

Interview with Mouna Ezzat Agha on March 27, 2023

0:00:02.680,0:00:06.080

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

0:00:06.360,0:00:12.210

Thank you.

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me tonight. I really appreciate it.

0:00:13.900,0:00:24.270

So, a little introduction, as you know, my name is Heather Bruce Satrom, and I teach in the English Language for Academic Purposes program at Montgomery college.

0:00:24.450,0:00:32.840

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

0:00:33.080,0:00:41.540

and the goal is to help others better understand the experiences of immigrants and refugees - excuse me-

0:00:41.710,0:00:43.190

in the United States.

0:00:45.200,0:00:59.160

-I've been interviewing a lot today- Telling your story will enable others to better understand the challenges that immigrants face, and better appreciate the resilience and perseverance of people in your community.

0:00:59.370,0:01:03.070

I am grateful for your participation. So thank you.

0:01:04.220,0:01:18.950

Typically, we do two interviews, this first interview is going to focus on your experience in your home country, Syria, and also in Saudi Arabia, where you spent many years.

0:01:18.990,0:01:46.070

Then, the second interview, hopefully next week, will focus more on your experiences in the United States. You had a chance to read the questions in advance, but please know that all of these questions are optional. So, if at any point you don't want to answer a question, you can say I would like to go to the next question, or I would like to pass, and that's fine. No problem at all. If you need to take a break at any point, that's also fine, too. Okay?

0:01:47.780,0:01:54.770

All right, so let's start with the first question. Could you please tell me your full name and spell it for me, please?

0:01:55.130,0:02:09.320

My name is Mouna Ezzat Agha. How we spell is m, o, u, n a. The last name is Ezzat Agha, e, z, z, a, t, space, a, g, h, a.

0:02:09.419,0:02:21.940

Great! Today is Monday, March 27th. It is about 8 p.m. Do I have permission to record this interview?

-Yes, ma'am.

0:02:22.140,0:02:29.180

Thank you. Okay. So tell me, do people in the United States have trouble pronouncing your name correctly?

0:02:29.640,0:02:45.410

for the the first name, maybe one or two times. It's rarely, because Mouna is an easy name, but the last name, yes, it is difficult, but usually they say Mouna, or Moana,

0:02:45.530,0:02:49.170

but I never change it. The name is still the name.

0:02:49.300,0:03:11.020

-Okay! So you don't use a nickname, you use your..

-Yeah, my name, no nicknames.

-I always love how you say, "ya'ani," and for those who do not speak Arabic, we could say that "ya'ani" means "like"?

-Yes, it is "the meaning of,"

0:03:11.410,0:03:21.780

-I never read about this word.

-I always love when Arabic speaking students say "ya'ani," and sometimes I say "ya'ani," too, now.

0:03:21.850,0:03:36.490

-All right, so let's see. You are living in Columbia, Maryland. You used to live in Silver Spring. Is that right?

-Yes!

-Okay. When did you move to Columbia?

0:03:36.490,0:03:47.940

-In 2021

-Okay, great! And are you a student at Howard Community College now?

0:03:48.210,0:04:02.560

-Now, yes. I started in 2021, when I moved, or the end of 2021.

-And you are also working as a medical assistant for an urgent care. Is that correct?

-Yes, Yes. I work as a medical assistant in urgent care, I draw blood, take vitals, injections..

0:04:04.720,0:04:14.950

-Go ahead, I'm sorry.

-so, for example, if there is a cut, I help the doctor prepare things, and give him stuff and then finish it.

0:04:15.300,0:04:21.190

That's a very important job. Did you do that kind of work when you were in your home country?

0:04:21.190,0:04:35.320

No, I was in accounting, economy, the Department of Accounting, but when I came here, I said to myself, "my English was not that good, let's try something else."

0:04:35.320,0:04:43.790

-Your English is getting much better. I knew you several years ago, and you have made so much progress, so "mabrouk," congratulations!

-Thank you!

0:04:44.400,0:04:48.570

All right, so let's see, when were you a student at Montgomery College?

0:04:48.690,0:04:53.070

In 2015.

0:04:53.540,0:05:18.180

-And then you transferred to Howard Community College?

-Yes. I was there in Montgomery from 2015, for the ESL, took a couple of classes of English, because they told me that, even the ground is not working as ESL, you're supposed to be as a credit. Then they told me "why don't you do physical therapy 8?"

0:05:18.220,0:05:21.370

And I did it for three months, also, and I finished it.

0:05:21.400,0:05:33.370

I tried to have any opportunity to work, but the opportunity was less, and I didn't drive at that time. Back home I didn't drive.

0:05:33.410,0:05:39.620

I didn't have the chance, or I wasn't used to driving. Do you know what I mean?

0:05:39.830,0:05:47.050

But then I said to myself... then they told me that as a medical assistant there are more opportunities. I said, okay,

0:05:47.110,0:05:59.100

"let's do medical assistant." Also for three months at night. Then I did my experience. Then I worked in Briggs Chaney working clinic, the urgent care.

0:05:59.270,0:06:08.820

-Do you enjoy working there?

-Wallah, I enjoy it. Why would I lie? I enjoy it. I told them.. every time somebody speaks to me, I tell them it's fun.

0:06:09.140,0:06:28.230

-I like it more than staying in front of the computer and deal with the computer. I deal with numbers, math, but not the computer.

-Now you get to work with patients and doctors.

-Yes, Yes.

-That's great. So you recently got your driver's license?

0:06:28.230,0:06:46.640

-In 2019.

-Was it difficult?

-I never ever drove, and I didn't try. Even my dad and mom, because we were raised in Saudi Arabia, they work in Saudi Arabia, and you know, in Saudi Arabia no woman drives.

0:06:46.640,0:06:54.500

That's why I didn't learn. Even when we go in the summer to Syria to have the summer break,

0:06:54.530,0:07:07.570

we didn't drive or learn to drive. And when I got married, I didn't need to drive. Everything was nearby, even going to my sister is 15 min by bus.

0:07:07.600,0:07:25.820

-I am a bus person. I like busses.

-How does it feel now to know how to drive?

-Now I tell everybody that I am independent. Being here, I am now an independent woman.

0:07:25.820,0:07:44.820

If I want to go shopping, I go shopping, I go to my college by myself. I want to drop my kids, I will drop my kids. No need to say "Waseem.." my husband's name is Waseem, by the way, "Waseem, drop me there," or "Waseem, bring this.." If I want to have something, I would go by myself.

0:07:44.850,0:07:58.530

-You can drive and you're working. You are definitely an independent woman, now. That's wonderful! Congratulations!

-"Shukran." Thank you!

-All right. Let's start from the very beginning. Where and when were you born?

0:07:59.000,0:08:07.550

I was born in Syria, on May 16th, 1982, in a city called Aleppo.

0:08:07.770,0:08:13.420

It is a nice city and a nice country.

0:08:13.700,0:08:14.510

Yeah.

0:08:14.700,0:08:16.340

0:08:16.360,0:08:23.750

I know that you moved with your family to Saudi Arabia. How old, were you when you moved there?

0:08:24.050,0:08:24.980

I was two years old.

0:08:25.570,0:08:29.140

Did you spend summers in Aleppo?

0:08:29.230,0:08:32.320

Yes! Every summer, my dad..

0:08:32.330,0:08:46.780

In Saudi Arabia, like here, they give them money, instead of buying a house, or something, or a car, for..

0:08:46.780,0:08:59.420

I don't know, expenses, some expenses. But he saved this money and said, "okay, guys, go to Syria, you, your mom, your sister, and brothers. Go to Syria."

0:08:59.840,0:09:10.380

-What kind of work did your father do?

-My dad is a civil engineer. He was working in that major.

0:09:10.660,0:09:12.270

So you

0:09:12.410,0:09:23.710

lived in Saudi Arabia for most of your life, or for how many years?

-Yes! Until I finished my.. what do you call it?.. my high school.

0:09:24.100,0:09:40.580

-Wow! That's a long time.

-Yes, but they tried, by the way, my family, they tried... the high school there is four years. They tried in the first year and second year to have me and my sister live in Syria.

0:09:40.580,0:09:50.710

Hopefully, we will take the last.. what do you call it?.. the last year in high school in Syria. It is a big..

0:09:50.740,0:10:05.180

what do you call it?.. Period. It's either pass or fail. If you have good grades and become a doctor, or you have bad grades and you will be nothing, or repeat the last year again.

0:10:05.270,0:10:16.950

-So, a lot of pressure.

-Yes, it's different than here. But because in Saudi Arabia the education is easier, that's why in Syria, when we are in the 10th grade

0:10:16.980,0:10:29.080

and 11th grade. It was difficult for me, especially subjects like English, and even I like math, math and physics.

0:10:29.250,0:10:44.370

It was difficult. My mom put teachers to us to teach, tutoring like here, to teach us more than the school. Even with that, our degrees were not

0:10:44.390,0:10:54.140

that bad, but good, but she said, "in this case, if you go to the 12th grade,

0:10:54.270,0:11:06.250

it's a big period and you will not succeed. Let's return back to Saudi Arabia." Then we went back to do this year, and we finished it with the 96

0:11:06.260,0:11:14.510

percentage from 100.

0:11:14.810,0:11:34.030

95 was very good. That's why, of course, because we are not from Syria, I mean, I am from Syria, but my study is not from Syria. That's why they reduced the mark. They will not take 95 as 95. They reduced a couple of marks.

0:11:34.030,0:11:42.530

That's why I said to myself, "I want to be a doctor, but my degrees start from mathematics, economic and down."

0:11:42.760,0:11:43.600

You know?

0:11:43.930,0:11:59.040

-So your education in Saudi Arabia did not prepare you as well as...

-Yeah, because it's easy. It is not that difficult. If you ask anybody, the education in Syria

0:11:59.050,0:12:12.220

is more successful and difficult and more preparing than Saudi Arabia's. In Saudi Arabia it was very easy. Imagine when I went back to the 9th grade,

0:12:12.500,0:12:13.890

0:12:14.410,0:12:21.700

in Saudi Arabia. I told my mom and dad "oh, mathematics! I took that in 10th and 11th Grades in Syria."

0:12:21.770,0:12:30.500

In that situation, "oh, physics! Oh my God! It's too easy! I took it in 10th and 11th grades."

0:12:30.550,0:12:33.410

-Interesting!

0:12:33.750,0:12:51.620

Americans who watch this video might not understand the cultural differences between Syria and Saudi Arabia. Could you talk a little bit about that? How it was different for you to spend time in Saudi Arabia compared to what your life was like in in Syria?

0:12:51.780,0:13:02.280

In Saudi Arabia, me and my mom and dad, we have only.. my dad has only his sister

0:13:02.290,0:13:21.590

and my cousins. We play with them. In Syria, there was more freedom. In Saudi Arabia, every time if you are not having scarf, you always put "a'baya," that is a long jacket and a scarf.

0:13:21.590,0:13:41.000

If you didn't put it...

Now, of course, nowadays the days have changed. But before, in my period, when I was young, it was more difficult than now. You will put "a'baya," a scarf, and if you don't put it, somebody will come and take your dad and send him back home. Back to Syria.

0:13:42.890,0:13:51.660

A woman is not driving. My mom only when she comes to Syria she can drive.

0:13:52.320,0:14:09.460

There are parks like in Syria, but of course, like me, I am 11 years old, or 10 years old, with my long jacket or "a'baya," we call it "a'baya," you will ride the bike

0:14:09.460,0:14:26.120

and that's it. When you will be 18, you cannot ride it, because now you are older, and they will see you. But in Syria, you would take this "a'baya" and ride the bike, drive a car. Whatever you want, you can do.

0:14:26.120,0:14:31.830

In Saudi Arabia there was more pressure and more limited things to do.

0:14:31.830,0:14:47.580

-So, there's more freedom for girls and women in Syria?

-Exactly!

-Did you ever wish that you had not moved to Saudi Arabia? that you had grown up...?

-No. Because in that period, we were young, not like nowadays,

0:14:47.580,0:15:17.580

I didn't think about it, because every time in the summer I go to my relatives, to my grandma and grandpa in Syria. That's why I didn't think about it. I didn't say, "oh, why I don't have friends?". I had friends, but we don't go to each other, because you know the family is not... my mom

doesn't know her mom, or my dad doesn't know his dad. That's why we don't have friends only my

0:15:17.580,0:15:37.270

my cousin, and that's it.

-What city or region in Saudi Arabia, did you live in?

-I don't remember Bisha, this is the first one, it's a small village, but then we moved to Riyadh. Riyadh has a lot of parks, and my dad was...

0:15:37.270,0:15:46.800

you call it a supervisor? The civil engineer of two malls, called Al Faisaliyah, and Al Mamlaka in Riyadh.

0:15:46.880,0:16:04.790

And I know Jeddah. Riyadh is the capital. Jeddah is the second capital, or the second biggest city in Saudi Arabia. I know it, and I was there for two years.

0:16:05.270,0:16:07.010

Did you ever go to Mecca?

0:16:07.020,0:16:15.680

Mecca I visited recently. I was there, and my mom and dad visited me there, but I was... my kid's age was 11, or 10 years.

0:16:15.770,0:16:24.240

I don't remember it very clearly. Now, in January, I visited there.
-Did you go as part of a pilgrimage,

0:16:25.260,0:16:44.010

as part of the "Hajj"? Did you go for a religious purpose?
-It's "Umrah." "Hajj" is coming after two months. "Umrah" is what Prophet Muhammad did. What the Prophet did is "Sunnah."

0:16:44.230,0:16:50.190

That's why we did the "Umrah." It's also praying, and we visited Medina and Mecca,

0:16:50.820,0:16:54.770

and we visited Jeddah again.
-What was that like for you?

0:16:54.940,0:17:17.390

When I was little I saw it, but you know you, when you are small, you don't remember it, now you are growing up, and you see the "Ka'aba" and Mecca, and oh my God! My heart was happy! Then I cried because it's emotional. If you ask me now if I will go again, I will go again.

0:17:17.400,0:17:21.849

-I can imagine that that was a very emotional moment for you.
-It's very emotional.

0:17:21.990,0:17:30.120

I was very happy. I was very excited and enjoyed it when I visited. I wish I'd stayed there, only in Mecca and Medina.

0:17:30.290,0:17:47.620

-Could you tell me a little bit about your memories of Aleppo when you were a child? What was it like in Aleppo when you went there in the summer?
-In Aleppo, we had a lot of old stores...

0:17:52.290,0:18:06.610

and "Q'ala'at Halab," (The Citadel of Aleppo). There is an old market near the palace. It's called Aleppo Palace, I remembered Q'ala'a in English is called a palace.

0:18:06.610,0:18:25.900

Aleppo Palace is a big view in Aleppo. It is very nice. We visited one or two times. There, you really see how the history of Aleppo,

0:18:25.900,0:18:37.620

and the small markets there. You have everything. And also, in Syria, or in Aleppo, there are forests,

0:18:37.620,0:18:52.670

and mountains. There is a lot of views, in general in Syria, or especially in Aleppo. There is a lot of things.

0:18:52.670,0:19:11.870

Can you tell me a little bit about your family? Who did you live with when you were a child?

0:19:12.170,0:19:24.900

-I lived with my mom and dad. I am the oldest, and we are three after that. My sister is younger than me in one year, and my brother and sister are a twin. We lived in Saudi Arabia, like I said, and in the summer, we go to Aleppo. Then, when I finished my high school, I lived with my grandma and grandpa in the college.

0:19:24.980,0:19:29.840

I went to college in Aleppo, University of Aleppo.

0:19:30.360,0:19:45.850

-What did you study in college?
-Economics, Department of Accounting.
-That's different from what you're doing now.

0:19:45.850,0:20:04.300

totally different. My mom and dad when I told them that I'm doing that said "Mouna, from accounting to medical assistance? 360 degrees change!"

-But you enjoy your work now, right?

-I swear I enjoy it. If you tell me, "will you continue with that?" I would say, "yes, I will not return to economics." I I like it. It's fun.

0:20:04.370,0:20:16.040

It's really fun to draw blood, and when somebody has small veins, you have to see which one, is it this one or this one? Then you get it for the blood. It is fun.

0:20:16.570,0:20:29.080

I bet it brings you a lot of satisfaction to work with people. You seem like a people person.

0:20:29.290,0:20:34.360

-Yes. And I talk to them, and I recognize myself talking to you.

-You probably make them feel at ease and comfortable when you take it.

0:20:36.230,0:20:44.630

So let's see.. When you were growing up, do you have any memories of important holidays? Were there

0:20:44.890,0:20:57.700

times of the year that were really important to you and your family?

-Yes, we have two holidays. We have Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha. One is after Ramadan, and we are in Ramadan month now.

0:20:57.700,0:21:15.160

And one after "Hajj." It's called Eid Al Adha, when they cut (slaughter) sheep and give it to poor people,

0:21:15.160,0:21:26.800

and some for you, for the family, and some for your relatives, who don't have meet, or have less meet, then to poor people.

0:21:27.690,0:21:33.960

-One over three, not a quarter..

-One third?

-Yes, one third.

0:21:34.420,0:21:41.540

-So you would have a big feast? -Yes. Because every summer...

0:21:41.610,0:21:44.380

0:21:44.650,0:21:47.500

What do you call it?

0:21:48.030,0:21:49.860

0:21:50.500,0:22:09.010

Some Eid celebrations are in the summer, and we go to my grandma and grandpa in Aleppo. Sometimes it's in Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia it is not like in Syria. In Saudi Arabia we only have my aunt and my cousins,

0:22:09.010,0:22:26.990

We go to them, because in our country, this is what the celebration is. One day you go to your the old person, like grandma and grandpa, and all people come to them, from relatives, from their friends. They have this special day,

0:22:26.990,0:22:36.790

and everybody comes to drink coffee..

-So everybody visits the older people?

-Yes. They drink coffee, give them dessert, and everything.

0:22:37.050,0:22:44.880

And the second day you go to people that are, for example, old or younger, a little bit.

0:22:44.880,0:23:04.050

On the first day you go to the older people, like my grandma, grandpa, their sister, and brother, and stuff like that! And the second day, they come to you. The third day you go to the other ones, the younger ones, like my uncle, my aunt, and stuff like that. In Saudi Arabia, it is different. You go to my

0:23:04.050,0:23:06.220
auntie. and that's it.

0:23:06.360,0:23:24.030

Some friends come on the second day. My dad and mom have only one or two friends, not more than that, and then we go to the mall. You know, they give us gifts or money, and then we go to the mall,

0:23:24.450,0:23:44.410

to eat, for example, to eat lunch, to eat dinner, breakfast... In Saudi Arabia we don't go to the mosque and in Syria also, we don't go to the mosque. Only men

0:23:44.410,0:23:58.920

go to the mosque to pray the morning "salah" (prayer), and then they go to their relatives to gather them, like an engagement.

0:23:58.920,0:24:11.860

-I heard that on this holiday children get new clothes to wear. Is that true?
-Yes. Every year, even when they have clothes, and even now in America, we buy them new clothes.

0:24:11.860,0:24:30.640

Because you feel that the person or kids will be happy. And then we give them gifts and money. Because this day is special, and not like any other day. That's why we buy them new clothes.

0:24:30.640,0:24:50.110

And, for example, men give their moms some money, to make her happy. In Saudi Arabia, you get the money, and you buy clothes and stuff like that, but you go to the mall.

0:24:50.110,0:24:55.780

You only have one family and go together to dinner or lunch.

0:24:55.970,0:25:06.290

-Can you describe a little bit the special foods, you mentioned, lamb, or were there other important foods that you would eat?
-Yes, we eat lamb, and we also eat beef,

0:25:06.490,0:25:19.330

and fish, but the special one is lamb, but in Saudi Arabia they eat beef more than lamb.

0:25:19.580,0:25:32.050

In Syria there is lamb more than beef. We eat lamb more than beef.
-Any special desserts that you would eat? Were there sweets?
-We have "Knafi,"

0:25:32.260,0:25:42.990

which is a dessert with cheese inside it and some syrup on top of it. There is "Qatayef," that is also

0:25:43.010,0:25:54.140

a dessert with cream cheese inside it. You serve it to the people when they come to you.

0:25:54.520,0:26:14.640

-Do you make these traditional dishes now, when you're living in America for your family?
-Yes, I make it, but not every day. Because I am working. One time I made "ma'amul."

0:26:14.640,0:26:31.720

"ma'amul" that had inside it pistachio.
-That sounds delicious!
-Yes, I made it one time, and I made "Qatayef" and my kids said me, "mom, when will you do it again?" I said, "okay, I have a weekend and I will do it again."

0:26:33.830,0:27:03.610

-Was the Arabic that you spoke in Aleppo, different from the Arabic that you spoke in Saudi Arabia? Was it a different...

-The Arabic language is the same, but there is a dialect, like when you go from state to state, you know who's from Texas and who's from Maryland. This is the same. When someone speaks, from the accent or the dialect you know

0:27:03.610,0:27:10.000

who's from Saudi Arabia and who's from Egypt. Some words are different.

0:27:10.090,0:27:24.950

Some words are different and you will know. Like me, I will tell you an example and you will laugh. Every time I go to Aleppo and I speak, they ask, "are you from Aleppo?" and I say, yes.

0:27:24.950,0:27:33.340

They say my accent or dialect is not from Aleppo, but when I say the word "hallaa'" (now) they know I'm from Aleppo.

0:27:33.360,0:27:46.860

"Hallaa'" means now. Then they say, "oh, yeah, you are from Aleppo."

-They could tell when said that word, that's cute! How old were you when you first started studying English?

0:27:47.240,0:28:03.670

In Saudi Arabia there is English. In Syria there is English, but it is difficult. But our English in Saudi and in Syria is British English. Until now, I always tell them this example.

0:28:04.090,0:28:05.300

I say

0:28:05.380,0:28:13.100

In America they say, Apartment. In Saudi Arabia or Syria, they say for the apartment, flat.

0:28:13.170,0:28:17.030

Until now, I told them this example, I said, I remember.

0:28:17.310,0:28:21.400

-And there is another word for elevator also.

-Left.

0:28:21.430,0:28:40.210

-Yes, I lived in London, so I remember the vocabulary differences.

-Yes, I tell them the same English, but in America has more, maybe, it's not the accent, but more difficult, or more words.

0:28:40.470,0:28:51.600

-Interesting.

-Even my husband... sorry I interrupted you... even my husband when he came here in 2002

0:28:51.890,0:28:53.780

0:28:54.080,0:29:01.210

He thought he will do research, and then he will get a fellowship and stuff like that, because he's a doctor.

0:29:01.380,0:29:07.060

He said. "Mouna, every word I write is different.

0:29:07.300,0:29:11.720

Different English."

0:29:12.400,0:29:16.210

How old were you when you first started studying English?

0:29:16.500,0:29:33.240

We study English in the 5th or 4th grade. Yes, we study English, because English is the second language. I'm sorry I interrupted you.

-No, no, I interrupted you, I think.

0:29:33.430,0:29:46.850

-When you came here, did you find it challenging to speak English?

-I speak English, but sometimes I have the "th"

0:29:47.040,0:29:49.690
for example, they said "th," but I say "s."

0:29:49.770,0:29:51.070

0:29:51.360,0:30:01.910
I mess up all the words, and even until now, when I speak to them, they understand me, but they

0:30:02.210,0:30:03.330
laugh

0:30:03.380,0:30:08.330
or make fun about the words I say. For example,

0:30:08.390,0:30:11.700
South and North.

0:30:11.900,0:30:19.210
When I speak quickly, I am telling you, this is correct and perfect, but when I speak quickly I say "sous,"

0:30:19.530,0:30:21.050
and when I say "sous,"

0:30:21.250,0:30:28.650
they make fun of it. I think "okay, as you like. I understand myself and people understand me."

0:30:28.910,0:30:36.560
They understand you. So, how old were your children when you first came here?

0:30:36.750,0:30:46.430
My son was three and a half, and my daughter was one and a half.

0:30:46.640,0:30:48.470
-And now, how old are they?
-My son is 14 and my daughter is 11.
-Do they speak Arabic?

0:30:48.830,0:30:55.760
-Fluent, yeah, sure.
-Their English must be wonderful.

0:30:55.810,0:31:04.380
With my English, they are correcting me.
-They're correcting you? It's easier when you're younger.

0:31:04.570,0:31:15.750
-Imagine, they want me to say, instead of Costco, they want to say, Costco (American accent),
Mama Costco. Guys, it's Costco! No, no, mama...

0:31:16.310,0:31:33.080
-Do you speak Arabic at home with them?
-Yes, we speak. Me and my husband, we speak Arabic, and we speak with them in Arabic. If they
speak English, I don't understand, even when I do understand it, I say, "oh, I'm sorry, what is
that word?"

0:31:33.150,0:31:38.290
So it is important for you to make sure that they're learning Arabic.

0:31:38.810,0:31:47.060
Yes, because even when they are playing, or speaking English, I say "Mama, Arabic, mama speak in
Arabic."

0:31:47.200,0:31:51.730
Even between themselves. My son

0:31:52.120,0:31:56.530
because he studied in Syria

0:31:56.680,0:32:13.460

the pre K-1. We have pre K-1, and pre K-2 kindergarten. Then he was supposed to be in the first grade, but here in America, they make him kindergarten before. By the way he's in January, that's why they put him in kindergarten.

0:32:13.650,0:32:21.180

Because he was three years in Syria and studied Arabic, his Arabic when he speaks to me seems fluent.

0:32:21.330,0:32:29.920

But when Sima speaks to me she speaks to me in English with some word in Arabic then more words in English.

0:32:29.980,0:32:38.600

One time she told me, "Mama, we are playing in the school," all the sentence in Arabic.

0:32:38.920,0:32:43.520

...Swing. I went to slide. I went and played on the slide.

0:32:43.540,0:32:59.030

All the sentence was in Arabic, but the slide in English. I asked "what's the meaning of slide," and she said, "Mom, I don't know what the slide is in Arabic, I said, slide means this... in Arabic. And she said okay.

0:32:59.670,0:33:11.940

-That's hard. But it's good that you're teaching them and they're getting both of those languages.

-Yeah, because they will forget. They will forget the language, and it will be hard for them

0:33:12.460,0:33:20.730

to speak to other people in Arabic, or if they go to Syria and visit Syria, they cannot speak in Arabic.

0:33:20.910,0:33:24.190

Have you brought your kids back to Syria?

0:33:24.220,0:33:30.500

-Have they spent time there or no?

-No, from 2013

0:33:30.710,0:33:49.160

See, I told you about the "th." From 2013, we didn't go back to Syria. I can go back, but sometimes I say to me to myself that I have my mom and dad here, and my sister will hopefully come here.

0:33:49.390,0:33:59.840

-Only my relatives. Hopefully, one day I will go.

-Your mom and dad now live here in America?

-Yes, from 2005.

0:34:00.550,0:34:04.010

Was that a hard adjustment for them being older?

0:34:04.160,0:34:12.400

My mom.. Some people... because she is older than me,

0:34:12.570,0:34:19.600

English is difficult for her, but also, like me, some people understand her.

0:34:20.460,0:34:22.090

They understand her.

0:34:22.310,0:34:37.920

When Americans think about Syria or Aleppo, of course, images of the war come to mind. Can you talk a little bit about what happened in Syria that

0:34:38.330,0:34:40.989

led to your decision to come here?

0:34:41.739,0:34:59.840

We had our home there. That was a big apartment. Not like here, small apartment, but a big apartment of six rooms and a balcony for 10 basketball or

0:34:59.860,0:35:03.150
soccer players, a big balcony.

0:35:03.420,0:35:13.790
What happened is the war started in 2011, but not in Aleppo. In Homs, another city.

0:35:14.040,0:35:16.610
Then what happened is

0:35:16.700,0:35:27.240
in 2012, it started in Aleppo. It started in another area. It's, you know, like in Maryland there is Rockville, there is Virginia.

0:35:27.250,0:35:32.960
Even Virginia is another state, but it's closer to Maryland.

0:35:33.350,0:35:38.890
But what happened is we are hearing the sounds, my son,

0:35:38.980,0:35:55.900
said, "wow, bomb!" I said, "no, mama, it's not a bomb, it's a faculty (factory)." Even my sister told her kids... Her kids are the same ages like my son and daughter. I said, "no, mama, it's not a bomb, it's a factory."

0:35:55.900,0:36:06.570
And she said, "factory! No. You didn't see the smoke? there's smoke from the bomb." I said "smoke of a factory," and they said no. My son is clever, he understands.

0:36:06.570,0:36:23.400
-You were trying to protect your children, so that they do not feel afraid?
-Yes, so they don't feel afraid.
-So you said it was a factory not a bomb.
-Factory not a bomb. And even then he said "no, it's a bomb, and see all the stores are closed.

0:36:23.580,0:36:25.930
Why are all stores closed?"

0:36:26.410,0:36:28.230
and my home

0:36:28.380,0:36:40.990
is near to a village where are sending bombs. After that there is a village near my home sending bombs. I see from my balcony I see the bombs.

0:36:41.430,0:36:42.840
What happened is

0:36:43.070,0:36:50.240
two times we went to the shelter, because the airplane was above our building. But my son

0:36:50.610,0:36:57.520
was three and a half, and you know, at this age, three and a half, even in my country the boy is

0:36:57.820,0:37:05.190
clean. He can go to the bathroom by himself, and you can only take him, but he's clean, no diapers.

0:37:05.450,0:37:10.960
Imagine because of two times, and bombs and sounds and stuff like that,

0:37:11.640,0:37:17.330
We started over. Sima was one and half,

0:37:17.410,0:37:31.140
she didn't notice. She cannot notice bombs, but you see, or hear, and feel the bombs, and you hear it, and stuff like that.

0:37:31.920,0:37:37.700
One time a building in front of us

0:37:38.200,0:37:39.210
burnt.

0:37:39.460,0:37:49.740
We were in the shelter, and thank God that the people were in the shelter. And by the way, we don't have shelters. It's where you put.. what do you call it?

0:37:49.830,0:37:52.240

0:37:52.300,0:37:58.260
Not the gas, the other one

0:37:58.530,0:37:59.640

0:38:00.030,0:38:03.660

0:38:03.730,0:38:11.760
It's not a shelter, but where you put stuff you go there. There is no shelter in Syria like in America. No shelters.

0:38:12.220,0:38:19.910
Two times we went there, and one time

0:38:20.050,0:38:24.740
one person was doing one himself

0:38:24.820,0:38:28.200
by... what do you call it?

0:38:29.350,0:38:35.020
Like a small box and put some wood to warm himself, because there was no electricity

0:38:35.170,0:38:44.320
and no water. Electricity comes only for two hours, and water comes only for four hours a day.

0:38:44.690,0:38:57.160
That's why he was warming himself. My husband thought it was a fire. He immediately called his mom, and we run to his mom's home. His mom's home is

0:38:57.190,0:39:02.260
closer to the city, and not close to the bombs.

0:39:02.700,0:39:08.070
Then, from that day, he called his the his brother, and told him,

0:39:08.140,0:39:20.130
"please send us the papers, the papers that you gave us in 2010 and we said no, we are fine, now, we want these papers, the green card papers." Even my husband...

0:39:20.520,0:39:21.560

0:39:21.800,0:39:28.400
He was saying "I want to go," then he would say "no, I don't want to go." because he had his own clinic, why would he go?

0:39:28.570,0:39:33.790
I said to him

0:39:33.870,0:39:38.450
"God will protect us! But it's for your kids'

0:39:38.640,0:39:46.750
situation and people are paying a lot of money for a green card, but this green card s coming to you like this,

0:39:46.890,0:39:51.900
take it, and if we have a chance to return back, we will return. You have your own clinic."

0:39:53.070,0:40:02.420
It must have been a very frightening, scary time for you as a mother.

0:40:02.830,0:40:07.670
-Yeah, in that case, we decided to move. other than that we will not decide. Every country has negative and positive.

0:40:07.720,0:40:14.710
but it was too much for us, and even for him. When I am by myself

0:40:14.860,0:40:22.040
really, I call Waseem and tell him, "I hear a bomb, are you okay? I don't know if the bomb is near me or not near me. But I am okay."

0:40:22.260,0:40:31.100
If he is at home, and he is scared, I told him, "it's okay, it's okay. Nothing happened. We are together and the kids are with us. We are good."

0:40:32.000,0:40:34.090
Two times we slept

0:40:34.180,0:40:41.790
in the hallway, not in our beds, because you never know when the building will go down?

0:40:42.140,0:40:53.590
It was... I think people who stay longer, they have more stuff than us, because we moved in 2013. We had

0:40:53.690,0:40:56.750
one scary year

0:40:56.820,0:41:01.010
Not more than that.

0:41:01.040,0:41:02.740
Then we said, "no, we're done

0:41:03.280,0:41:04.260
for us."

0:41:04.460,0:41:13.450
Can you describe a little bit what it felt like to be a mother of young children living in Aleppo at that time? What was going through your mind?

0:41:14.140,0:41:20.810
Yeah, it was a scary world for the kids, because even one time,

0:41:20.990,0:41:39.250
Omar was at school, and there is bomb, and they call me from school and said, "we are taking another road." Even the school is 10 minutes walking, but they take him with a small bus. It's to make it enjoyable, and have the kids enjoy.

0:41:39.360,0:41:50.450
But they said, "don't worry! We will be late because we are taking another route. It seems like there is a bomb. We don't know where exactly." Even schools closed.

0:41:50.530,0:41:58.600
It was scary. That's why I said "God will protect us, I know, but more protection

0:41:58.930,0:42:03.720
and we are taking our reasons. Let's go

0:42:03.790,0:42:10.580
out, me and you. I know it's a new start, but this is a solution.

0:42:10.640,0:42:11.800
because it's

0:42:11.950,0:42:18.040
protecting the kids and for their

0:42:18.480,0:42:20.300

0:42:22.490,0:42:28.740

worries," when they feel those feelings, you know, because Omar knows everything.

0:42:30.870,0:42:34.270

Was it difficult to get the paperwork to come here?

0:42:34.330,0:42:42.410

We went... No, the papers didn't come to Syria, it came to Turkey.

0:42:43.140,0:42:49.960

-So you went to Turkey first?

-We went to Turkey first, and we had a wonderful journey.

0:42:50.270,0:42:54.490

That's why until now Omar remembers it.

0:42:54.550,0:43:02.670

It's not a wonderful I am joking. We went...

0:43:02.710,0:43:04.570

Waseem's uncle

0:43:04.910,0:43:22.800

he has a car, and said "oh, I know the road. I am always going from Turkey to Syria, and from Syria to Turkey." we said wonderful! Let's go, then. This is Saturday. Let's go. Me, my family, my mother in law, her son, and my sister in law. We wear three cars.

0:43:22.970,0:43:24.970

Waseem's uncle

0:43:25.310,0:43:28.910

and my mother in law's car, and my sister in law's car.

0:43:29.220,0:43:36.540

They are behind us. And there is a back above the car. Then we went

0:43:36.720,0:43:56.100

and he said, "okay, I know there is a gas station nearby. Let me fill the trunk. We were surprised. All the stores are closed. Nobody in the street, no cars, no person, no nothing. Then immediately appeared a person who said, "what you are doing, guys?

0:43:56.140,0:44:00.770

return back." The uncle couldn't hear.

0:44:00.810,0:44:05.230

And Waseem said, "go inside, he said, to go back, what are we doing here?"

0:44:05.340,0:44:11.430

and when we were going back, imagine in the front of us were 1000

0:44:12.720,0:44:14.870

person, men.

0:44:14.960,0:44:22.320

We didn't know if they were enemy, military, from the nation of the military.

0:44:22.570,0:44:24.990

I don't know, they have their guns

0:44:25.080,0:44:27.430

like this in front of us.

0:44:28.040,0:44:30.660

until now, Omar remembers that.

0:44:30.790,0:44:33.740

I tell him "Omar, what did you see?" I imagine, Omar...

0:44:33.980,0:44:47.030

I think last year I told him, maybe with my mother in law, we will go to Syria. My mother in law went there. My mom went there and said everything is okay.

0:44:47.100,0:45:06.470

and Omar said "no, we will not go there. Every day they destroy it. Why would we go there?"

-Omar is your son?

-Yes, Omar is my son.

-He has memories still?

-Yes, he said, "why would we go there? everything is destroyed. When it will be fixed. I will go there."

0:45:06.470,0:45:08.620

I said, "mama, people are going there.

0:45:08.680,0:45:13.590

people visit Aleppo." He said no, only when it's okay.

0:45:14.140,0:45:17.740

-How old was he then?

-He was three.

0:45:17.900,0:45:24.360

Because we came here when he was three and a half in 2013.

0:45:24.660,0:45:32.750

So you saw all these soldiers?

0:45:32.790,0:45:41.450

Yes! We saw all the soldiers and they told us to back up return back. And when we returned, thank God, everybody was safe. When we took the luggage

0:45:41.950,0:45:49.080

the suitcase from the top of the car, imagine, there was a bullet from one side

0:45:49.320,0:45:53.580

to the other side. a hole from a bullet.

0:45:53.630,0:45:57.670

Then I took my pants. All of them had holes.

0:45:59.000,0:46:00.100

It was

0:46:00.270,0:46:09.140

one cm, one inch from my husband's head, because the luggage

0:46:09.400,0:46:16.990

was on the top of the car. There was a sniper. He was shooting at us, or at them, we don't know.

0:46:18.190,0:46:33.480

-I can't imagine also what it was like to pack all of your things like that.

-From that day, Waseem said we won't go back to Turkey. Then

0:46:33.620,0:46:34.900

they told him,

0:46:35.110,0:46:40.520

what you can do, is that people pay some people and they know the road.

0:46:40.840,0:46:53.440

You can go to them. We paid some people, who knew the road, the highway, and you know, always when you go from one country to another country, you go by highway, right?

0:46:53.440,0:47:08.290

But in that day, because of the war and everything, we went by villages. That's why, instead of taking one hour from Syria to Turkey, or half an hour, because Aleppo and Turkey are close. It took us two hours.

0:47:08.290,0:47:23.600

Because we were going from one village to another village, from one village to another village, and you feel very sad. Everything is in the ground, everything is destroyed, no tree, no humans, no buildings. Everything is down.

0:47:24.680,0:47:34.970

Until now Omar said he won't go back. Every time I tell him, "we will go, your mama visited there twice, and your grandma visited there."

0:47:35.310,0:47:36.900

He said "no way."

0:47:37.070,0:47:41.870

When you were traveling with them. Were you thinking maybe we won't come back?

0:47:43.110,0:47:50.160

When the the first time he called, or his brother called

0:47:50.340,0:47:56.710

they were negotiating what we wanted,

0:47:57.470,0:48:00.970

a round trip or one trip? Do you know what I told them?

0:48:00.980,0:48:02.230

I told them

0:48:02.480,0:48:07.580

One trip. I will not go back until I get my passport,

0:48:07.740,0:48:19.200

my citizenship. This is the first thing I told them. "Mouna, do you want one trip or two trips," I said, "one trip, and I will not come back until I have my passport."

0:48:19.450,0:48:24.040

How did you decide what to take with you and what to leave behind?

0:48:24.400,0:48:31.510

I took only the things that are important and some clothes.

0:48:31.730,0:48:38.420

Other than that, no. Imagine.. and of course, my jewelry.

0:48:38.980,0:48:41.010

my jewelry, that

0:48:41.120,0:48:50.310

my mom and my grandpa and my mother in law gave me when I got married, I brought it. Imagine that my home when I got married,

0:48:50.680,0:48:59.960

I had only the living room. I had a dining room and a guest room, but was just a room. There is no stuff, no furniture.

0:49:00.650,0:49:10.740

My husband saved, and I saved and we bought our furniture. You know, we didn't sit on it and we left.

0:49:11.210,0:49:17.880

My kids didn't sleep on their

0:49:18.100,0:49:23.010

bed, the one that I bought for them because they were little. But

0:49:23.270,0:49:25.060

it was all new.

0:49:25.500,0:49:29.960

-What year was it when you went to Turkey?
-2013

0:49:30.110,0:49:41.100

And how long did it take you the second time when you went from village to village?

0:49:41.200,0:49:45.630

The story is, when we went with his uncle, it was Saturday. After maybe three days or one week we went with these people,

0:49:45.650,0:49:55.870

and we went from village to village, and we stayed on the border between Turkey and Syria for four hour.

0:49:56.050,0:50:03.850

They told us that we are the last car. Imagine the cars behind us, they stayed. They closed the border.

0:50:03.950,0:50:12.640

-You were the last car to go through?

-We were the last car. We stayed, me and my sister and my mother in law, we stayed for four hours.

0:50:12.680,0:50:22.010

And the kids, thank God, they had water. We didn't eat, and didn't drink, only water, and they stayed in the car until they..

0:50:22.150,0:50:29.300

because do you know what they were doing? they are scared, and this is their right, they were scared and opened all luggage.

0:50:29.350,0:50:42.620

Every person in the car. They opened their luggage in the Turkey's side. Because in the Syrian side there was no government then. Now there is government, but before, when we got out there was no government.

0:50:43.420,0:50:47.390

The people on the border,

0:50:47.510,0:50:59.840

I don't think they are the Government, I don't know.

-How long did you stay in Turkey?

-We stayed for a couple maybe weeks, until our paper were finished.

0:51:00.780,0:51:08.950

-And you knew that you wanted to continue?

-Yes, because I told you in 2012,

0:51:09.110,0:51:22.400

Waseem called his brother and said, "please bring the papers. I am done."

-Did you have family in the United States already to help you?

-This is his brother, the one who was here 20 years ago.

0:51:22.640,0:51:35.200

-Your brother in law?

-Brother in law, his brother, Waseem's brother. Yes, my brother in law.

-Was he here in Maryland, or in a different city?

0:51:35.220,0:51:49.010

-No. In Maryland. That's why we stayed in Maryland.

-Interesting. So you had some family here to help you adjust.

0:51:49.090,0:52:08.680

Only his... I have my auntie and my uncle, but they are in another state. They didn't help because they are in another state. And my mom, my mom also in here, but she's in another state. But when we came in 2013, we came only to Maryland because his brother, my brother in law, he's here from 2013, and he helped. He supported us, and helped us!

0:52:08.760,0:52:38.510

-What was it like when you first came to the United States? Was it what you expected it to be, or was it different from what you had imagined?

-I was only worried because I have my scarf. Yeah, I was only worried because I have my scarf. Other than that, I was joking with my husband and stuff like, but my son and kids are with me.

0:52:38.510,0:52:54.900

They were surprised about the culture, like when you see a boy and a girl close in the bus, or metro station, we don't have this in our country, you know?

0:52:54.900,0:52:59.660
Very, very close. They were very close...

0:53:00.910,0:53:02.190

0:53:02.630,0:53:04.230
-Did you face

0:53:04.290,0:53:14.290
discrimination because of your headscarf? Did people make comments about it?
-Yeah, they made comments. In 2014,

0:53:14.670,0:53:28.930
because my husband had his first job in sonography, in 2014, and I was working with my son in the... he was working, and my daughter was in the

0:53:30.310,0:53:38.480
stroller. From my home to the mall, it's half an hour walking, and then a guy with a Toyota truck.

0:53:38.830,0:54:07.100
I don't know what he said, blah, blah blah scarf. I said, okay, he was talking about me and about my scarf. What he was talking about? I don't know. This is only the problem, and even my mom and grandma, her mom, said to me, "Mouna, you are not scared. Take your scarf off," I said I will not take it off. Even my friend told me, "I was having a scarf when somebody

0:54:07.260,0:54:10.370
appeared with a gun in front of me

0:54:10.720,0:54:13.320
and I asked, I took the Scarf off."

0:54:13.470,0:54:28.250
I said, "okay, when somebody will come and hit me or something, I'll take off the scarf. Other than that, I won't. I am okay until now. They will say bad words, they can say bad words until tomorrow. I don't care."

0:54:29.380,0:54:45.870
In New York they were talking to my husband. I know they didn't talk to me, but they were talking to my husband, asking if we are Jewish, or Spanish, because he's white with black hair. They think he's from Spani or something.

0:54:46.550,0:54:53.140
I have so many questions that I want to ask you.

0:54:53.340,0:55:03.520
Do you feel living in Columbia now that you can wear your headscarf, and people are respectful of you, or do you still feel

0:55:03.640,0:55:07.700
some sense of discrimination against you because you're Muslim?

0:55:07.730,0:55:21.400
No, Even in Montgomery or Columbia, there are more people who have scarves. You will be okay.

0:55:21.410,0:55:30.020
I will not be shy, or I will not be afraid. You will be afraid when you will be by yourself. When I go to Oregon,

0:55:30.250,0:55:31.270

0:55:31.300,0:55:43.720
There is not a lot of people you can see. Maybe you will see one or two have a scarf. I go to the mall, Washington Square Mall, and

0:55:44.260,0:55:51.210

No person with a scarf, maybe one or two. I am by myself. I say okay, I am special today.

0:55:51.300,0:56:05.780

-Here you feel like you have a lot...?

-Here, yeah, there is a lot of people. I am not scared. I have a scarf, and other people have scarves. This is my personality. If they don't like me, it's their problem.

0:56:07.310,0:56:15.110

Have your children faced any discrimination being Muslims here? Did they ever have any difficulties?

0:56:15.230,0:56:24.620

No? Only because my son, he's, what do you call it?...

0:56:24.680,0:56:39.560

Very white, much whiter than me, and sometimes they make fun of him. First, when he was in kindergarten. We were in Montgomery, by the way, next to my mom and mother in law.

0:56:39.800,0:56:58.880

He always would come and complain "mama, they hit me,".. "mama they are talking about my forehead,".. I said maybe they are afraid of you like you are afraid of them, because they are not the same environment. I said, "you are different."

0:56:58.880,0:57:10.490

But when they see you being clever or nice, and don't care, they would be nice to you, but if somebody hit you, tell the teacher. If the teacher didn't respond, hit him then

0:57:10.640,0:57:11.970

tell the teacher.

0:57:12.200,0:57:27.310

Every time I tell them, even now.. Sima is not whiter than me, she's the same color like me, or maybe darker. Sima is having issues with her kids, with her friends

0:57:27.340,0:57:34.540

but I told her, "it's okay, they only wants you to not be clever.

0:57:34.620,0:57:44.590

Tell the teacher." I spoke to the principal, and they did well. It's not because she is a Muslim, maybe they want to make fun.

0:57:44.660,0:57:49.410

Even to other to other kids, they make fun of them sometimes.

0:57:49.960,0:57:51.560

But generally

0:57:51.570,0:58:08.690

their experience has been pretty positive?

-Yeah, yeah, positive. Nobody will bother you because you are a Muslim. No. And, by the way, there in their school, I noticed this in Columbia more than in Montgomery, they will text you "Eid Mubarak,"

0:58:08.720,0:58:18.970

"Ramadan Mubarak," and they tell the people who are fasting to go to the library. In Montgomery, until Sima was

0:58:19.210,0:58:23.840

two or Omar until the 5th grade,

0:58:23.880,0:58:36.050

they didn't tell them that. They didn't tell them go to another room because you are fasting, you are not eating. Here, they tell them there is another section to read a book or something, if you don't want to be in the lunch area.

0:58:36.130,0:58:41.530

-That's very nice from the school.

-I didn't hear that from Montgomery. I hear it here.

0:58:41.540,0:58:56.570

No, for for the Muslim issues, I don't have any issues, it only happened when I came here for the scarf, and because I was also in Roanoke, there was not a lot of people who had a scarf,

0:58:56.670,0:59:05.560

one or two, or never.

-In Roanoke, Virginia?

-Yes.

-You faced difficulties there?

0:59:05.730,0:59:17.050

It's only when you are by yourself, you are special, and you have only the scarf. You are worried what they will do, or what they will say. When I told my husband about this guy

0:59:17.110,0:59:30.720

in the truck who said, blah, blah blah, scarf, that he was cussing me and cussing the scarf. He said, Waseem, "don't worry, unless he didn't do anything else." I said, "thank God, nobody did something (to) me."

0:59:31.160,0:59:48.890

-So your husband was a doctor in Syria. Was he able to find work in medicine here, doing the same kind of work?

-Here there are other protocols and other exams. They want you to be a graduate from here to be a doctor.

0:59:48.890,1:00:06.280

But there are steps, three exams. He had step one and step two from 2002, or 2003, before he married me, and step three until now, he didn't get it. But you know, back home, as a radiologist

1:00:06.290,1:00:09.350

he did ultrasounds and X-rays

1:00:09.850,1:00:24.380

and mammograms and wrote reports. In this country, there is a technician to do that, and the doctor writes only the report, and a sonographer writes a small report, and the doctor will write a big report.

1:00:24.770,1:00:31.400

That's why here he took the exams

1:00:31.410,1:00:48.920

as a doctor, take exams as a sonographer, sonography exams, and work as a sonographer. Now he works in a doctor's ObGyn office as a sonographer to see the fetus

1:00:48.920,1:00:58.990

All the Women's ObGyn, and he works in Johns Hopkins Hospital as a sonographer, but everything...

1:00:58.990,1:01:09.830

What do you call it? Venous, musculoskeletal, ObGyn, everything in sonography

1:01:09.870,1:01:21.690

in the hospital.

-Does he feel frustrated at all that he can't do exactly what he was doing before? Or does he feel happy with his work now?

-He is in between.

1:01:21.730,1:01:28.110

I'll tell you why.. Because he's doing what he used to do in Syria,

1:01:28.200,1:01:44.840

but not writing reports, and he feels sad because some people here are writing the reports, like the radiologist. He's writing the reports, and sometimes it's not right, or have issues, or they don't understand it. So he says,

1:01:44.840,1:02:02.990

Why, didn't I do this test? Let me take this test and finish it, and I'd be a doctor." With this test, he will be a general doctor, not a radiologist. He will have an ID doctor, you know, there is for doctors there is an ID. He will have it.

1:02:03.110,1:02:11.820

I told him many times. But he is also right. He will work or study. He's working

1:02:11.880,1:02:30.800

from 9 to 6 p.m., when will he have time to study? He will come tired. Like me, I am studying, right, but I am not studying... people are not working at all. They are studying 14 hours. I am studying maybe one or two hours.

1:02:30.920,1:02:36.910

I am not putting my all energy.

1:02:37.280,1:02:45.540

So your you have your responsibilities for your children, you have your job, and you're going to school.

1:02:45.700,1:02:46.960

Exactly.

1:02:47.120,1:02:51.550

-It's a lot.

-Exactly.

-Yeah, that must be very tiring.

1:02:52.190,1:03:01.410

I am taking biology, right? The friend that is taking biology with me, guess how many classes she is taking? She's taking five classes. I asked her

1:03:01.700,1:03:09.390

how she's managing five classes? and she said, "I don't have kids. I don't have to work. I am by myself."

1:03:10.400,1:03:12.350

I think a lot of people

1:03:12.580,1:03:23.220

don't really understand sometimes what community college students have in their lives, in addition to school.

1:03:23.250,1:03:30.280

-Exactly.

-It's a lot. It's exhausting. But you're making so much progress even in these past few years. You've

1:03:30.830,1:03:37.740

really moved ahead in your career, your language skills, your children are healthy. It's it's really

1:03:37.760,1:03:45.090

wonderful to see how much progress you've made.

-Thank you.

-One last question,

1:03:45.300,1:03:50.300

how do you feel talking about all these memories today? How does it make you feel?

1:03:50.580,1:04:05.450

I feel that I am happy. I am giving my experience, and what happened to me to other people to know. Not because I am a Muslim and have a scarf,

1:04:05.480,1:04:09.260

means that "she don't know anything. Maybe she's

1:04:09.350,1:04:16.220

nothing. She's not educated, or her language is not a perfect English ."

1:04:16.300,1:04:30.830

No, I am studying, continuing my studying, working, have kids and family. And how we from that experience, bad experience, we have something.

1:04:30.950,1:04:57.200

I know not only a career, for example, some people have their own career, like own a business, not yet in this situation yet, but at least I am working. I am showing my kids that I am not

stopping, that I had my education and stopped. No, I am continuing. My husband supports me. Last time I told him, "the teacher said,

1:04:57.210,1:04:58.710
I am clever,

1:04:58.890,1:05:03.580
do you not want to be a doctor? Go ahead, be a PA," I said,

1:05:03.980,1:05:21.920
"Professor, you want me to be a PA. I have two kids. It's a lot." And she said, "No, it's not a lot. You will manage it. Go ahead." I said I will see. But this bad situation, and leaving my country, my home, and my sister.

1:05:22.250,1:05:39.110
Until now, I have been 11 years. I didn't see my sister and her kids. I see her on WhatsApp, but it's not like physically, to touch her, drink coffee with her and all. She's one year younger than me. From that situation

1:05:39.110,1:05:55.440
and leaving your country, and your things, and coming here to something you don't know. Then you have something. You work. You have your kids. They are successful, my son, "Mashallah" he is, God bless him, he is getting subjects

1:05:55.460,1:05:58.330
more than 8th grade, 9th grade.

1:05:59.220,1:06:05.010
-You must be veryproud.
-Sima now like math, thank God.

1:06:05.010,1:06:34.830
In this situation, I am happy. I am giving my experience, telling them about my bad situation, and how to let the people not to stop, "Oh, I have bad situation! Oh, I will stop." No go on. Maybe you will be a successful. Woman, a successful man, not woman only, a successful man. You will have something don't say "Oh, I am coming from

1:06:35.070,1:06:36.510
another country

1:06:36.550,1:06:44.260
maybe it's difficult. It's difficult, but you will have it. You will go on. You will find your way.

1:06:45.190,1:06:59.390
You certainly have found your way, and you certainly are showing all that you have been able to accomplish after all of these very, very challenging experiences. Mouna, thank you so much for sharing your story today.
-You're welcome, thank you.

1:06:59.410,1:07:03.090
Thank you. Thank you. I'm going to stop the recording.