world. We are eating the food the same, and we are growing up, and we are breathing the same oxygen.

0:30:19.000,0:30:43.000  
It's not a lot of differences. Because I heard so many in the United States who make us, because as soon as they understand you're a refugee, they want to treat you really low or feel like you're just starting to live in this world. Come on!

0:30:43.000,0:30:48.000  
This is not a different world. We all came from the same earth,

0:30:48.000,0:31:09.000  
but a little other part of this world. But my family and my experience in Afghanistan always encourage me because I started my journey, or I found myself when I was 14 years old, when I chose soccer, to use soccer

0:31:09.000,0:31:25.000  
and change my life, and change other people's life in Afghanistan. And I worked 10 years in this sport, in the Football Federation, and being advocate for them, and being a coach there, and being a soccer

0:31:25.000,0:31:29.000  
player for national team. All this experience I had. It was not

0:31:29.000,0:31:41.000

receiving easily. I have a lot of challenge, first from my family to not let me go play soccer,

0:31:41.000,0:31:45.000  
my relatives, and the community, and the Football Federation.

0:31:45.000,0:31:56.000  
All the males were there to stop girls from playing soccer, and not pursuing to get better

0:31:56.000,0:32:00.000  
in soccer to get a certificate, being coach, being a referee.

0:32:00.000,0:32:11.000  
All those years, or struggling in Afghanistan made, or built a lot of strength for myself. Then, when I came here, yes, I had a lot of challenges. I had a lot of bad days,

0:32:11.000,0:32:22.000  
but the only thing that inspired me or motivated me was

0:32:22.000,0:32:38.000  
my journey, which I already started in Afghanistan, and I say, "Hajar, you have done so many big stuff, or big things in Afghanistan, with less, facilities with less equipment, with less education.

0:32:38.000,0:32:46.000  
But here, where there's a lot of opportunity, there's a lot of education centers, and there's a lot of up a level of soccer,

0:32:46.000,0:32:56.000  
then you can make it. You can do it better than before, or make it..

0:32:56.000,0:33:04.000  
Go to the next level, or being the same way you were in Afghanistan.

0:33:04.000,0:33:05.000  
I'm so glad that you began speaking about soccer, and I'd really love for you to,

0:33:05.000,0:33:22.000  
if you can go back to the beginning of your interest in soccer, how you discovered soccer? How old you were? And what drew you, or attracted you to the sport of soccer?

0:33:22.000,0:33:25.000  
Can you talk a little bit about the beginnings of your interests?

0:33:25.000,0:33:50.000  
Sure. I was in middle school, 14 years old. That time was during the war. The war was not finished, and there was a lot of chaos in Afghanistan, in all those years. At the same time, because all the gun people they think, because before

0:33:50.000,0:33:58.000  
that were four decades of war, and all the people stay at home, or they didn't do a lot of activities outside, like woman weren't

0:33:58.000,0:34:14.000  
in leadership or not in a lot in the community. Then everybody were saying, "girls should stay home. Women belong at home.

0:34:14.000,0:34:19.000  
They don't belong to society. They don't belong to part of making

0:34:19.000,0:34:35.000  
the government," and that was so hurting me. It was so painful for me. First of all, why? I am a female. Then one day I realized I'm proud of being a woman.

0:34:35.000,0:34:47.000  
I'm very happy being a woman here, but the people cannot tell me or stop me for being a woman and stay at home. I have to change this vision and these words they're using.

0:34:47.000,0:34:54.000  
That's why I found soccer to show the ability and show the power of woman that

0:34:54.000,0:35:01.000

they could do anything they want, and there's nothing in this world to make it limited for female or male.

0:35:01.000,0:35:06.000  
Everything is here for everybody to what they want to do.

0:35:06.000,0:35:19.000  
That's why soccer.. when I started soccer I had a little challenge with my relatives, because they weren't ready to accept girls with that uniform and playing football.

0:35:19.000,0:35:34.000  
But I had support from my family. My dad was supportive, my mom was supportive, and my siblings, which is the big power I had. That's why I could

0:35:34.000,0:35:40.000  
fight with the community and with the people who were standing to stop me?

0:35:40.000,0:35:42.000  
I could continue and practice in a few years. Then, the goal was to get selected for the national team.

0:35:42.000,0:35:57.000  
Then, in a few years of practicing, I got selected to Afghanistan's Women's National Team. The better journey, or the beautiful journey started with

0:35:57.000,0:36:08.000  
being in the national team, and traveling the world, and I visited so many countries, and I visited a lot of cultures.

0:36:08.000,0:36:09.000  
Then I came back.. When I was coming back to Afghanistan,

0:36:09.000,0:36:20.000  
I could use all that knowledge or experience I received from different countries,

0:36:20.000,0:36:24.000  
how they practice, and how they build their federation.

0:36:24.000,0:36:29.000  
Then I started working for Football Federation in 2012.

0:36:29.000,0:36:50.000  
The Women's Committee.. I was in charge of the Women's Committee, and I built a lot of good events, or programs for girls in the Football Federation, because, at the time we started soccer, there was a few clubs and a few girls to play soccer.

0:36:50.000,0:36:56.000  
But after a while I practiced, I was working at Football Federation, one day,

0:36:56.000,0:37:05.000  
I counted the registration and it was 5,000 football players in our office.

0:37:05.000,0:37:06.000  
Those 5,000 were from all over Afghanistan. That was so happy,

0:37:06.000,0:37:23.000  
and I said, "this is where we came. We worked hard for other girls to encourage them to come and work for Football Federation to recruit a lot of girls and engaging all of them to the different programs.

0:37:23.000,0:37:31.000  
And we build a very good community, in the Football Federation. Even we have a lot of struggles in the community,

0:37:31.000,0:37:37.000  
but family was supportive, and there was so many other people to come and support us.

0:37:37.000,0:37:53.000  
I was watching people, the dad was taking their daughters to the Football Federation to want to register, and I heard so many times people want to be football players and some dad was commenting to me on social media, "my daughter

0:37:53.000,0:37:59.000  
wants to be like Hajar. How she can start? how she can be like Hajar?"

0:37:59.000,0:38:06.000  
Those memories I have from soccer, and we worked a lot for soccer in Afghanistan to make it a common activity in Afghanistan, and everybody loves soccer,

0:38:06.000,0:38:24.000  
and they send their daughters to play soccer, because the only reason I view soccer was to change the vision of the main "girl belong to home." Girls do not belong to home.

0:38:24.000,0:38:25.000  
Thank you. When you first started playing soccer, you said you were 14 years old.

0:38:25.000,0:38:26.000  
Is that right?

0:38:26.000,0:38:31.000  
Yes, I was around that.

0:38:31.000,0:38:32.000  
And was that offered through your school, or was that a program that was run by a sports organization?

0:38:32.000,0:38:41.000  
Who organized the soccer when you first started?

0:38:41.000,0:38:45.000  
Very good question. I started playing soccer at the school because there was a teacher over there,

0:38:45.000,0:38:58.000  
she was.. We had a physical education class, and always when we had a physical education

0:38:58.000,0:39:06.000  
subject, she was giving a ball, like basketball, or any ball. We have to run, or practice,

0:39:06.000,0:39:14.000  
but one day I saw the teacher with a few girls practicing football.

0:39:14.000,0:39:20.000  
Then, I joined that small group. Then, she realized, there was a lot of football fans.

0:39:20.000,0:39:24.000  
I joined, and she asked many girls, and we made it

0:39:24.000,0:39:32.000  
the group of a good team. Then, we registered for the Football Federation,

0:39:32.000,0:39:44.000  
and joined the tournament in the Football Federation. We had a tournament for the Football Federation, and also between the middle school and the high school tournament.

0:39:44.000,0:39:53.000  
And eventually you became part of the national team, The National Women's Team in Afghanistan. Is that right?

0:39:53.000,0:39:54.000  
Yes, the tournament, the Football Federation,

0:39:54.000,0:40:09.000  
they organized. Then asked all the schools to bring their teams in the Football Federation because they are looking to select for national teams.

0:40:09.000,0:40:16.000  
We participated in that tournament, and they selected me during the game

0:40:16.000,0:40:26.000  
from that tournament. Then, I started as a national team player in 2009.

0:40:26.000,0:40:32.000  
And did that give you opportunities to then travel to other countries as a member of that team?

0:40:32.000,0:40:38.000  
Yes, being part of the national team opened a lot of opportunities for me.

0:40:38.000,0:40:42.000  
I could travel and could practice more in the Football Federation.

0:40:42.000,0:40:59.000  
We had more equipment, we had more facilities, professional coaches, and we could travel and get training outside of United States and come back and participate in international competitions.

0:40:59.000,0:41:00.000  
And even we traveled to the United States in the training camp and California.

0:41:00.000,0:41:08.000  
We could travel to Germany only for training and participate with some Asian countries in competitions.

0:41:08.000,0:41:37.000  
Yes, it was a really good time, and a really good opportunities for me to visit different countries and learn the culture and come back to Afghanistan and teach other girls. Around 2013-2014 was the time I'm coaching or I'm teaching other girls. What I received

0:41:37.000,0:41:42.000  
these years, at that time, I was sending, or sharing with my new generation in the Football Federation.

0:41:42.000,0:41:51.000  
To get to the level of play, to your athletic level, requires an enormous amount of training.

0:41:51.000,0:41:55.000  
Can you talk a little bit about the kind of training that you went through?

0:41:55.000,0:41:58.000  
How did you get to be so good at what you do?

0:41:58.000,0:42:11.000  
In Afghanistan at that time we didn't have an outside gym, or in the school there wasn't really

0:42:11.000,0:42:18.000  
good field to practice, but when you go to the national team, we had a better field,

0:42:18.000,0:42:35.000  
we had better equipment, the coach was there to coaching us every day. If we had a tournament, we were practicing every single day. Sometimes we had 2 times a day, in the morning and the evening, we had a practice in the Football Federation That built a lot

0:42:35.000,0:42:48.000  
of strength for us, and made us better players, different than other players were practicing in the school, because there's a lot of different levels. That gave us a lot of good experience, and we could get better and better.

0:42:48.000,0:42:59.000  
And all these travels in different countries, that gave us also good experience to get better in soccer and playing better.

0:42:59.000,0:43:05.000  
So you were practicing two times a day, you're also going to school, and you have family responsibilities.

0:43:05.000,0:43:08.000  
It sounds like you learned a lot about discipline.

0:43:08.000,0:43:21.000  
That time, I always say, my schedule was full, because there was not time I can visit my family. Or my family was visiting my relatives, and I didn't

0:43:21.000,0:43:34.000

have time to go join their celebration, or join their parties, because, I was too late when I came back from soccer. I was so tired. I just needed to rest. Yes, at that time,

0:43:34.000,0:43:39.000  
my day was full, because going to school in the morning, and then after that we go directly to the Football Federation to

0:43:39.000,0:43:51.000  
practice. Then, we come back to home, and sometimes my shift was that day,

0:43:51.000,0:43:54.000  
and I came home, and I have to change it, and I start cooking

0:43:54.000,0:43:55.000  
dinner for the family.

0:43:55.000,0:44:04.000  
When people said to you, "Oh, girls or women should not play soccer," how did you respond to that?

0:44:04.000,0:44:08.000  
How did you handle that kind of criticism?

0:44:08.000,0:44:27.000  
At that time, it was so hard, but I was so strong, or I could say.. I was so direct. I didn't feel any, or I haven't experienced anyone come directly to to me and stop me. Only my relatives. Because when they came home, they could say and directly

0:44:27.000,0:44:30.000  
tell me. The question I received was, "what is the benefit of being a soccer player?"

0:44:30.000,0:44:42.000  
Or "what is the future of this?" and "okay, now you go to soccer. What is next? What will you do?"

0:44:42.000,0:44:51.000  
The harsh things I received were, "Hajar, you must stop soccer, because in the future you cannot find husband first.

0:44:51.000,0:44:58.000  
If you find a husband, how you will tell your sons about soccer?

0:44:58.000,0:44:59.000  
'Yes, who is your mom?', 'My mom is a football player.'

0:44:59.000,0:45:09.000  
How will you feel if your sons are ashamed of your activities in the past, or being your shame for your generation."

0:45:09.000,0:45:17.000  
Those word were so hard for me to hear, but do you want to use these

0:45:17.000,0:45:23.000  
very bad words, or harsh words to stop me?

0:45:23.000,0:45:25.000  
They didn't know these words were not working on me to stop me.

0:45:25.000,0:45:28.000  
I didn't have experience to people from outside

0:45:28.000,0:45:40.000  
tell me anything, because we had this.. because my father was in the government,

0:45:40.000,0:45:41.000  
we had security, and the car was exactly outside the home.

0:45:41.000,0:45:50.000  
We got in the car and they dropped us to the school, and

0:45:50.000,0:46:06.000

dropped us to the soccer field, and they picked us up. I haven't had experience to go using public transportation, or be in the public, or walking in the streets for people to realize, "oh, Hajar is

0:46:06.000,0:46:13.000  
a soccer player," or they attacked me, or they talked to me directly.

0:46:13.000,0:46:18.000  
I didn't have that experience, because always I was in the car and nobody was..

0:46:18.000,0:46:23.000  
I haven't had the connect with people. Only places

0:46:23.000,0:46:30.000  
I see people were school, university, and Football Federation, or outside of Afghanistan.

0:46:30.000,0:46:34.000  
I read in some of the articles about you, about your decision to cover your hair while you play soccer.

0:46:34.000,0:46:40.000  
Can you talk a little bit about your reason for that?

0:46:40.000,0:46:45.000  
The the reason for it is we all almost wear like this. This is the culture we have

0:46:45.000,0:46:52.000  
in Afghanistan. I grew up with the same culture to have a scarf or cover your whole body

0:46:52.000,0:46:58.000  
and your head. When I started soccer, the two things my family provided

0:46:58.000,0:47:11.000  
so I have to keep the value of the culture and the value of the religion. You cannot go beyond, or you cannot be opposite of what we have in our culture. That's why I always had.. and I was happy to accept it.

0:47:11.000,0:47:23.000  
Yes, I could keep the value of the culture and the value of the religion.

0:47:23.000,0:47:27.000  
That's why I always had my head

0:47:27.000,0:47:32.000  
covered at the practice or in the international communities. Anywhere

0:47:32.000,0:47:39.000  
I went, I covered. That was my choice, and I was happy to cover it.

0:47:39.000,0:47:44.000  
Then I got my work in Afghanistan Football Federation,

0:47:44.000,0:47:48.000  
and that was my journey to have all the culture with me and the value of the Muslim course

0:47:48.000,0:47:58.000  
with me because I was talking with my people in Afghanistan

0:47:58.000,0:48:04.000  
and I was asking their daughters to send to the Football Federation, and I was encouraging to...

0:48:04.000,0:48:12.000  
Yes, this is a safe place, and this is a home. This is a place you can grow and earn experience.

0:48:12.000,0:48:18.000  
I couldn't act opposite. They couldn't accept it.

0:48:18.000,0:48:25.000  
That's why I always gave them a better vision and the same culture they want so

0:48:25.000,0:48:34.000

I could have more girls in the community or in our Football Federations to have more girls.

0:48:34.000,0:48:40.000

The other reason, I was thinking was, I have to be part of the community,

0:48:40.000,0:48:45.000

then you have to act the same culture, the same community you are.

0:48:45.000,0:48:52.000

And I think symbolically, it's important, too, because girls and women could see you playing very well,

0:48:52.000,0:48:54.000

and yet wearing modest dress. It seems like symbolically, that was important in some ways.

0:48:54.000,0:48:59.000

Is that right?

0:48:59.000,0:49:14.000

It was, yes. Very good point. We have to show ourselves, because when you want to.. when I was asking to send girls, then they first they see me how I play, how I look, how I stand in front of them,

0:49:14.000,0:49:21.000

then they will say "okay, after we send our daughters to play soccer, they will be like her."

0:49:21.000,0:49:29.000

Then they could. That was easy for them to make a decision. If I was doing like an American or European style, and standing for them, "yes, I'm here to question your daughters, or send your daughters." Absolutely

0:49:29.000,0:49:40.000

they would have stopped, and the first place.

0:49:40.000,0:49:48.000

Can you tell me a little bit about Soccer without Borders, about the goal of the organization and your role in that organization?

0:49:48.000,0:49:49.000

Yes! Soccer without Borders is a nonprofit,

0:49:49.000,0:50:10.000

which they are using soccer in a positive way to change their culture and change the community and use power of soccer to have more community, more girls and boys and youth in the community.

0:50:10.000,0:50:24.000

And I'm working as a girls coordinator program to recruiting more girls to the program. At the same time, I'm coaching them when I'm inviting them to soccer in California and I'm coaching them.

0:50:24.000,0:50:30.000

It's a really good program, and I am so happy to join them.

0:50:30.000,0:50:44.000

I wish I had that privilege, or that experience to come sooner than this to this organization, because they're focusing for the newcomers to find

0:50:44.000,0:50:49.000

and go to these schools and find a newcomers, talk with them. When they're inviting for soccer. Plus, they're working with them on the English

0:50:49.000,0:51:05.000

language, and they're working being as a mentor, if they need a psychologist, or they need a mental health. They're providing for them. We are, as a coach,

0:51:05.000,0:51:33.000

we are working for different areas with them. We were checking their grades in their school, and if they have any weaknesses in some classes, then we are going to talk with their teachers to work with them more. Or even if we know, that we will put our time to talk with them and teach them, or help them to grow, not only in soccer but also in school, because all newcomers don't know English.

0:51:33.000,0:51:38.000  
So are you working with immigrants and refugees in Oakland through this program?

0:51:38.000,0:51:45.000  
Yes, the school I have been targeting, where I am based is Oakland International High School.

0:51:45.000,0:51:53.000  
All this school is for newcomers, and there is a refugee from Afghanistan, from Yemen, from from Middle East, from South America, and even from Ukraine.

0:51:53.000,0:51:59.000  
We have a lot of refugees from any part of this world

0:51:59.000,0:52:05.000  
In this community, we have different coaches, which know different languages.

0:52:05.000,0:52:09.000  
If they know that language then they can communicate easily, and they can understand each other easily.

0:52:09.000,0:52:26.000  
Yes, we are there, too. I'm trying to learn Spanish, because there's a lot of students Spanish speakers, and I'm trying to know more so to I can talk with them and understand them

0:52:26.000,0:52:31.000  
in the soccer field, and outside of the field, too.

0:52:31.000,0:52:35.000  
Sounds like you're doing really important work with newcomers in the Oakland area.

0:52:35.000,0:52:39.000  
I think it's wonderful that you can use your experience

0:52:39.000,0:52:40.000  
and the challenges that you had then to help others who are coming.

0:52:40.000,0:52:45.000  
I think that's a really beautiful part of your story.

0:52:45.000,0:52:46.000  
Sure. Yes.

0:52:46.000,0:52:53.000  
Could you tell us a little bit about the situation for girls and women in Afghanistan Now?

0:52:53.000,0:52:56.000

0:52:56.000,0:53:12.000  
Right now it is very.. what words can I use? We couldn't imagine we will be facing this scenario right now in Afghanistan.

0:53:12.000,0:53:29.000  
As soon as the Taliban came in August 2021, the only statements, or the only news we heard is banning education for girls, banning sports, and any activities for woman, and banning

0:53:29.000,0:53:46.000  
all employees, female employees, banning all of them. Right now, it has been about 16 months since they shut down all women's activities, any school in higher higher education, or even in the workplace.

0:53:46.000,0:53:57.000  
They don't want to see any female or woman outside of home, and they don't want to see any girl or any female woman be a part of the government,

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or a part of the education system. They don't want to see any of them. They shut down completely all the activities. Right now, it has been almost two years

0:54:09.000,0:54:16.000

that girls couldn't go to school. The new year started a few days ago,

0:54:16.000,0:54:31.000

and we felt that they could go to school this year, but still there's no achievement, or there's no changes that the Taliban say "we banned schools for all girls, but we will change it in the future, very soon."

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But I have not heard any changes to that statement. It's day by day getting worse and worse, and we are receiving the worst news from Afghanistan, because if you shut down schools for girls, how can you have a future in that country? And how can we have a future for an Afghanistan to build

0:55:00.000,0:55:20.000

and have a doctor, an engineer, and a teacher? The worst.. the other part is, if they want girls to stay with home, who will treat their moms? Or who will treat their daughters in the future, if you do not let girls go in school? How can they become doctor? How can they

0:55:20.000,0:55:29.000

become teachers? This is so hard for all of us, especially when we were there to build the country,

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but now we migrated to other countries, and we are watching from outside and don't have the power to stop it, or change it.

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Even international communities, they are watching or listening to the news, and are not acting strongly, or positively to change and stop this terrorist group in Afghanistan. It is really a big shame,

0:55:54.000,0:56:12.000

I could say to everybody, and all of the countries that worked there, and were there as a part of Afghanistan to make it better. But now, everybody is out of the country, just watching them and letting this terrorist group do whatever they want with the people of Afghanistan.

0:56:12.000,0:56:17.000

At the time when you grew up in Afghanistan you had opportunities for an education,

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you had opportunities to play soccer, and to travel the world.

0:56:22.000,0:56:26.000

Can you express your hope for the next generation of Afghanistan?

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What is your dream for your country, and for the women and girls of Afghanistan?

0:56:32.000,0:56:36.000

My dream for Afghanistan is the same

0:56:36.000,0:56:47.000

I grew up with a better place, because I am dreaming that everybody and all girls can go to school.

0:56:47.000,0:57:11.000

I dream that everybody can choose what they want, go to any education, or any university they want, and select the major by their own choice, and they act, wear clothes, and go to work outside by their choice, where there is no limit for them, and there is no forcing to stay home, or go outside. I am

0:57:11.000,0:57:24.000

dreaming for Afghanistan. All of Afghanistan, especially for the women in Afghanistan, that there is no limit for them to dream, and there is no limit for them to act, and everything be there for them.

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That's why I was working, I would always say, "I'm working hard right now to make it easy

0:57:26.000,0:57:42.000

this pathway, or this way to becoming a member of Afghanistan's national team and become a coach or become a higher role, become a president of Football Federation

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one day." I want to make this way easy for the next generation which is coming after me.

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I don't want the generation before me to

0:57:54.000,0:57:55.000  
have the same experience and the same challenges, or the same struggle

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I went through. I don't want the next generation to come and have the same experience.

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I want them to have an easy life so they can build new things and innovate new stuff

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in this world and serve a better community and country.

0:58:18.000,0:58:25.000  
That was beautifully expressed. Thank you so much. Our hour is up, but I have one last question for you today.

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How do you feel about telling your story today? What emotions are you experiencing right now?

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Thank you for asking that. I feel proud.

0:58:36.000,0:58:52.000  
I feel happy. I feel mad, not for myself or for my people,

0:58:52.000,0:58:55.000  
but for the international community. They went to Afghanistan, and just left everything alone there, and left us behind.

0:58:55.000,0:59:25.000  
And now we are facing destroy. Honestly, we.. and this is 20 years, 2001 to 2021, everybody in Afghanistan, girls and boys, women and men, all of them were ready to rebuild Afghanistan, on the education level and on the government level, in leadership, in business, and in

0:59:26.000,0:59:35.000  
any area that you see. Everybody who was trying to get involved and rebuild and make it better.

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But unfortunately, now, all those plans, or all those dreams are destroyed.

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And now rebuilding Afghanistan takes another decade, or maybe a few decades, and that is so hard.

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That's why I'm using 'mad', because we are now facing

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a movie that we cannot direct,

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or we cannot change it, and it's really hard.

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I wish this group get out of Afghanistan

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as soon as possible, and all girls who are living in Afghanistan right now, and all the families that are in Afghanistan to find jobs,

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find a place to go get education and have a normal life.

1:00:21.000,1:00:22.000  
We are not desiring, or we are not dreaming

1:00:22.000,1:00:35.000

of a beautiful and a very developed country. We were happy with our normal life in Afghanistan and the normal lifestyle.

1:00:35.000,1:00:41.000

Thank you so much for expressing that. I hope that as well for you and for the future of your country.

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Our time is up, right now, but I look forward to talking with you again.

1:00:44.000,1:00:56.000

I'm going to stop the recording. But before I do one last time, thank you so much for taking the time to tell your story today. I really appreciate it.

## Interview (Part 2) with Hajar Abulfazl on April 14, 2023

0:00:03.000,0:00:06.000

Good evening, Hajar! It's so nice to see you.

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How are you today?

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Thank you, Professor. I'm fine.

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So what I'm going to do is begin with an introduction of the project and of you, and then we'll continue the conversation that we started a couple of weeks ago.

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Let me read your bio: Hajar Abulfazl is originally from Kabul.

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Did I pronounce Kabul correctly, or is it Kabul, Afghanistan?

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Kabul or Kabul, is good.

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I've heard both. Okay, thank you. And now lives with her husband in Oakland, California.

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She moved to the United States in July of 2017.

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She speaks Farsi, also known as Dari, and English. Hajar started her studies at Montgomery College in the spring of 2019.

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She is majoring in Community Health at Montgomery College, and is taking classes remotely.

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She anticipates graduating from Montgomery College in the fall of 2023. Hajar coached soccer in Oahu Hawaii, last year.

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Wow, that's great! Today she works as a soccer coach, and as the coordinator of a girls soccer program with a nonprofit organization Soccer without Borders, and in her spare time she enjoys playing soccer, hiking, and exploring San Francisco

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and other parts of California. So a little bit of background for those who are watching this video

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if they did not see the first one. My name is Heather Bruce Satrom. I teach an ELAP, English Language for Academic Purposes

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at Montgomery College. This project is called History

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in the Making: Documenting Stories of Immigrant and Refugee Students at MC,

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and the goal is to help others better understand the experiences of immigrant and refugees in Montgomery County, Maryland. Telling your story

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will enable others to better understand the challenges that immigrants face, and better appreciate the resilience and perseverance of people in your community.

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I'm so grateful for your participation.

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Thank you!

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Thank you for reading my bio, and I am very excited to continue this conversation with you.

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Me, too. Me, too. Today is Friday, April 14th.

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It's about 5 p.m. This is the second of two interviews.

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The last time we spoke, we talked about your experience growing up in Afghanistan. Today

0:02:31.000,0:02:38.000  
we'll have a chance to build on our earlier confusion and talk more about the work that you're doing in Oakland, California, with Soccer without Borders.

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You had a chance to read the interview questions in advance.

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But please note that all the questions are optional. If you want to skip a question,

0:02:48.000,0:02:55.000  
that's fine. If you need a break, please let me know. We'll take about an hour to talk today.

0:02:55.000,0:02:59.000  
So first, could you state your full name for me please?

0:02:59.000,0:03:00.000  
It is spelled Hajar Abulfazl, h, a, j, a, r

0:03:00.000,0:03:12.000  
And the last name is, a, b, u, l, f, a, z, l

0:03:12.000,0:03:15.000  
Thank you. And do I have permission to record this interview?

0:03:15.000,0:03:16.000  
Yes.

0:03:16.000,0:03:22.000  
Thank you! Alright. In our last conversation, you told me about how you started playing soccer in Afghanistan, about playing for the Women's National Team

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of your home country, about traveling to other countries. Could you tell me a little bit more about that? Where you went when you were traveling with your team? And how that travel experience affected you?

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Sure. When I started when I was selected for the national team

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that was 2009, and I started to travel with the national team.

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First I was in Germany, because Germany had five years contract with the football, Afghanistan's Women's National Team, to have a training every season for 25 days.

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Then I went for two times there. Then I had time to go..

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What the other international competition was, in some European countries. It was Germany and Norway. In Asia

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we had more competitions, like with Qatar, Jordan, a lot of them were in South Asia,

0:04:30.000,0:04:46.000  
like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India, Nepal. For all of those I had a very good experience. The most favorite one was when we had a friendly match with the Qatar

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National Team. That was 2011, and we won 2-1.

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That must have felt great.

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It was really good, and I feel that that was one of the best

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matches I had for Afghanistan.

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I think what is so remarkable about that story is how soccer opened up all these doors for you to learn about other cultures and

0:05:10.000,0:05:30.000  
other languages. Can you, maybe tell us a little bit about how your world opened up through this travel? What you learned about yourself? Or what traveling enabled you to do as far as growing and becoming who you are now?

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How did it affect you?

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Oh, very good question, Professor. Traveling made my vision wider.

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I was thinking, I had a plan to graduate from high school,

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just go to university, or just continue my playing soccer.

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But I didn't know how much I can expand my plan, or how much I can make bigger

0:05:48.000,0:06:08.000  
my vision for my future, but soccer.. through soccer and through these international traveling, I could meet more people, and I can read more bio, meet a lot of different people with different backgrounds,

0:06:08.000,0:06:13.000  
and who they are working for, for the soccer or beyond soccer?

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I learned so much from so many people around the world, which was Europe countries, Asia countries.

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I even came to United States a few times for a training camp in California.

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All of these combined, made me have a more positive attitude, or a positive vision for myself, for my life, because everybody has a different experience or a different culture and different challenges.

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But these experiences make everybody, or made myself a better person.

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I can stand for myself, and I can speak about my challenges, speak about my problems. After a few years of working for the Football Federation,

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they made me as advocate to not just stand for myself, and also fighting for others' rights and speak about them to get their rights,

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which they deserved it. All these ones, I'm sure the culture from the Middle East and South Asia made more..

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Made me more a better person. Because my family, or my country was similar with these countries

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we visited, but I brought so many experience to my team, and I bring to my school. I share with all my classmates, share with my teammates, because they couldn't.. they didn't have the chance to travel, but I was kind of a messenger to bring the message from the other side of the

0:08:00.000,0:08:21.000  
world, or from other countries, in the class, or in the school and in the team, which made their mind also open, as I did for myself. That was a really good experience, and I am so happy. It was not just playing soccer, that opened a lot of opportunities for me to travel, I can

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participate in some international conferences, or international workshops to build and receive a capacity and other.. not playing soccer, but the other knowledges, too.

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When you're describing this, I'm thinking about how, when you travel, you were learning about different cultures.

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But you were also teaching others about your culture, and you were teaching others about what it means to be an Afghan woman, and I think, certainly here in the United States, we have a lot of images from the media about women living under the Taliban and we have these ideas

0:08:57.000,0:09:08.000  
of women in burqas being isolated, staying at home, and you were and are projecting a very different image.

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You know, you're projecting an image of a very strong, independent, athletic articulate woman.

0:09:14.000,0:09:23.000  
You have this chance to show the world that Afghan women are more than just the stereotypes that we see.

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So I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about your experiences

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if you have felt stereotyped by others? Do people have these preconceptions about what it means to be a woman from Afghanistan? And how do you..

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How do you teach others about the reality of what it means to be a woman

0:09:43.000,0:09:44.000  
from Afghanistan?

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Yes, I felt it, and I experienced that the other countries, as well,

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they don't know a lot about Afghanistan. As you mentioned, we are just watching the news.

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They're just sharing specific news, or specific subjects to people.

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They're not sharing all details on all,

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maybe in a good.. for other people. But when I had the chance to travel, the people were thinking we always have burqa,

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there is no freedom, there is no school, there is no playing sport, and even they didn't think about it that we are willing to have

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work outside of home, because, many years the media gave them, because of the Taliban regime or other regime in Afghanistan, to put us in a shelter, that we cannot work, or we cannot go in school. That was a good chance for me to.. when I go and see other people and I can share my experience

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from Afghanistan, about food, music, women's rights, and all the activities

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we have. Specifically, in 2015, 2016, I had more travel

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I went to Japan, Germany, and Norway, Denmark,

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all these countries. And I had seminars and workshop, and I had the chance to talk with a lot of people, one-on-one or one as a big groups and the most common question all of them has was, "do you.." Or if anyone is working in a government, anyone working

0:11:31.000,0:11:49.000  
outside? Do you have right to choose your school? All these kind of.. I said yes, because we are in Afghanistan, but I feel we have more freedom..

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0:11:50.000,0:11:57.000  
We have more freedom than other countries. I'm talking about 5-6 years ago. We have more freedom than other countries. Iran is our next.. or Saudi Arabia or the Middle East countries.

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We've.. I felt it. I have more freedom than other countries in our region, because we had that right to go to school, and we had the right to go to any university we want.

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And also if we want to go to a stadium and watch the game, we had that chance. There was a specific place for all females, or families to just sit there and watch the football, which few countries in the Middle East or in South Asia, they don't have that, and the government banned, that they cannot go

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to the stadium, but we had that one. Plus, at that time, 37% of women were working for the government at the leadership part. In the Parliament,

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we had more than 37% of was, Parliament were women. And we had a Minister,

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we had ambassadors, and we had a lot of doctors. Those things made me happy, and also it's good to share with the people to know

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that woman had that right to go out, outside and make history for them, and make make a pathway for the next generation to come and follow that one.

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We had that, as you mentioned, the stereotype that women are just staying home, and they should be at home.

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But those ones were for longer ago, which I received when I was starting playing soccer.

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They'd say, "you belong to the kitchen. You are belong to stay home.

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You do not belong to the green field," which is soccer field, "you don't belong here.

0:13:38.000,0:13:42.000  
Just go where you belong," that means that you belong to the kitchen.

0:13:42.000,0:13:52.000  
Just cook and raise children, but with all of those messages we received, but we had that chance, or we had that ability to sure ourselves in the social participations, our communities..

0:13:52.000,0:14:08.000  
Yes, we can be part of the society, part of making the country a better country.

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From what I've read about your time as a professional soccer player, I understand that you made a choice to cover your hair.

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You were kind of sending a message out to the world,

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I think, by by doing that. Can you talk about the message that you were trying to convey by covering your hair while you played soccer?

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There are a few reasons, but why I love to have it is because, first, I love to have it.

0:14:41.000,0:15:02.000  
But the second reason why I kept it is because I was there to encourage the next generation, or younger generation to come to play soccer, and all families or fathers were watching me, how I looked. Because if you're representing something, or you want to encourage people to come to you and follow your rules, or follow

0:15:02.000,0:15:10.000  
your pathway, then first, they will look at you, what you achieved, or what you have done.

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Then they will, maybe, convince themselves that, yes, this is a good way.

0:15:11.000,0:15:28.000  
That's why I kept all the culture from Afghanistan. I kept all the values from Islam and Afghanistan to show a better.. or show what they are looking for.

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Because our mission was not to change completely the culture, or change the religion,

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but we wanted to make.. to give them.. Give women and girls freedom to come play soccer, and to come play any other sports they want.

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We didn't have the plan to change completely what is established.

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We kept all those values, and we pursued our mission, which was increasing the number of the players, because I found soccer is a good way to to fight for yourself and make yourself a better person or earn what you want in this world.

0:16:13.000,0:16:22.000  
That's why I encourage more girls in Afghanistan to come to play soccer and find your life.

0:16:22.000,0:16:41.000  
In a way, it's a very visible message, I think, to young Muslim women all over the world that you could be athletic and strong, and still be modest in your dress. It seems like it was a very concrete and quiet way of saying what you wanted to say. I think that

0:16:41.000,0:16:44.000  
that was a very interesting message the way that you did it.

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I think there was this period of time when many people felt really hopeful about the future of Afghanistan, and of course the past few years have been extremely difficult.

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Do you have family and friends in Afghanistan now, and are you in communication with them?

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And if so, can you tell me about their experience now?

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Yes, there is a lot of people left behind in Afghanistan.

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They are still living in Afghanistan, but the only difference from before is, they cannot be outside of a home, and they cannot go to school, and they cannot continue their.. some of their activities.

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Which is so hard for us to watch them. It has been exactly almost two years, and before the Taliban it was Covid, and they stayed home for a while because of Covid.

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It means it has been few years that they haven't been outside of home and to have activities, which is really hard.

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And now they're contacting me every single day, and I am receiving messages from WhatsApp, through WhatsApp, and they're sending me the picture, sending me messages, a lot of.. and that is so hard for me to receive it.

0:18:04.000,0:18:23.000  
And I cannot.. at the same time I receive it, and I'm talking with them, but I cannot do anything for them, which is harder, but all I can do is talking with them nicely, and give them positive messages, and tell them "this is not permanent, this is temporary. It will.. this regime

0:18:23.000,0:18:39.000  
will leave Afghanistan, and then another government will come. You will have a better future very soon." Kind of to give them hope to just not thinking today, thinking about tomorrow.

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And I'm just telling them, "you have your yard, or you have your room,

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do some activities in the room, or at the house. Do not just stay home or watching something.

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You can have some activities." Meanwhile, The Taliban is there, shut down everything,

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but you can do something at home. There is a lot of.. because all of them have social media,

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I say social media is a school right now for everybody, because there's a lot of people or influencer. They are sharing good messages or good lessons. You can just go and watch them, or listen to them.

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With that one you can gain knowledge, or you can gain information,

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but at the same time you cannot go out. That's the only thing I can do for them to just tell them to use these ways.

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But on the other side, I can understand them.

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It's really hard to lose everything. And there.. of course, I'm telling them there's hope,

0:19:40.000,0:19:52.000  
but right now they feel there's no hope, and there is no future for them right now, and it's so hard.

0:19:52.000,0:19:56.000  
But it sounds like you do feel hopeful about the future of your country.

0:19:56.000,0:20:14.000  
I'm very hopeful, and I I'm sure this is not the end of our freedom, and not the end of Afghanistan, and at the same time, they came 20 years ago, and they stayed in Afghanistan for a few years, but their government collapsed, and I believe this regime

0:20:14.000,0:20:22.000  
will collapse again very soon, and all these generation who are here,

0:20:22.000,0:20:27.000  
we will go and build that country again, and a better Afghanistan.

0:20:27.000,0:20:29.000  
When you feel discouraged about the situation, how do you maintain your hope?

0:20:29.000,0:20:41.000  
How do you maintain your positive energy? What sustains you and gives you strength to keep feeling optimistic?

0:20:41.000,0:20:49.000  
Always, I'm saying, the big regimes or the big government they never stay forever.

0:20:49.000,0:20:55.000  
All.. Any government or any regime has their period, time. If they are coming, they will stay a few years, but they will

0:20:55.000,0:21:03.000  
not be forever. But we are trying to.. myself,

0:21:03.000,0:21:04.000  
I'm trying to gain experience and gain knowledge so as soon as we can..

0:21:04.000,0:21:18.000  
I'm making myself ready for that situation if we get our Afghanistan back, our freedom,

0:21:18.000,0:21:34.000  
then at that time, we should be ready to go back and get responsibility and make it, because at the same time, if I sit and I watch the Taliban what they are doing, and shut down for all the activities for women,

0:21:34.000,0:21:37.000  
and I sit and just say, what are they doing? and crying..

0:21:37.000,0:22:01.000  
It will not change anything, but if I think for the future, for five years later, or 10 years later, then I can keep that hope, or keep that plan for myself, and I can watch the future, and at the same time, learn something or gain experience for going back to Afghanistan a few years later and make

0:22:01.000,0:22:02.000  
Afghanistan better. That is the only thing that I said, "Hajar,

0:22:02.000,0:22:14.000  
you're young, and at 10 years or five years, or even 15 years later, you can go back to Afghanistan and make it what you want.

0:22:14.000,0:22:27.000  
And I think, I mean, what you said was really interesting to me, and when I'm interviewing all the students participating in this project, I'm curious about what helps with mental well-being, emotional

0:22:27.000,0:22:32.000  
well-being, and I'm wondering, you as an athlete,

0:22:32.000,0:22:45.000  
the connection between physical exercise and emotional health. Is that something that's important to you that you've noticed, or that you encourage of others? Is there a connection for you between physical health and emotional health?

0:22:45.000,0:22:54.000  
Oh! That is a very good point, Professor. That is also very important, because we have to think first of ourselves,

0:22:54.000,0:23:00.000  
our health. Always, I'm at the morning.. now it is Ramadan, but if it is not Ramadan,

0:23:00.000,0:23:19.000  
I'm always running in the morning. If I cannot run, I will walk, but I will go outside, to get the fresh air. Every week I have a lot of.. I'm practicing soccer, and if I'm not practicing, I'm going to the gym to

0:23:19.000,0:23:28.000  
run. All these.. I believe physical activities is giving us a positive attitude, a positive energy.

0:23:28.000,0:23:45.000  
That's the only thing we can do for us to keep our body healthy, and with writing and reading and talking with my fellows, or talking with my teammates, or talking with my friends in Afghanistan, or outside of Afghanistan,

0:23:45.000,0:23:55.000  
these all included, they give me positive energy to stay calm and not get too depressed, or get negative energy.

0:23:55.000,0:24:03.000  
Of course, our body, or our emotional is not always stable

0:24:03.000,0:24:18.000  
in one place. It will go down, or maybe go high, but with having all this conversation with the people, or having your lifestyle, or daily routine, to have a physical activity, reading books, or writing something.

0:24:18.000,0:24:25.000  
These ones make me happy. The other people also have something, maybe they have music,

0:24:25.000,0:24:33.000  
they have writing, or they have painting, some things to make them busy that can make them

0:24:33.000,0:24:38.000  
busy, and make them.. keep them healthy.

0:24:38.000,0:24:49.000  
Another thing that some students have mentioned is the importance of spirituality or religious faith, or having a community. Are those things that are also important to you?

0:24:49.000,0:24:51.000  
It is really important, Professor. That's why always I'm making friends. Any city I go, I don't want to

0:24:51.000,0:24:54.000  
stay alone at home, especially on the weekend. I don't want to be home.

0:24:54.000,0:25:03.000  
I have one or two friends, I'm calling them, and I will take them to the park,

0:25:03.000,0:25:13.000  
take them to the museum, take them somewhere, and I make a plan with them. Even the easiest things I can do is inviting them at home and making food.

0:25:13.000,0:25:26.000  
Cooking is.. the food is something we have everybody in common, and we can make that with inviting them for eating, or inviting them to have food is building

0:25:26.000,0:25:38.000

community, is building relatives.. friends, which is real good. The easiest thing I can do is inviting them at home to making food with me at home.

0:25:38.000,0:25:41.000  
Cooking and eating together. That sounds like an excellent plan

0:25:41.000,0:25:46.000  
for combating frustration or loneliness, or any of the other

0:25:46.000,0:26:00.000  
negative emotions that I think so many people have gone through during the pandemic, and I think that recent events in your home country certainly had really tough impact on the Afghan community here, as well.

0:26:00.000,0:26:07.000  
So you came to, if I remember correctly, the United States in July of 2017. Is that right?

0:26:07.000,0:26:08.000  
Yes.

0:26:08.000,0:26:09.000  
Can you tell me a little bit about your decision to come to the United States at that point?

0:26:09.000,0:26:14.000  
What happened in your life or in your country that made you decide that year

0:26:14.000,0:26:20.000  
it's time for me to move to the United States?

0:26:20.000,0:26:37.000  
2017, okay.. 2015, 2016, we had the.. the government was there, but every week or every month we have a lot of explosion from the different terrorist groups, like The Taliban, or some of them..

0:26:37.000,0:26:48.000  
There's targeting the army and targeting women activists, or they're targeting the people.

0:26:48.000,0:27:05.000  
They were active at the Government, and we were witness of every week explosion. They attacked a school, attacked the mosque, or even they attacked the wedding ceremony.

0:27:05.000,0:27:12.000  
And that year, I came to the United States at the beginning of the year,

0:27:12.000,0:27:16.000  
and I had a one-year visa in my passport.

0:27:16.000,0:27:22.000  
Then I came two times at the beginning of the year because of two meetings,

0:27:22.000,0:27:31.000  
but when I went back to Afghanistan, the three or four months ago of that, to make a decision, I was at the medical school, and we had.. I remember we had

0:27:31.000,0:28:01.000  
a Pathology exam. And all students were at the big hall for the final exam, and a huge explosion happened in exactly half of a mile away from our university. The building was huge glasses, and with that attack, at the square of our university, all the glasses broke and all the building

0:28:02.000,0:28:20.000  
collapsed, but not the floors, all the glasses collapse, and all the broken. We had a lot of people inured with that glasses broken, and most of people just they pass out, or because they couldn't..

0:28:20.000,0:28:29.000  
It was shaking so badly. At that time I felt "Hajar, if I was not at this school, I was out at the street,

0:28:29.000,0:28:33.000  
I might lose my life, and I will not be alive."

0:28:33.000,0:28:44.000

But when I go home, because my father was at army, and he gave me.. always I had a driver, and I had a car.

0:28:44.000,0:28:51.000  
They took me to school, they took me to the soccer practice.

0:28:51.000,0:28:57.000  
Then, when I arrived home, my father said, "Hajar, this is done. You cannot go to the soccer

0:28:57.000,0:28:58.000  
practices," because the school I cannot stop,

0:28:58.000,0:29:16.000  
but I think we have to stay home for a while, because those attacks were, sometime it was.. before it was a one attack, but recently, in 2017, we had more than 20 attacked in a few months.

0:29:16.000,0:29:23.000  
It was a lot, and we lost so many people. And my father said, and my mom also, both of them,

0:29:23.000,0:29:34.000  
they said, this is the time we have to make decision to be out of Afghanistan, and any of you who have an opportunity, or any of you who already has an opportunity to leave the country,

0:29:34.000,0:29:42.000  
it is the time. At least one of us should be alive outside of.. out of Afghanistan. We should not stay

0:29:42.000,0:29:49.000  
all of all of us at home, and if anything happened, all of us die at the same time.

0:29:49.000,0:29:52.000  
At least one of us, should be alive.

0:29:52.000,0:29:53.000  
Then talking with my mom, and she gave me the permission to have to leave.

0:29:53.000,0:30:00.000  
Then I traveled to United States and stayed here.

0:30:00.000,0:30:04.000  
That must have been terrifying. What you describe with the explosions.

0:30:04.000,0:30:06.000  
I'm so sorry that you went through that. When you came here,

0:30:06.000,0:30:14.000  
did you come as an international student on an F-1 visa, or through a refugee program?

0:30:14.000,0:30:15.000  
Or how were you able to..?

0:30:15.000,0:30:21.000  
I came on a B1 visa, that is a tourist visa.

0:30:21.000,0:30:26.000  
I came with that one, then I stayed.. I had,

0:30:26.000,0:30:34.000  
I talked with a lawyer, then I applied for asylum mid summer of that year.

0:30:34.000,0:30:37.000  
Was that a long and complicated process? I'm trying to imagine the bureaucracy and what was involved.

0:30:37.000,0:30:43.000  
I think a lot of Americans don't know nothing at all.

0:30:43.000,0:30:49.000  
Do you want all the details? That's a big story.

0:30:49.000,0:31:10.000

This is a long story, Professor, and there is.. the procedure of being a refugee in the United States is, first of all, is not easy, and it is not a short time. It has been a long time, because I came here,

0:31:10.000,0:31:20.000

but my other teammates, or my other friends, they went to other countries, like European countries, or Canada. They got opportunity to

0:31:20.000,0:31:31.000

finish all the paperwork and all the procedure of immigration at that country so quickly and easy,

0:31:31.000,0:31:59.000

easier than me. But in the United States, it is really complicated, and I don't know how to explain why it is so complicated, and it is such a long time to just wait and to receive one paper or receive your being asylum, or you are granted, or even sometimes so long to not be granted. It has been exactly more

0:31:59.000,0:32:09.000

than six years, Professor. I couldn't receive any granted document from the country to grant me as a refugee here.

0:32:09.000,0:32:27.000

And that's why I couldn't finish my school, because I couldn't receive any benefit from the Government. I have not received 0 benefit from the country as a refugee here. I work and I earn money and I go to school.

0:32:27.000,0:32:35.000

I did all of it for myself. I work more than 40 hours.

0:32:35.000,0:32:48.000

Sometimes to just earn money to pay my rent, or pay my grocery, and I have never received anything from the Government, only I received one paper that is the work permit.

0:32:48.000,0:32:57.000

That's all I received, and it's so hard. All my family they after.. all my friends and family

0:32:57.000,0:33:05.000

they left the country after me. They are already granted, and they already received a refugee status.

0:33:05.000,0:33:16.000

But in here, in the United States they put you.. They gave you one letter and keep you for a long time here, and I lost a lot of opportunities for being here.

0:33:16.000,0:33:22.000

First, my life was in danger in Afghanistan,

0:33:22.000,0:33:39.000

that's why I left it, but if I was safe, or my country was safer, and I believe that I could work, or I could gain a lot of more experience, or I can gain a lot of achievements from international, because I lost a lot of opportunity,

0:33:39.000,0:33:50.000

and there's so many countries they invited me as a speaker, or as an attendee to conferences. I even lost,

0:33:50.000,0:33:55.000

I missed a few international competitions with my national team.

0:33:55.000,0:34:12.000

I couldn't go and join in, because I didn't have a travel document. I applied and I paid for the travel documents two times, and unfortunately they rejected because they said there is no emergency reason for you to to travel out of the United States.

0:34:12.000,0:34:17.000

If you go out of the United States, you cannot come back to the United States.

0:34:17.000,0:34:21.000

It means you will lose here, and on the other side,

0:34:21.000,0:34:29.000  
you will lose the other opportunities to kind of.. I cannot explain it on how this procedure is.

0:34:29.000,0:34:39.000  
The only thing is, it is really hard, and I cannot believe this country made this system for the refugee to come and experience this one.

0:34:39.000,0:34:47.000  
At the same time they want to help Afghan refugee, and they are shouting or they are sharing

0:34:47.000,0:34:54.000  
all this that they're helping refugee, but I haven't seen any help.

0:34:54.000,0:35:03.000  
Thank you for describing that, because I think it's something that a lot of Americans don't realize, just how time consuming and expensive and complicated the process is.

0:35:03.000,0:35:08.000  
So, I appreciate you describing that. And I'm sorry, that's been your experience.

0:35:08.000,0:35:12.000  
We're really lucky to have you and I'm glad that you stuck with it, and that you're here, because I think you are contributing so much.

0:35:12.000,0:35:24.000  
And I do want to talk to you about your work with Soccer without Borders, because I think it's really interesting.

0:35:24.000,0:35:30.000  
Can you tell me a little bit about the organization, and how you got involved with it?

0:35:30.000,0:35:46.000  
Soccer without Borders.. I wish I founded it a few years ago, so I can spend more of my time at this organization, but I'm lucky I founded it last year.

0:35:46.000,0:35:50.000  
I have a LinkedIn account,

0:35:50.000,0:35:55.000  
then I'm following some organization at that account

0:35:55.000,0:35:58.000  
and I saw this nonprofit announcing they

0:35:58.000,0:36:04.000  
were looking for.. they're open for hiring.

0:36:04.000,0:36:15.000  
Then I read the description, and I said, "Oh, this is so fit for me, and I am very fit to this position."

0:36:15.000,0:36:34.000  
Then I applied for the Colorado state, but when I applied they said.. I had two interviews, and when I passed the two interviews and the third they said, "Hajar, I think we are very happy to have you in California, and state of Colorado." They sent me the

0:36:34.000,0:36:45.000  
description, for being in California and being a coach and as a coordinator program with the newcomers, especially Afghan girls.

0:36:45.000,0:36:51.000  
And then, when I read it I said, "yes, it's exactly what I'm looking for and I'd love to be here."

0:36:51.000,0:37:02.000  
Then they hired me online, and I moved from Hawaii to California, and I started my job here beginning of January 2023.

0:37:02.000,0:37:09.000  
It has me three months, almost, that I'm working with them, and I found it exactly..

0:37:09.000,0:37:19.000  
I feel that I live, or I build it by this job, or for being here, because I gained experience for the past few years as a refugee

0:37:19.000,0:37:43.000  
and in different states of the United States. Plus, I have experience from Afghanistan working for the Football Federation and playing soccer. All combined, and I am a very good fit at this position because we are here working with the refugee for newcomers to make a place a home for them.

0:37:43.000,0:38:02.000  
Soccer is the tool we are using to make their life better and make them make a positive life, or make it a good community for them to not feel alone, or not feel isolated in the places.

0:38:02.000,0:38:11.000  
That's why we keep talking with them, recruiting new players, and going to the school and talking with their teachers.

0:38:11.000,0:38:32.000  
Take the time from the half or 10 minutes, or 15 minutes off of the different classes to just go there and present and introducing our program and introducing ourselves to the girls, so, if they like to come play soccer, and inviting them there and give them home. I really happy

0:38:32.000,0:38:39.000  
I am here because, as I said, those experiences now I don't want these newcomers

0:38:39.000,0:38:44.000  
they felt or they faced the same experience I had.

0:38:44.000,0:38:55.000  
That's why I want to help them a lot. Give them a very good view from this country, or because it is, what I said about the government, all those..

0:38:55.000,0:38:58.000  
But there's a lot of good people around here.

0:38:58.000,0:39:13.000  
They really love people to help them and give them job, give them assignments. Just make them busy, in a good way so they can learn something, they can gain experience, which is really good.

0:39:13.000,0:39:22.000  
And here, we are just asking to come play soccer, but at the same time is not

0:39:22.000,0:39:26.000  
we are focusing to make them a professional soccer player.

0:39:26.000,0:39:39.000  
At the same time, we want them to provide a community so they feel at home. Feel me like a sister, or like a mom, or anything they want.

0:39:39.000,0:39:47.000  
Just feel it.. and I'm always there for them, so if they need help for mental health or physical activities, or anything they want to have it,

0:39:47.000,0:40:10.000  
we are here. Even two days ago, one of the girls said. I asked them, what makes you happy, so I can do it here for you? They said, "Hajar, shopping really making me happy," and I said, "I will take you to some of the clothing or some shopping if

0:40:10.000,0:40:20.000  
you know a specific one, I will take you there. But if you don't know, I will take you to the mall or somewhere, so that you can just walk around." Because it has been six months,

0:40:20.000,0:40:39.000  
she arrived to the United States, she received some documents, and she joined this school, but she didn't see dark or outside. She hasn't seen night of the United States because she is afraid to go outside, and she doesn't have car, and there is no other person,

0:40:39.000,0:40:46.000  
or there's no other community to take them to somewhere, like a park or somewhere.

0:40:46.000,0:40:49.000  
And just she said, "Hajar, it has been six months

0:40:49.000,0:40:52.000  
I haven't seen dark. It means all the nights

0:40:52.000,0:40:57.000  
she's staying home. Just going to school and come back about three o'clock

0:40:57.000,0:41:00.000  
before night, they are all home,. There's no night.

0:41:00.000,0:41:05.000  
That's why I said, okay, I'm making some fun days. We call fun days.

0:41:05.000,0:41:11.000  
On fun days, we take them to trips, for hiking, for beach days.

0:41:11.000,0:41:17.000  
We take them to go golfing, do anything that makes them happy.

0:41:17.000,0:41:18.000  
We will take them, as I said today, we have gardening.

0:41:18.000,0:41:29.000  
We bought a lot of stuff to just make them, plant seeds and also soil. Everything over there so

0:41:29.000,0:41:38.000  
they can make their plant, any plant they like. They plant the ways they have. All these things,

0:41:38.000,0:41:46.000  
I know it is really simple, but I believe that is really good, because it makes them happy.

0:41:46.000,0:41:56.000  
Because they want to just be out of home. They want to just be out of that big home where they are, because they want to talk with new people.

0:41:56.000,0:42:01.000  
They wanna talk with new people, new teammates, all those.

0:42:01.000,0:42:22.000  
And all I am working here, I put.. I can find the dots from here to the Afghanistan experience. I have. And I'm really lucky I'm here, and I want to try my best to make them very happy and a good community here, because they deserve to be happy

0:42:22.000,0:42:24.000  
and they deserve to be safe and healthy.

0:42:24.000,0:42:31.000  
So is the program based at Oakland International High School? Is that where you're focusing your work with that community?

0:42:31.000,0:42:37.000  
Yes. Our office in a California is all Oakland. But I specific,

0:42:37.000,0:42:46.000  
I will be at Oakland International High School, and I will start with middle school in Roosevelt Middle School.

0:42:46.000,0:42:51.000  
I will go on because they receive newcomers over there, too, and I will work with two schools.

0:42:51.000,0:42:54.000

0:42:54.000,0:42:59.000  
Where are they coming from? Are they also from Afghanistan, or from other countries?

0:42:59.000,0:43:01.000  
Can you describe a little bit the population?

0:43:01.000,0:43:07.000  
The population we have.. In Oakland International High School, we have from any

0:43:07.000,0:43:30.000  
place from this world. Even we have from Ukraine, from Afghanistan, from Yemen, from different countries, from the Middle East, like from Syria, and from Jordan. The majority of our participants are from South America.

0:43:30.000,0:43:36.000  
South America countries, we have a majority of our participants.

0:43:36.000,0:43:43.000  
I think what's particularly powerful, is that you have lived it.

0:43:43.000,0:43:45.000  
You've gone through this experience, and they can see you, and how much you've accomplished.

0:43:45.000,0:43:54.000  
So even a simple thing like a soccer practice, or going on a shopping trip, or planting a garden,

0:43:54.000,0:44:04.000  
these little activities with you, I think, can be pretty powerful, and a way to start forming a community.

0:44:04.000,0:44:09.000  
Yes. Today one of them said, "Hajar.

0:44:09.000,0:44:17.000  
You have so much energy, and your English is really good, and your attitude is so positive when you're coming to the class

0:44:17.000,0:44:23.000  
and you say, 'hello, everybody,' always.. how can we have this positive

0:44:23.000,0:44:26.000  
energy? I wish we have half of that. We are watching you like a role model. We want to have that energy like you."

0:44:26.000,0:44:38.000  
One of them I had.. not a therapists or not

0:44:38.000,0:44:46.000  
a psychology class, but we are setting with our participants one by one to talk with them and what the challenge they have,

0:44:46.000,0:44:51.000  
what problems they have in family, out of family or home, or out of home.

0:44:51.000,0:44:58.000  
And she said, "Hajar, I'm not a shy person, and I am not so quiet,

0:44:58.000,0:45:07.000  
but here, it makes me quiet. Here, I cannot be who I am."

0:45:07.000,0:45:14.000  
And I said, "it is normal. It is not kind of what this country gave you,

0:45:14.000,0:45:15.000  
but, yes, because you came from one culture to another culture, and it is so hard,

0:45:15.000,0:45:28.000  
and it takes time for you to adapt yourself to this culture. First, the food is not the same, the culture is not the same,

0:45:28.000,0:45:49.000  
the people are talking a different language. All this combined makes you quiet, and I know you are so active, and I know you're looking to fly again higher and higher, and I am here to support you don't feel like that because you are shy. But as much as

0:45:49.000,0:45:52.000

you can, talk with the people if you see anyone. Talk with them, make friends. They are the same like you. You are a newcomer from one country,

0:45:52.000,0:45:57.000

and there are other people there coming from other countries. Make friends, and we are here to support you in any way.

0:45:57.000,0:46:13.000

Just tell me what we can do." I want to talk with them more, and to know what they're looking for. What the desire..

0:46:13.000,0:46:16.000

If I have that power to make that happen.

0:46:16.000,0:46:22.000

I remember how much positive energy you had when you were in my class, so I absolutely agree with what they were saying.

0:46:22.000,0:46:25.000

I think it's very inspiring, and I love that about you.

0:46:25.000,0:46:33.000

One thing I think that is particularly interesting about your experience is that you have been to many parts of the United States.

0:46:33.000,0:46:44.000

You've had a chance to see different regions of the United States and get an idea of how diverse our country is in terms of geography and culture.

0:46:44.000,0:46:51.000

Has that surprised you a bit, how diverse the United States is?

0:46:51.000,0:47:01.000

Have you.. What are your thoughts about that, having lived in Maryland and Hawaii and California, now. Tell me a little bit about your impressions.

0:47:01.000,0:47:10.000

As you say, yes, the United States is a big country, and they have a lot of different culture

0:47:10.000,0:47:16.000

than we have, or different communities. I lived in New York, I lived in Washington DC,

0:47:16.000,0:47:28.000

I lived in Virginia, in Maryland, and even in Tennessee, California, and Hawaii, all of them, and I know it is not easy for anyone to move from one place to another place.

0:47:28.000,0:47:37.000

I have.. I heard, so many people, they are born in the the same city, they grow up, and they live all their life in the same city, and they don't want to move.

0:47:37.000,0:47:43.000

And this is.. They feel this is a big risk to take a ticket and move to another state.

0:47:43.000,0:47:44.000

But I feel I am a traveler and I came..

0:47:44.000,0:48:00.000

I missed, or I lost everything I have in my country, and I came here with one baggage, and that was a few clothes or a few books

0:48:00.000,0:48:05.000

I had and I didn't have anything else. But I built a home here for myself.

0:48:05.000,0:48:06.000

If I go from one state to another state, it's really easy for me.

0:48:06.000,0:48:17.000

It's nothing. Why I love to move to new places, because I want to make more community.

0:48:17.000,0:48:22.000

I want to meet more people. And I want to expand my networks and expand my communities

0:48:22.000,0:48:33.000  
and learn more from different people. This is one reason, another reason is, I'm looking for opportunities for a job or school.

0:48:33.000,0:48:36.000  
If I find it, I don't think about

0:48:36.000,0:48:40.000  
where the destination is, or where the place is. I want to just go and focus on that. Even when I moved to Hawaii, it was the reason to play coaching soccer over there.

0:48:40.000,0:48:49.000  
That was from Maryland to Hawaii.

0:48:49.000,0:48:54.000  
It's farther than from Afghanistan.

0:48:54.000,0:48:55.000

0:48:55.000,0:48:58.000  
But I took that risk, and I moved there, and I go there.

0:48:58.000,0:49:04.000  
I didn't have any home, and I didn't have even single friend over there.

0:49:04.000,0:49:13.000  
No one. I just arrived to the airport, took the Airbnb, and looked for an apartment, and I found it, and I continued my life over there.

0:49:13.000,0:49:17.000  
Even when I found this job, and I said, "okay, this is my mission.

0:49:17.000,0:49:18.000  
I have to be around my people, around people to serve them. I cannot stay here

0:49:18.000,0:49:29.000  
and just coaching for a few people," which is so interesting for me

0:49:29.000,0:49:38.000  
and I had fun over there, but my vision or I feel my personality is to work with bigger groups or bigger communities.

0:49:38.000,0:49:51.000  
When I felt.. when I heard the Afghan community came in California, and they need support, I said, "Hajar, it is the time. You must go and support them, because of the language I have and the experience

0:49:51.000,0:50:00.000  
I have. The experience from Afghanistan and the United States combined. It can help more people then that's why I am here."

0:50:00.000,0:50:11.000  
And about the communities, I could say that I am lucky to have good people came to me from United States,

0:50:11.000,0:50:21.000  
even from Tennessee, or anywhere I go, the community was very nice and kind with me and they were so generous..

0:50:21.000,0:50:26.000  
The people are generous.

0:50:26.000,0:50:31.000  
There were so many challenges during the pandemic for everyone,

0:50:31.000,0:50:39.000  
but I think one good thing that came out of the pandemic was increased opportunities for remote education.

0:50:39.000,0:50:49.000  
So I think it's wonderful that you're able to continue taking classes through Montgomery College and you're still pursuing your job

0:50:49.000,0:50:58.000  
opportunities and you're still able to travel, and you just keep going. I think that's one good thing that came out of the pandemic.

0:50:58.000,0:51:20.000  
When I think about you and your example, one question I have for you is, if you met a new student at Montgomery College, who was just starting, perhaps someone who just immigrated to the United States, or is a refugee, what advice would you give them?

0:51:20.000,0:51:36.000  
Advice would be.. I will tell them to find a community that works with you and with your expertise. Find NGOs, nonprofits, or a center to support your career.

0:51:36.000,0:51:43.000  
Because when I came here, the problem I had was

0:51:43.000,0:51:48.000  
people make me feel I was an incomplete..

0:51:48.000,0:52:04.000  
Because I was a refugee. They made me feel that I cannot do anything, and whenever I try to achieve something big, they were telling me you're newcomers. This is kind of beyond your reach.

0:52:04.000,0:52:11.000  
That's why I want to tell the newcomers to look for organizations that does not look at you,

0:52:11.000,0:52:17.000  
look at your paperwork, look at your experience, if you're legal or not, you're refugee or you're a U.S. citizen or you're not, they'll go

0:52:17.000,0:52:28.000  
and help you at building your skills and expertise that bring with you. Such an organization

0:52:28.000,0:52:30.000  
like I'm working here Soccer without Borders, which I, unfortunately, didn't find sooner.

0:52:30.000,0:52:58.000  
But if they are right now, I advise them to look for these nonprofit centers, and even in the college, even in their schools, there is some centers or their office, go there and talk with them and share your experience share your plans.

0:52:58.000,0:53:06.000  
I believe there are some people that can guide them well and guide them to where they can go and make them happy.

0:53:06.000,0:53:11.000  
Were there any resources at Montgomery College that you found particularly helpful?

0:53:11.000,0:53:16.000  
It was really helpful. One of them was the future link.

0:53:16.000,0:53:21.000  
They came there as a nonprofit.

0:53:21.000,0:53:34.000  
They have.. it was for a short period time, but they give you training about your personality, about..

0:53:34.000,0:53:38.000  
There is a mentor over there

0:53:38.000,0:53:43.000  
and guide you to where you want to work, or which major you want to choose.

0:53:43.000,0:53:44.000  
They give you a counselor, also. That helped me at MC.

0:53:44.000,0:54:01.000  
Plus, the counselors are really helpful. And I really.. I want to appreciate my English professors.

0:54:01.000,0:54:11.000  
They gave me a lot of confidence. Honestly, Professor, I received more confidence at this school.

0:54:11.000,0:54:20.000  
It wasn't out of school, but my English professors were really helpful, and still I have contact with them, and I love them so much, all of them.

0:54:20.000,0:54:28.000  
One of them is you and my other professor. All of you

0:54:28.000,0:54:35.000  
gave me that feeling, to receive and achieve something, which.. I had a lot of challenge that time to learn

0:54:35.000,0:54:52.000  
the language, learn at the college, but I think with receiving the messages, or receiving the emails from the Professor, make me so happy.

0:54:52.000,0:54:57.000  
That was the only thing I at the United States and the college, I think.

0:54:57.000,0:54:58.000  
We feel very lucky to have students like you.

0:54:58.000,0:55:12.000  
I think, working in this program, I had the opportunity to meet extraordinary people, like yourself, and to me it's very obvious that immigrants in this country contribute so much.

0:55:12.000,0:55:19.000  
But there are many Americans who don't have that opportunity to meet people from other countries, or to really get to know their stories.

0:55:19.000,0:55:29.000  
I think, my question is, if you could.. what is it that Americans should know about the experience of coming here? What is it like..

0:55:29.000,0:55:40.000  
For an American who was born and raised here, maybe their family's been here for generations.

0:55:40.000,0:55:48.000  
What did they not know, or not understand about your experience?

0:55:48.000,0:55:52.000  
They don't know what I experienced personally.

0:55:52.000,0:56:00.000  
They feel like.. I know the United States is a very developed country, and they have

0:56:00.000,0:56:04.000  
experience longer than us in Afghanistan,

0:56:04.000,0:56:28.000  
but I will love to tell the people to trust the generation that came from Afghanistan here. Not only Afghanistan, but other countries. Because, what I mean is, we had a lot of challenge in the country, from the family, from the society, from the government because of economic problems, the education system was

0:56:28.000,0:56:34.000  
the problem. Outside of being home there was a lot of problems,

0:56:34.000,0:56:49.000  
but we built a good life, and we received experience, and that country, and we make as an Ambassador, or as a Minister, or working as part of the government, and we gained that experience. When we are coming to the United States,

0:56:49.000,0:56:56.000

I know this is not equal or not. We don't know the system in the United States, but that's not that

0:56:56.000,0:57:05.000

we just born here. We had experience, and we still have them, and nobody can take that away from.

0:57:05.000,0:57:20.000

But I want to.. Anyone in any organization or any centers, not to see any refugee or anyone as a refugee, as a newborn.

0:57:20.000,0:57:21.000

Yeah, they have experience, and they had a lot of challenge,

0:57:21.000,0:57:45.000

and they passed, and they achieved that to come here. It's not easy to come to the United States. If you see the United States is not giving visa to anyone. You pass the interview at the Embassy of the U.S. at your country,

0:57:45.000,0:57:50.000

they will give you visa. It means, anyone who is coming to the United States,

0:57:50.000,0:58:08.000

they have something at their country to come here. And if they're coming, don't treat them like a newborn and give them.. talk with them. I'm sure that talking with them.. they will share a lot of information with you where they want to be. Even if they were a doctor in

0:58:08.000,0:58:12.000

Afghanistan, but they had a desire to work in another place.

0:58:12.000,0:58:22.000

It means.. when you're talking, then you can find a way for them. Like, "yes, I studied as a medical doctor, but I didn't want to be in the hospital."

0:58:22.000,0:58:26.000

Because in Afghanistan we didn't have a lot of choices.

0:58:26.000,0:58:33.000

But with the small choices or short choices, we made it, and we started. It means, when they're coming, just talk with them to find what they want. Always don't give the answer,

0:58:33.000,0:58:50.000

just ask what they want, then, with talking, you can find the solution, or you can find a way for them to introduce a place so they can just go there.

0:58:50.000,0:59:05.000

Do you feel sometimes people make assumptions about you as a Muslim woman, or an Afghan, or someone who is a non native speaker of English? Do people have stereotypes about who you are?

0:59:05.000,0:59:08.000

And if so, how do you overcome that?

0:59:08.000,0:59:09.000

Honestly, Professor, I wish that the confidence I have right now

0:59:09.000,0:59:26.000

I had two, three years, or a few years ago. I could talk with people. I think you have to pass the time sometimes to receive.. and I heard a lot from people, even if they were high profile,

0:59:26.000,0:59:35.000

they believe my ability. They believe, I'm capable of doing that thing,

0:59:35.000,0:59:36.000

0:59:36.000,0:59:40.000

but they didn't give me that opportunity to try it.

0:59:40.000,0:59:47.000

Even when there are so many project or so many

0:59:47.000,0:59:52.000

activities that belonged to Afghanistan, that was belonged to my people.

0:59:52.000,1:00:00.000  
I could help that one. I could be involved in that project, or I could be involved with that community. But they couldn't..

1:00:00.000,1:00:09.000  
They didn't involve me, and they stayed there and worked, and I couldn't tell them "excuse me!

1:00:09.000,1:00:17.000  
I know more than you my culture. I know more than you the vision, or the attitude of my people.

1:00:17.000,1:00:30.000  
I know what they need. I know what they know. But how you can go approach them and talk with them without knowing the culture, without knowing what they want."

1:00:30.000,1:00:33.000  
This experience I had, I want to give them opportunity.

1:00:33.000,1:00:43.000  
Talk with them. They know a lot. Give the opportunity from Afghan for the refugee from the Middle East to the Middle East. Even if I'm not part of Middle East,

1:00:43.000,1:00:51.000  
but I know the culture. I think I can talk with the families.

1:00:51.000,1:00:57.000  
I can talk with the girls. I can talk with their fathers and convince them and help them.

1:00:57.000,1:01:04.000  
I could be better supportive than you. Yes, you have good knowledge, and you have a good experience at that nonprofit, or that organization,

1:01:04.000,1:01:07.000  
but you don't know everything.

1:01:07.000,1:01:15.000  
We need to listen to the experts early. Where do you see yourself

1:01:15.000,1:01:20.000  
five years from now. When you think about the future, what do you hope for yourself,

1:01:20.000,1:01:21.000  
for your family, for your country? What do you envision?

1:01:21.000,1:01:24.000  
First, if I had the chance to receive my travel document I would be at the FIFA

1:01:24.000,1:01:35.000  
Football International Association. I will

1:01:35.000,1:01:42.000  
and I could travel around the world, and I could be at any World Cup..

1:01:42.000,1:01:47.000  
Women's Football World Cup, if I have my document.

1:01:47.000,1:01:56.000  
And I could finish my degree, and I could finish my bachelor and my master in 5 years,

1:01:56.000,1:02:04.000  
hopefully, and I could go and visit my family after 7 years, almost. And my family will be..

1:02:04.000,1:02:09.000  
They will have their citizenship in Italy,

1:02:09.000,1:02:27.000  
and they will be fine. Plus, I will have a huge community in the United States, and if I get all my documents and all my degrees, I could work in a higher organization in a better position.

1:02:27.000,1:02:34.000

I hope all of that happens for you, and I have no doubt that it will.

1:02:34.000,1:02:35.000  
Thank you.

1:02:35.000,1:02:39.000  
How do you feel talking about your story? What emotions come up for you?

1:02:39.000,1:02:46.000  
Different emotions, happy, proud, sad, all combined.

1:02:46.000,1:03:01.000  
Like if you make soup, we have a lot of difference.. I'm right now, like a soup, I have all the emotions, but the most.. the highest emotion is, I know I'm proud of myself,

1:03:01.000,1:03:17.000  
I proud of my experience, but the other part is, I'm really sad that I lost a lot of good opportunities because I am almost 30 years old, but I lost a lot of good opportunities, so I can be better in my life.

1:03:17.000,1:03:21.000  
I love that idea of a soup with lots of different flavors and lots of different emotions.

1:03:21.000,1:03:22.000  
I think that's a really nice way to describe it.

1:03:22.000,1:03:28.000  
Very helpful. Is there anything else you would like to add

1:03:28.000,1:03:31.000  
today? Our hour is up, but and I don't want to take more of your time, because I know how busy you are, and you've already had a long day.

1:03:31.000,1:03:40.000  
But is there anything else you'd like to add to this conversation?

1:03:40.000,1:03:47.000  
I think I said everything. There's nothing in my mind right now.

1:03:47.000,1:03:55.000  
Well, thank you again so much for your time, and I really look forward to watching you as your career continues.

1:03:55.000,1:03:58.000  
I have no doubt the future is going to be very bright for you.

1:03:58.000,1:04:00.000  
Thank you so much for your time today.

1:04:00.000,1:04:11.000  
Thank you, Professor for giving me this opportunity to talk and review all my experience here, because sometimes we cannot think, but when we talk, everything's coming in our mind.

1:04:11.000,1:04:14.000  
But thank you for make this happen.

1:04:14.000,1:04:20.000  
-It's been so fun to reconnect with you.  
-Thank you, Professor!