

Nancy Ajrylovski

**Interviewed 3/6/2008
By Jean Seagers
Midway Village Museum**

Nancy Ajirylovski

Jean Seagers: What is your name?

Nancy Ajirylovski: Nancy Ajirylovski.

JS: And you live where?

NA: In Rockton Illinois.

JS: Are you married?

NA: Yes and I have four kids and three grandkids. I got three girls and one son.

JS: What is your husband's name?

NA: His name is Larry.

JS: What is your occupation?

NA: I am a co-owner with my husband in a restaurant in Rockton. It's a family restaurant and we own a business. I run into with my husband and my kids.

JS: What is the name of your restaurant?

NA: Is Ray's Family Restaurant in Rockton.

JS: Where were you educated?

NA: I was educated partly and well mostly in the Chicago area.

JS: Where did you go to school?

NA: I went to grade school in Brian Piccolo and I can't seem to recall the name of my high school.

JS: So you grew up in Chicago?

NA: Yes I did. Yes I was there I came to the United States when I was seven years old and my father was here one year before we came to the United States. He came in 1970 and we came in 1971 and we settled in Chicago the Chicago area. It was me my sister, my brother, my mother and my father.

JS: So your father came a year ahead of you and the rest of you came after?

NA: Yes he came a year ahead of us you had to do that in order to for you to get a visa and to be legally in this country which we came legally. We got our green cards at the airport.

JS: Where did you come from?

NA: Macedonia, it's formerly Yugoslavia became independent in 1992 and it's a village in Macedonia.

JS: What's the name of your village?

NA: It's called well I was born in Navot. But then when I get married it's [Asamat] so it's just villages and towns. It's a big huge area there and it covers like here they have towns well there they call them villages because they're not that big and they don't have what the town offers. We do have towns but they're more far away from the villages

JS: What did your parents what occupation did they have before they came here?

NA: They were farmers mostly like tobacco and apples. My father was he had his own apple orchards and that was his commodity. My mother she did the house chores and tobacco, tobacco fields and my grandparents the same. My uncles, my aunts mostly it was that and just regular farming wheat.

JS: Do you remember much about growing up?

NA: Yes I do actually I do remember. I was still fairly young but I went to school there a year and it's a lot of hard work there. I mean you know people don't realize how they used to struggle to get what people here have to work one week. There they have to work six months so you know as you can imagine. They work actually all summer long to make ends meet in the winter to get through the winter and the summer. They would have to work all summer long.

JS: Did they sell their produce?

NA: They sell their produce yes. They sell tobacco. They sell actually mushrooms. Their apple orchards grapes nowadays actually it's less than that it's mostly apples but people try to go fishing. Everybody has their own fishing there and they have people who come in and will buy the fresh fish. They would have to clean them and everything. Now that's how the people are doing their business. It's is still the apples are doing big-time.

JS: That's their main crop there?

NA: Actually Winston factory is in one of our big cities there of tobacco, Winston for cigarettes yeah. It's one of our biggest factories. It is about an hour and a half away from our villages so it employs a lot of people and that's why people are still doing tobacco even though you know it's a very hard job but they get good money for it.

JS: What made your parents want to come to the United States?

NA: I think because of the way they were living there you know working very hard like they didn't grow up with everything like they had to work for it and the commodity there wasn't so great. It was a hard way of living. It was hard times they went through the good times, the bad times.

JS: That's a big decision to decide to leave your own country.

NA: It is a really big decision and at the time like everybody was doing it. Like my uncles they came here first before my father did and it was extremely hard for them because they had to leave their home but they worked so hard for to build and they had their farmland so they had to actually you know shut everything down, their house because you don't rent it there you know there's nobody to rent there. Some people used to have actually to rent the fields for tobacco or they would rent the fields for the apples. Like say my father had those beautiful apple orchards and he would rent them to people so they could work them so they won't go to waste but now as time grew the people there you know have either passed away or moved on you know to different areas like maybe America. It was just a way of life and they knew that when they came to the states they would you know they would work hard and make a living.

JS: So you say some of his brothers were here already?

NA: His brothers were here already two years prior to one of them I think in 1965 if I am not mistaken. He came and he was the first one and then my uncle came a year before my dad did and then when they all got together they actually decided to buy a house which was a three-story home. So they all lived in the same house while everybody had their own apartment and they all bought it together and my father was here like just one year and he ended up buying a house with his brothers and so he was working three jobs you know going from one job to the other because he wanted to bring his family here so he worked very hard for what he achieved. I mean everybody works hard don't get me wrong. It is right now you know people have a lot more easier than they did when they first came into America.

JA: What did your father do in the United States?

NA: Well when he first came he used to work at restaurants washing dishes. He had three dishwashing jobs that he did in and from then on he moved and he was working for Schwinn Bicycle actually. He worked there for I think like nine years and then we went to Europe and he kind of lost that job because he stayed on more than he could have. They kind of like let them go because he did not come back in time. So then he would just do you know odd jobs here and there.

JS: So you moved back to Europe?

NA: No we just went there in like 1979. My brother got married there and we went there and it was because you know you can't just go there for one week and then just come back. You know we had to reopen our house. We had to do a lot of things and it took more time than necessary and we all went but then when he came back he lost his job and my mother used to work for Zenith Television she worked there for seven years and when her mother passed away which she was in Europe and then when she came back she lost her job because of it too. Yeah because you only have a few weeks or more like a vacation time and if you're not back within those few weeks then you lose your job and you know it's understandable.

JS: So what did they do they both lost their jobs?

NA: Yeah then my father went back and did you know odd jobs here and there. He would work in restaurants and my mother got another factory job and she was there for a long time. My father he just did odd jobs here and there. He still made the money. He was a saver and he was a worker and my brother works since he was 14. He was a busboy and then he started to be a cook and he was a cook for even today. So he started out young and then eventually my brother got his own restaurant in Chicago and then my father used to work with him and my sister she was young she got married. I was still young. I was in school and I worked for a while and then I got married and then came to Rockford.

JS: Had your father and mother ever been in this country before they came here?

NA: No, no.

JS: Your mother was born in?

NA: Everybody yeah we were born, my siblings and I was born there, my mother and my father my uncles everybody was born in Macedonia.

JS: So you and your how many siblings?

NA: Me, my brother and my sister.

JS: Three siblings? So you were in Chicago from the time you?

NA: From 1971 to 1982 by the time I got married. So I was actually raised in Chicago and then I moved to the suburbs of Chicago when I got married which was 1982 and then we were there until 1999 when we moved to Rockford and we moved to Rockford to buy a restaurant and we've been here ever since.

JS: When you arrived in this country you flew here?

NA: We flew into O'Hare Airport. Yes it was quite the experience.

JS: What was it like?

NA: It was amazing because growing up in a village we had no television. We only had a radio so we had no outside sources really. We never really went anywhere. My parents could not afford to take us anywhere like trips or they were just hard-working farm people. My father used to go sell apples in Sarajevo and Bosnia and Zagreb and Kosovo and all those big huge areas there where people would buy apples. It's not as if you're going to go to you know like someone's going to come in and buy them all. You have to go and sell them yourself and he went all over there and then he was in the Army I'm not sure. I really haven't even talked to him because he's passed away like 18 years. I know my uncle was and I've seen pictures of him in a uniform so I never really got to talk to him about it but he had a lot of stories that's for sure.

JS: Now when you came to the United States do you remember how you reacted when you landed?

NA: Yes I actually do. I seen a lot of lights. I'm the kind of person I'm very curious. I'm not just you know like take it in stride. I'm very curious and you know I want all of the details and we stopped at the airport and our flight was delayed and my uncle had already come. He was waiting for us at the airport but because our flight was delayed he went home and so then he came as I vaguely remember it was like 2 a.m. in the morning and we didn't know where to go. My mother we never knew English none of us and me like the kind of person that I am I am like I want to know everything and very nosy and when it comes to that stuff. I'm not nosy like gossip nosy and we had a telephone number which was my uncle's telephone number and my father where he used to say because him and my father were waiting for us but then they left. So than out of curiosity you know how are we going to get home we were there and nobody was there to greet us. So then you know like you see this telephone and you've never really seen a telephone in your life but like here and there you stuff. So then there was this guy there and I think I was like seven years old but I was the kind of like I don't just sit back and just stay there you know. So then I went and I asked I remember to this day it's so weird I asked this guy and I gave him the telephone number because I don't know how to dial a telephone you know you have to put money in there and I never knew you had to do anything like that so the guy was very kind enough and he put in a quarter there, dialed the number for me because I gave him the telephone number that I had written on a piece of paper. My mother had actually and I took it from her and we gave it to the guy and he called for us at home and then they answered and then they came and picked us up and when we drove home it was the middle of the night so all you see is lights. It was amazing. I had never seen so many lights and so many roads in our life. You just see like regular roads one-sided you don't see all these highways and stuff and we saw them back home you know when we went to the airport because it's like a 2 1/2 hour drive from where we are at it but it was a small airport was nothing like O'Hare or anything.

JS: What about when you went to the grocery stores and that it must have been an entirely different...

NA: Yeah it was because there in our villages they used to have bazaars in the big cities you know in the small cities the big cities whatever and you go like once a week and you get your stuff

that you need to make food all week long because there they home cooked three meals a day ahead. So it was kind of interesting. I don't really vaguely remember like my first day going to the grocery store or whatever but I remember going later on and how much like a loaf of bread was it was like \$.25 you know we get a loaf of bread and we got to buy sacks of flour. You had to like I went to school when I came here so I knew more than my mother let's say. So I would help my mother when we go shopping and I would count the money for her. She didn't know English.

JS: Neither one of them knew any English?

NA: No nothing we didn't know English at all. I went to school they signed me up and I was supposed to be in first grade but because I did not know English so they put me back in kindergarten for a while for about six months I would say and then I went to first grade and I picked up English fluently within six months.

JS: You were young enough.

NA: I was young enough where you pick up more and my brother he had a little bit harder of a time picking it up because he was a lot older than me and my sister even more because she was about 14 when she came here so she it was harder for her to pick up the language than I did and then I went from first grade I went to second grade and I didn't go to third grade they skipped third grade on me so I went straight to fourth grade because I was too good to be in third grade. Because I picked up right away and I would you know let's just say I was the type where I wanted to achieve and learn fast.

JS: Did your parents speak which language?

NA: They spoke Albanian, Albanian and Macedonian they spoke but mostly because we are Albanian they spoke mostly Albanian.

JS: In the home?

NA: Yes in the home.

JS: And do you still speak it?

NA: Oh yes, yes I do and my kids do.

JS: So you said your mother stayed at home she didn't work anymore?

NA: No actually she did work yes. She worked in another factory she then and she even worked in a factory when my brother got the restaurant in Chicago and my father used to work with him and help them out.

JS: Does your brother still own a restaurant?

NA: Yes he does actually but he's here in Machesney Park.

JS: Which restaurant is it?

NA: It's Hogsvie Family Restaurant, yes in Machesney Park and actually he owned the restaurants that I have right now before I did.

JS: You said you lived in the Chicago area or did you live in Chicago?

NA: I actually lived northwest of Chicago is it northwest? It is out by Pulaski and Grand Avenue and North Avenue in the city of Chicago yes.

JS: What was your home life like?

NA: Home life here?

JS: When you were growing up.

NA: When I was growing up in Chicago it was pretty fair I guess I would say. My father he was old-fashioned so you know he was very strict with us very strict and we didn't have all these little toys and all these things that kids nowadays have. We were limited. We didn't have that much money. My father was a saver if he could afford it he would buy it if he couldn't he wouldn't. He tried to make life comfortable for us. We had a home, we had clothes you know we had food on the table every day and it was good. I had my aunts around me. I had my uncles; I had my cousins and we grew up in an environment which is actually really well because everybody around us was either Albanian or Italian or Polish and I mean there was all kinds you know from all over people in that area and people like used to know everybody. They used to be friendly. They used to say hi when you walked down the street. They knew your name. They knew whose kid you were. It was a different environment than it is let's say like now people are growing up sometimes you don't get to see your neighbors at all. You could live in a neighborhood like 20 years and you don't even know who the person on the next block is and when we were growing up everybody knew everybody for like blocks and blocks away because it was all one big community and you were not scared to play outside or you were not scared to so it was pretty good and at it was very nice childhood.

JS: It wasn't just Albanians then that were in the neighborhood?

NA: No it was all kinds as I said Italian's, Polish, Americans that had been here for the longest time.

JS: Did you continue to live in that house that had the three stories?

NA: We did for a while and then my uncles decided that they want to move so then they moved about 15 or 20 miles away and then my father stayed in the same .We just went to like a big apartment complex and then after I got married then they bought a house in more like a northwest part of Chicago because the area was getting a little bit it wasn't the same as when I came here so then he moved there and then little by little and they moved just further west.

JS: Did you parents speak English before they came?

NA: No

JS: So your father picked it up?

NA: Yeah my father picked it up. He wasn't fluent but he understood and he understood.

JS: How about your mom?

NA: No less even today she's not fluent I think it was hard for her to pick it up and when you don't use it like where she used to work in the factory you don't really mingle that much you just do your job and the only break you have is when you eat you lunch or have a 10 minute break so conversing with anybody it's kind of rough.

JS: Is she still living then?

NA: Yes she lives in Roscoe with my brother.

JS: How old is she?

NA: She is 75.

JS: Did they encourage you to speak English in the home?

NA: Actually in the home we never spoke English because nobody understood it. You know my parents didn't understand it. Even with my father he did not say like don't speak it because he knew we had to learn it and as I said I learned it really fast so me and my cousins were always speaking it because it was easier for us to speak English and then at home we would always use Albanian even today.

JS: In the neighborhood?

NA: In the neighborhood it was you know I had friends and we would mostly speak English but then again we would use of the Albanian language at times too and even today like you know I have kids and they grew up in an environment where we spoke both languages so my kids grew up speaking both languages.

JS: They comfortable in either language?

NA: They are comfortable in either language. They understand either language perfectly. They adapted to it because that's the way they grew up. My in-laws live with us so and they're not fluent. They understand really well English and it's just like speaking it is not easy for them even though they've been here for so many years.

JS: But they do speak English?

NA: Yes it's just a little bit less let's say they've been here such a long time you would think they would know it fluently but they don't because of the jobs that they have done in the past and it's different now you have like the kids who grew up that came from there like when they were small you know you have Sesame Street and I knew a girl who was in her 20s and she came here and she got married and she did not know one thing to say in English and she learned fluent English within a year because she never worked because her husband was working at a time and just buy the TV and just watching TV and watching Sesame Street and she learned English.

JS: How much school did your parents complete?

NA: I'm not sure about that but I don't think it was if any school at all really then as I said back then it was hard times for them they did not have time for school they went as soon as they grew up they went into the fields.

JS: What do you think is their attitude about school and about education did they wish that for your children?

NA: Not really because I think the way they were raised and brought up and the way they dealt in life that education to them – I think work came before education because that was the way they were brought up that was what they knew but in my opinion education to me is very important why because without education you can do nothing in this world so I always pushed my kids to go better for themselves or finish high school and do well in school for their benefit not for mine and for me I did not finish high school. I did not complete it because the time when I was in Chicago growing up there was a lot you know you had to walk to school there was no transportation you had no busses. Your parents were working all the time. My father did not even own a car so you were out of luck there you had to walk six or seven blocks to school no matter if it's freezing rain or whether it's 100° weather you walked and it was getting to the point where the schools were getting really bad, a lot of gangs in public schools violence and all that stuff. My father goes I'm not going to risk your life for education. He goes if you have common sense you can make it in this world and he was right because here I am today owning a business. I was very good in

school but that throws me back I think that's why I'm so hard on my kids for school because I was really good in school and I had to quit at a young age. I didn't go I didn't achieve what I wanted to achieve in my life as far as school is concerned because I think if I went I went the whole way I would have probably known more maybe not who knows. I've known people who have college educations and they've asked me stuff that I knew and they didn't.

JA: You could go back whenever you want to probably.

NA: Yeah actually you know I could have everybody could do a lot of things here in America that once they stop doing it they can go back and do the same what they wanted to achieve in life and I'm still young who knows maybe I'll go back and get my college degree. If I put my mind to it I think I could do it but running a business is kind of hard you're there like 14 hour days and sometimes 16 hour days and you don't have time for your family let alone to go to school but when the kids are all grown up and out of high school or college.

JS: Your children are how old?

NA: I have one he's a senior now he's going to graduate this year from high school Hononegah High School he's my youngest son and my other ones are already out of school. Two are married and one is going to be married in October so I just have my son with me and he at first did not like school that much, a typical boy wanted to have fun in school but now he realizes like I said you have to push them a little bit into that category when they don't think that it's right.

JS: Is he going to continue?

NA: Yes definitely if I have anything to say about it he will.

JS: Where you go to church or do you go to church?

NA: We have our mosque. We don't go like every week or every Sunday. We have our mosque that's in Brookfield Illinois. We have like a membership there. We have sometimes our parties there whatever you want to have twice a year they throw big parties and we go there but it's not like we go to church every you know.

JS: What is your religion?

NA: Muslim

JS: Did your children go to any type of Saturday classes.

NA: No, no they never went.

JS: Did you?

NA: No actually I did not, no. Although there was there was Sunday Schools to teach our kids. They went for awhile for three years and then it wasn't funded very good so they missed it they don't do it anymore so.

JS: What was your first job?

NA: I worked at a place called toys Milton Bradley in Chicago and then I got after that...

JS: How old were you?

NA: Actually right before I got married I was 17 almost 18.

JS: Did your parents that was okay with them?

NA: Oh yes.

JS: What other kinds of work have you done?

NA: Mostly restaurant work actually after that then I got married and then I worked in a restaurant and I've been in it ever since.

JS: Where did you meet your husband?

NA: I met him at a restaurant, my uncle's restaurant. He was actually my mom's first cousin. We went there and he was there. I was young and he was still young so we just let it go off for a while and then we saw each other somewhere else and then one thing led to another and then it clicked so it's kind of funny now here we meet at a restaurant and we own a restaurant now.

JS: That's your life.

NA: Yeah that's our life. It's very hard work but it's not mostly like hard work hard work it's just the time. It's a lot of time; we put a lot of time and effort into it. You have to give it 110% no matter what if you've come here let's say like yesterday and if you came here 30 years ago you have to give it 110% or you won't make it in life and you got to work at it. I know people that have come here like let's say like 10 years ago or 15 years ago they come here with nothing starting from scratch from Macedonia and they're well-off now. They have their own homes. They have their kids. They work and to better themselves here and they go back I've gone back three times to Macedonia. It's a beautiful country and we have a house there. We built a home there about 10 years ago. My in-laws go back every year and they're older now you know they don't have to work. My father-in-law's been retired for about 10 years and he goes back with his wife just as long as they can do it they have to make do on their own over there and I would love to go as visiting even my in-laws you know how they were born and raised there and they came here when they were in their 30s and they don't want to live there. They just go for the summer. This is their home; this is all they've known.

JS: Your husband's from the same area?

NA: Yes and for me to go live there and say yes I would live there. No I would not you know this is my home here in America. When I was seven I came here so I've been here all my life most of my life you know and this is it this is where all my kids are and my grandkids.

JS: When you were growing up who were your friends were they kids that...

NA: They were mostly Albanian kids Albanian and a few Italians that were in the neighborhood that we used to play with but I had my cousins and friends that weren't my cousins that were Albanian.

JS: When you come to Rockford have you branched out or are there other friends or do you stay with your family group?

NA: I stay with my family group because the only time you get to see your friends is like at an event that we have like once a year. Actually we celebrate the first person who came to America every April.

JS: The first Albanian?

NA: The first Albanian, we started celebrating when it was 90 years that was about 15 years ago and we started celebrating.

JS: And who was that?

NA: That's a good question. I wish I had the name for you. I should've gotten the name we celebrate him and I never even got someone even wrote a book about him and we celebrate every April the year that this guy came into America and that's how everybody started coming to America because of this one guy.

JS: Where did he go to?

NA: I think he was in New York if I'm not mistaken he's still he was an immigrant in New York so then for the past 15 years we've been celebrating all the our main area is called Prasba(?) that's where all the villages are so he was the first man from Prasba(?) to come to America and one guy got into his history and what he did here what he achieved in America and then he wrote a book about him.

JS: Did he achieve quite a bit?

NA: Yes he did and I wish I had the book. It is good to celebrate something like that because look where it's gotten us. I think if everybody that was here in America if they were not here and they were there today in today's standards people would not have they would probably have less than they do you know 30 years ago because there's not enough to go around. This way when people immigrated to like America or Australia or Denmark or Sweden or wherever Canada because they're all over they gave leeway to the other people that were there to make a better life for themselves because when you have five people going south to the same thing and when you have 20 it's a different story those five people will at least make the money instead of 20 so whether it be crops whether it be anything. So I think it worked out for both for best worlds us coming here making a life for ourselves and then the people that stayed there to make a better living for themselves because of giving them an opportunity to have that chance to do better than if everybody was there. They would not have achieved stuff that they have now or for that matter us here let's say a person is here and they have a family there if they send them like \$100 a year it'll go a long way over there and that's what they used to do before people would come here.

JS: Did your parents do that?

NA: My parents we had my grandmother living she was still there so yes they would send her money to live on and then she came here and stayed here for awhile and then she passed away so but as far as that's concerned that's the only one because everybody was here.

JS: Going back to your neighborhood you said it was a very ethnic neighborhood?

NA: Ethnic yes.

JS: Was there fighting among the different nationalities?

NA: No, no that's amazing to me like in this day neighbors don't care about other neighbors there let's say you gather around once a week you know whether it be Albanians or Italians or whoever it was sometimes you would have groups you know like picnics or whatever. Sometimes the whole neighborhood would do something. People there they were different I think because they lived so poorly in the old country and then when they came here they had all these good things like running water. We didn't have running water at home when I was growing up we didn't have no running water. We didn't have a bathroom inside we had outhouses. Still today there's no heated they have no natural gas there so everything is electric. They used to have wood burning stoves to keep them warm and when they came to the states you have all these different elements that you never had before so they were so appreciative of everything you know. They appreciated what they had here because they did not have it there that's why my kids they went five years ago we went on vacation about almost 6 years ago and they kind of knew because I

would talk to them about it about how people used to live there and how poor it was. They didn't have no telephones, no televisions, no running water, no heated rooms you know you heat the room with one big stove and so they kind of new and like when they went there and seen how these people still today in this day and age live poor people that are still well off but still don't have any stuff in their house that they do here. So then my kids appreciate a lot more America than they ever did before they went there but my kids also like to go back there and visit. My daughter was there last year again and my son might go this year again so you know they appreciate their culture where their parents are from but as I said here in America like my mom and my dad when they came here or my uncles or my siblings or my cousins for them to work three jobs it was nothing whether it be for my father or my uncle's work three jobs ,my father-in-law worked three jobs his wife she worked hard to took care of the family that's why I think they appreciated it because it did not bother them to work those three jobs because to work that kind of work for them there was nothing compared to what kind of work they did back home at least they got a paycheck every week you know. There you have to work six months before you got anything for it yes it is hard work and that's why I think that in that day and age even like Italians are Polish people that immigrated from all over they were all hard workers. They have a lot of respect that's what the key thing here is they had a lot of respect for one other they came from the same type of area there and they all had suffered in the past trying to make a living in keeping their family intact

JS: There was no real fighting like gangs or the kids?

NA: No, no, no, no not whatsoever none of that stuff.

JS: So where did your friends originate from school or your neighborhood?

NA: The neighborhood mostly I had one or two kids from school but because my neighborhood had so many people my age that I just stuck start to you know because like I said my father was strict he did not let me go wherever I wanted to go especially females you know because you have to be more strict with them even my brother he was a little older but he would not he had to be home in a certain time and he had to work at a certain time but the neighborhood was great I still remember it to this day

How do you feel your parents accepted American culture?

NA: American culture I don't know if they really did not accept it or accept it?

JS: Were they open to new ways of doing things?

NA: Well they had to be because their kids were growing up they were getting married they had to do different things but they still had their own culture and traditions even to this day we do the traditions

JS: What kind of traditions do you do?

NA: have weddings. Weddings are our biggest traditions. We do a lot of things for weddings. We spend a lot of money that's for sure .Our weddings last about a week starting from the day you let's say a Sunday is the wedding and the reception that Sunday you would start it off and then you go on from there but mostly because everybody works so much you know the hours are so expandable that you can't really go whenever you want. Everybody has businesses or everybody has a job so it's less than what they did back home in the old country but we just you know we still try to keep the traditional things a little bit but it's less but it's more if you know what I mean. We make it more of what we have because we are we have more money to make it with but as I said we have our big dinners, dinner parties before the actual ceremony. We have the ceremony at home in the afternoon and then we have a big reception at the reception area. The bride gets a lot of gifts from the groom's family bearing gifts yes we still do that. There's a lot of traditions that we have two big huge holidays that we celebrate which is the fasting month of Ramadan.

even though I was raised here I still fast the whole month and then we have a big holiday after that where you get all your family together and you make a big lunch or you make a big dinner whatever is convenient and then two months after the first holiday you have another one which is based on the first one prior to that. It called [Biram]. They're both called [Biram]. And it's a celebration you know you fast whoever can do it. I've done it since I was 12 so to me not doing it would be.

JS: And it's not eating up until sunset?

NA: From sun up to sundown and so you know that's one good thing that we do have still the traditional. I don't know if my kids will keep doing it like I did or their kids.

JS: Or your husband?

NA: No, my husband never does it anyway. You know you can't smoke when you do that and he's a smoker so it's pretty hard for him.

JS: Did you ever disagree with your parents about something you wanted to do like going somewhere or what you would wear?

NA: Oh yes I was not like as I said I was the youngest so I was more adapted to the way of American living where my brother and sister were a lot older than me so they were more into the whatever says goes. I was the kind of person where I was more Americanized I would say yes. I would try to talk my father like this is the right way you're doing it the way they did 30 years ago. I would always try to make him see my point of view when I was growing up but my father was my father. If he said no it was no you don't argue too much with him. He had a lot of respect from everybody because he was straightforward whatever he would say in front of you he would never talk behind your back.

JS: You didn't get away with a lot then?

NA: No we had to be very you know but he taught me one good thing though he taught me how to what there is out of life what you can do out of life if you put your mind to it and what you can become if you either this way or that way the wrong way or the right way you choose. He taught us a lot of things about that. He taught us about being appreciative of what we have. He taught us about saving, saving money not just going from paycheck to paycheck. You find a penny on the floor pick it up that Penny becomes a dollar soon. He was like that and I think everybody that came from back there was the same but my father was a little bit different. Where my uncles were more mellow and they were more mellow they were not as hard driven as my father was.

JS: Did you ever disagree with them both of your parents I should say about things that you wanted to do?

NA: Oh yes of course of course.

JS: Were you ever embarrassed by them that they were different?

NA: No, no because that's the one good thing about America everybody can be different and nobody will judge you.

JS: Nobody ever picked on you for being different?

NA: No because I knew how to talk English. I would dress accordingly to what I was. My father did not let us wear shorts. He did not let us for me and my sister wear straps. He did not let us wear makeup actually he loved my long hair and when I cut it he kind of got mad but I cut it to spite him. I think that's the only thing I did that was actually disapproving to him. I had really long

beautiful hair and I was so sick of it and I was the kind of person where I took sometimes I would dare myself to do it and I went and I cut my hair. I didn't ask him because he would have said no anyway.

JS: How old were you?

JA: I was I think like 13 or 14 and when I did it that was the thing but as you say we were never like really different from anybody like if you see us walking down the street you would never know that we were immigrants. My mother used to dress a little bit like according to how she knew how to dress from back home.

JA: Were there any superstitions or traditions that they hung onto from the other country and brought to this country?

NA: Yes even to this day people have superstitions and traditions like we hold onto them. Like on Fridays is our holy day. Every Friday the men go to church here even to this day the people that can and then they have like our mosque not the church but the mosque every from like noon to one they go and pray.

JS: Are there mosques in Rockford?

NA: There is one in Rockford yes; there is one in Rockford to which they go and one in Chicago. So between 12 and one in that period you can't boil water you can't cook anything on the stove, you cannot wash clothes, you can't clean the house. It is nice for you to just sit and enjoy just quiet time pray, if you're in the praying field whatever and back home we still do that and here also and Tuesday's we don't wash clothes. Tuesdays it's a the thing where way back when I don't know we still hold to those traditions superstitions. I mean no big deal though stuff that we kind of got implanted in that because when an older person tells you well this so and so did this and then something happened to them and they were not supposed to be doing it at that time and so it kind of sticks to you.

JS: Do your children observe these too?

NA: Kind of because I'm doing it you know because my father and my mother and my in-laws are doing it and it sticks to them also, not washing clothes or cleaning on our holy day on Friday in the noon between that time and because you hear stories like I said and then you can say well I'm not going to do that because bad luck or something so I think that's what it is no big major stuff like traditional. They still some of them still have old wives tales you know my grandmother used to fix broken bones like no doctor or nothing because they didn't have no doctors back then. So everybody had their own medicine that they would do and they would be fine. She used to fix broken elbows, any kind of broken ankles whatever she used to go in there and fix them like a regular doctor. Within two weeks you were fine and she practiced this when she was in Europe and then she still had it in her where one time I remember somebody had having a broken foot and she came and it was a sprain not broken and put like she would use soap and egg white and make it into like a cast and use paper, brown paper bags and spread it on that and put the cast on there, leave it for two weeks but she would like set it though. She knew where it was it was amazing. She knew where the bone was, how it was broken she would set it and then she would hold it in that position and then she would say okay don't move and then she put a cast on their and it would be good as new and so many other people have like old wives things where they didn't have no doctors or anything. My grandmother was a midwife for so many people that were born so many kids in Europe.

JS: Once you came to this country did your parents think that it was important that you remember your roots; did they encourage that?

NA: Oh yes, yes they did which I still do to my kids today.

JS: You were curious you wanted to know?

NA: Oh yes, yes I'm still learning actually. I still don't know you know I think when I'm a little bit older and I have more time because you know when you have kids and you work constantly and you have your growing up and you're raising your kids and your trying to take care of your family and working at the same time you don't have any time to dwell on that kind of stuff but I think when I'm older I'm going to be more like go into more how my cultures are and my religion because there are so many different types of Muslim religions. Thank God that we are the kind that we are because we don't believe in like suicide. We don't believe in killing somebody only in self defense which is natural that everybody. We don't believe in hurting anybody if they don't hurt you so you know it's different and we have good beliefs and bad beliefs just like everybody other religions do and I respect every religion. We are in a place where you have to respect other religions here in order to survive and even back home that's what they fight about. They fight about land; they fight about religion everywhere it's like that.

JS: So did your parents ever go back home?

NA: Yes they built a house there.

JS: Oh your parents built a house?

NA: Yes no this is my like right now when we were married we built a home but my parents have another house in their village. They built that about like 20 some years ago.

JS: Doe someone live in it?

NA: No they just go like every year like sometimes every other year. Nobody lives there they just built it to have when they go back when they go back to visit like not to live there.

JS: Did your parents or even you I guess you were quite young but did your siblings keep in contact with any friends?

NA: No, no because you know why actually they kept in touch because they're here. Most of my relatives my distant cousins some that I don't even really we don't keep in touch because I was so young to begin with when I came here but if I go back home I would ask you know who's this and who's this. I would be curious as to know who they are from the village you know who these people are because they're so scattered all over but the main thing around this area around the Chicago area the Illinois area that there's a lot of people from my own village that I grew up with or that my sister grew up with in the same so we are always doing events that or if you go for coffee somewhere that person will be there you would see them. So yeah we do keep in touch a lot.

JS: Now what brought you to Rockford?

NA: Business buying, buying a business, owning a restaurant. Me and my husband had both been in the restaurant business most of our lives and it was a good opportunity for us for us and our kids to work in an environment with with your lets say your family and to have an open mind about the future like how they would perceive the future knowing that this is the kind of job do you want to work this kind of job or you don't. You have a choice go better yourself to do something but don't get me wrong the restaurant business is very hard work and it not just physical. I'm not talking about physical that's nothing it's more mental work it's a lot of mental work. You work with the public every day. A person that works with the public everyday they have to have the

personality for it and they have to have the time for it. If you don't have those two don't bother you know I've been in this business for 20 some years.

JS: Did you find the people of Rockton were receptive to you being here?

NA: Oh god yes. I mean this is so amazing we're different areas that you live how the people change like when I was growing up in Chicago there were different people as I said you know our community it was based on that and then when I moved to the suburbs of Chicago people were different. Like everybody has their own category some people could be friendlier than others. Some people are more to themselves than others but here in Rockton the first time I came it's different people here are more relaxed. They could be millionaires that come to my restaurant and you would never know that they're millionaires because they don't present themselves like that. They're just human beings. They're very sincere people they're very down to earth. I don't know at first the first time I came here we just hit it off really good and I have regular customers that have been coming here since I had it since my brothers had it.

JS: And what year was that?

NA: 1999, it'll be nine years it's been nine years since we had it and the people here are just different and the area alone itself it's not like I'm really busy, busy where you have to have your mind always sharp like who's going to hit you from behind or that kind even though it was the suburbs that I was growing that I was in like nine years ago but now if I go when I go back to visit my friends or relatives it's too combusted for me. I hit the clock tower there you know by the highway and it's just so serene and relaxing and I go like wow this is so great you know. And at first my kids had kind of a hard time with it because living growing up in the same area like they did and then moving here was a whole different ballgame for them but they adapted really well and now they love it here to.

JS: Do they all live in the area?

NA: My daughter that's married she has three little girls she lives in Loves Park and my other daughter she lives in Orland Park but she's in Arizona for a little while and my other daughter lives with me and my son lives with me and that's one tradition that I have to tell you though my son will always live with me. One son if you have one son they have to take care of their parents. We take care of the parents the in-laws until they die. We don't put them through nursing homes. We don't have hospice. If the time came that I would have to stay home and take care of my husband's parents then I would have to we don't you know that's our culture. We don't change our culture and my son is instilled into that so he knows what's coming in the future that when we get old and we cannot take care of ourselves that he will have to take care of us. We don't go to nursing homes. It's in or you know that won't change unless it has happened before where they have they have put their parents I mean thank God for nursing homes I tell you. Thank God that there are nursing homes and that people are taken care of because everybody doesn't have kids or whoever can take care of them or they don't want to you know. We just grew up into that environment knowing that we do and it's just natural to us and it's natural even to my kids.

JS: He knows anyway?

NA: Yes he knows that. I mean they're going to have their own life I'm not going to.

JS: You won't live with them until you can't live?

NA: Right until I can take care of myself I'll be fine.

JS: Would you ever consider leaving this country to go back to Macedonia?

NA: No, no.

JS: Do you think your children would?

NA: No, no definitely not as I said it's a great place to visit but yes it's just too much of good things here that even though it's a beautiful place there too. I mean you have everything there that you have here now but it's still different even my in-laws as I said they were like raised there when they were in their 30s but they still don't they don't even want to go back and live there let alone me and my kids you know.

JS: And your children are mostly in the same type of work as you?

NA: Yes my daughter works. She went to high school. She finished high school; she went to two years of college. She went for CNA now she's going to get married so where she will go from there what she wants to do but she loves waitressing. She loves working in the business. She has you know she was instilled with it since she was young she would come over there and see me work and she loves working with people. She loves what she does so it's up to her what she wants to do in the future.

JS: What do you hope for for your children for the future?

NA: I hope first of all to be healthy you know that's my main goal for them to be healthy and for them to be happy in what they're doing and basically just not how do I put it, be greedy of what you have in life be thankful for what you have in life because so many people out there don't have not even half of what people here in America have and if you want to get a job you want to achieve there is always a job in America. No matter what you do you go out there do the snow, you go out there do the lawn. Whether you start young, whether you start old there's always something to do. There are always jobs available here if you really want to achieve something in your life or if you want to make it in your life.

JS: Opportunities.

NA: Opportunities yes and I think I've instilled that in them that we're very lucky to be where we are at today in America and my parents I thank them for bringing us to this environment because who knows we could've been there as they're growing up and getting married and having kids over there. We would not have the stuff that we have here it would be a lot different and that's why I appreciate every little thing that's in my way or that's why I never complain about working so hard because so many people have it so much harder and I think that's the key. You appreciate what you have you wake up in the morning you go to sleep you thank God that your kids are healthy that you're healthy that you're able to work able to provide for your family and that you're healthy to do it that's the main thing.

JS: One last question how do you feel about the current debate in this country about immigration and immigrants coming in legal and illegal?

NA: I think there's a lot of them that are here probably illegally and thank God that we never had to go through that route. I feel bad for the people who want to come here to make a better life for themselves because as I said wherever they are they're not happy they're not living and they want to make a better life for themselves for their family here or wherever it is nobody's actually like everybody comes from somewhere here in America. So you can say that we're all immigrants here because Columbus came do you know what I'm saying. Nobody was ever here except for the Indians so we're all sort of immigrants here even know it's our ancestors or whatever. I think in some areas they have to be really strict as far as now with all these threats and stuff like that that's happening. In some areas they are actually really strict right now than they ever were. It's harder now to get a visa to come into America than it was 30 years ago or 20 years ago.

JS: Do you think it should be?

NA: I think it should be because let's say like in the past I've known some people they wanted to come here to marry off their daughter or their son for example and they have a home over there, they have kids over there and they're going to school still that nobody can take care of them but them and they gave them a hard time with it just knowing that they wanted to come here for two weeks just to marry off their child and go back home because they have kids there, they have a family there, they have a home there. They know somebody has to take care of them take care of their house and that sometimes I don't understand if you show them all this proof that you still have family there or still have your kids there and you just want to come for two weeks and do this and then go back which you know you have to fight really hard for it. Some people have it really easy they get it right away from our country it's not really that bad from before though now it's a little bit harder yeah you have to really work at it and you really have to show a lot of proof that you're responsible for that person. You know that person does wrong then you're responsible for it so I don't know I go back either way. I feel bad for the people who that want to come in here to make a better life for themselves. It's a big country it's held us for this long. There's plenty of land then again I don't think the people that are illegal here that go and do illegal stuff here as far as robbing and doing wrong and killing people and causing accidents and driving drunk you know the illegal people that are doing that that are not even supposed to be in this country and they're taking advantage of it. They don't appreciate it is what I'm trying to get to you. You're here in this country and you're doing all these things and you're not appreciating it like why you're here. You're not here to cause trouble. You're not here to hurt anybody. You're here to do better for your family and that kind of gets to me when they're here and they go behind that wheel without no license with being drunk or being high.

JS: What should they do with them?

NA: I think they should deport them to my knowledge. It could be any I'm not saying it could be like one it could be Mexicans or it could be Arabians or I mean anything you know from all over I'm just saying like you're in this country you come here to work and better for yourselves and you take advantage of it and you keep intact with your family and you steer clear of the troubles because somebody else that deserves to come in this country legally didn't and your in this place and you make the best of it and they don't and that drives me crazy because so many people get hurt.