

Samira Abed

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Moureen Kaki [00:00:02] Hello hello. My name is Moureen Kaki, and I am an oral history fellow at the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life. And today is May 18th at about 10:44 a.m. Central Time, and I am here with a particularly special guest today. I'm excited for this interview, in part because I'm going to be interviewing one of my best friends and one of the people I know best, which is my mom. And so here we have on our interview today my mom, whose nickname is Scoop, you might hear me say that during the interview, but she's also known by her real name, Samira Abed. Mom, would you mind just introducing yourself and telling us where you're calling from, please?

Samira Abed [00:00:43] Hello there. My name is Samira Abed, and obviously this is an honor to be here with my favorite person in the world, the one that always makes me smile and brings my emotions all the way to the top.

Moureen Kaki [00:01:04] And where are you going today, Scoop?

Samira Abed [00:01:06] I'm calling from home in Florida, which is a little far away from Texas now. But Texas will always be my most important part of my life, I guess, because you guys were there. But for now it's Florida.

Moureen Kaki [00:01:23] Fair enough. We'll see if we can change that, but that's a later down plan. Mom, it's weird for me because I know so many of your memories and stuff, too, but what's the first thing you remember ever? What's the earliest memory you can think of?

Samira Abed [00:01:41] Of me being me, myself? So my childhood was in Brazil, and we lived on a very rural area. It was a capital of rice to Brazil back on the days when my father migrated to Brazil. The main street was two roads, two streets. And then we had a lot of friends there, they were farmers. And of course, my father and my mom made friends with the owners of those farms, and we would go and ride a horse and go to the pig farm and [inaudible] and all of that. So one of my early memories is actually being on that farm. And there was a big - it was similar to Texas. That's why Texas was so not different for me. The rodeo, the big wheel that they always have it on rodeos, the ones that they used to use on their carriers for the horse, remember? The horse carrier. So they had that as a decoration. And I was taking a picture, and I was wearing a little velvet cloth orange sweater. Yeah, I remember that sweater, I don't know why, and I had very short hair. I remember myself on the picture.

Moureen Kaki [00:03:10] Wow. How old do you think you were then?

Samira Abed [00:03:13] Oh, I have no idea. It was funny. We relate things to things that happen in life, like everything now, it's related to COVID. But I had a little accident on my face, so it was prior to that. So I think I was about seven years old. I don't know, it's really a guessing game.

Moureen Kaki [00:03:37] And you mentioned your dad, sidee, had migrated [to] Brazil. Where did he migrate from?

Samira Abed [00:03:45] From Palestine. From Palestine. And it was after the war, and it was 1958. For the matter of fact, I just came across his visa from Syria, from Damascus,

and that has his picture on it. So it was one of the opportunities that was given to him. One of the countries that were giving visas and one of the countries that was allowing to go to, it was Brazil. And I don't know why back home, they always have this idea that people that went to US would never come back. And so that way, his family always opposed coming to US, and South America and Central America was much more acceptable. And that's where my uncle, who was fourteen years older than my dad, went. And that's where my dad followed.

Moureen Kaki [00:04:41] And what was it like growing up in Brazil?

Samira Abed [00:04:45] It was great. It was great. I don't remember anything as far as Friendship. I remember people coming over and loving our culture, because of course, even born and raised in Brazil, my mom was the one that always cooked for us, and she would always relate her culture and her background to everyday food, even if it takes a little longer or she would have to tweak it. But there was always with the flavors of back home, and they always loved coming and eating kibbeh or trying her style sfiha or her favorite dishes. And they would beg, I remember some of the friends singing songs like, "Please make us this dish, and we will dance for you." Things like that. So it was great. I have nothing but good memories. Especially when you grow up, and you put two and two together, and you realize how happy and how you cherish those moments. It was full of harmony.

Moureen Kaki [00:05:58] And you had siblings, right? My uncles and aunts.

Samira Abed [00:06:01] Yeah. I had two sisters and two brothers, and I'm the youngest. And there's a gap because usually, ahna, we're Palestinians. We don't have a big gap between kids. So between my four other siblings, is like a year, a year and a half apart. And then between me and my brother is about five years. So that was huge because I was not - what do you call it? They didn't plan me. So I came. So I was the last one.

Moureen Kaki [00:06:43] You were the surprise baby?

Samira Abed [00:06:45] Yes. A surprise. We're gonna be positive in this interview, so we're gonna call it surprise [laughs].

Moureen Kaki [00:06:52] [laughs] The best surprise in my opinion.

Samira Abed [00:06:57] The best surprise, yeah.

Moureen Kaki [00:06:58] And so what brought you from Brazil? Because you started in Brazil, and you eventually made your way to Texas. Could you describe that journey?

Samira Abed [00:07:07] And a lot of the answers that I'm giving you, I'm relating - I'm talking about things that happen now in life that I understand why they happened. I had the honor to meet Dr. Norman Finkelstein, thanks to you and your sibling for making that possible. And I talked to him. It was so easy. And I questioned him. I said, "Why do we hold onto so much to our culture that even back home, people don't hold on to it their origins or back then?" And he explained to me, he says, "Because we left." And when he said it, subconsciously I was aware of it. But when he said it, it made so much more sense because he said, "You left. There's nothing there for you that exists but your memories and your culture. And if you keep making yourself more Westernized and accepting

Western culture, you're gonna feel like you failed to be where you came from." And that made so much sense.

Samira Abed [00:08:15] And the idea of, why did my parents were so stern about us marrying within or speaking the language. I remember being a child and being upset. Of course I didn't said it to my parents, but they spoke to me in Arabic, and I was like, "Why are they talking to me this ugly in this language that I don't even know?" in my mind. And now I feel guilty thinking that way. Now I understand why. So to answer your question is, I got married. It was an arranged marriage in the sense that we couldn't have boyfriends. We could barely have any friends. We were very well monitored, very strictly monitored of what we could do, who we could go out with. Even when my sisters had their fiancé and everything was by the book, I still had to be in the car with them because they couldn't be alone and things like that.

Samira Abed [00:09:25] So it was an arranged marriage in the sense that they say, "Oh, this guy, he's good. He's from back from our village, and his family, they're good people, and they're interested in you. Would you guys like to sit down and talk?" And of course, what did I know back then? And for me was like, "Wow, I'm going to America." That's what I was taught. I was like, "If I marry this guy, I'm gonna go to America." So for me it was like America where I remember the little cassette players with the headphones and the Converse shoes and Madonna. That's how I remember the video clips, you know those. It's like, "Wow, I'm going there." So that's how I imagined. It was like, "Okay, my parents are very strict, so this can be a way of maybe some kind of freedom that I'm gonna have, that I'm gonna be my own individual." Those are the things that ran into my mind when I was considering or accepted the marriage. I didn't think about the marriage or a person or I didn't even know what marriage was. The first thing that came to my mind was, "Wow, I'm going to America." So that's what brought me here.

Moureen Kaki [00:10:47] But you didn't go directly there first, right? There was a little bit of a detour trip.

Samira Abed [00:10:52] Yeah. So we got married in Brazil, and then I went back home to Palestine, which was my first time in Palestine, and I was there for a month.

Moureen Kaki [00:11:01] Can you talk a little bit about that and what your experience was like, or just memories that come to mind?

Samira Abed [00:11:05] Yeah, yeah, yeah. So again, I left Brazil, I left everything I knew. I remember I was with my father-in-law. We had a plane going to Amsterdam and Amsterdam - Tel Aviv. And when we got to Amsterdam, I have all my pictures that had Palestine flags, because I was on a dabke team, on a dance team that we would do all folkloric and cultural, and we carried Palestine flags everywhere, and we even made shirts. Every single picture that had everybody that I loved, even my wedding, it had pictures of Palestine. And then my father-in-law dropped the bomb on me. He said, "Oh, by the way, we're going to Tel Aviv, and they have checkpoints there." I had no idea. I knew vaguely about the conflict, but I didn't know anything in depth of how they were or what they did. And all I knew was the little I saw on TV, which was much better than nowadays. CNN, it wasn't as biased to one side, but little did I know.

Samira Abed [00:12:13] So he says, "Oh, by the way, you can't have anything that have the Palestinian flag." And that for me, it was like somebody took everything I knew away, because I had to start throwing pictures and things that were symbolic that was part of my

childhood that I chose to bring it with me, to keep my memories. So I start throwing things away literally in the trash. And I didn't have the heart to throw it away, so I burned them in a hotel room in Amsterdam two kilometers from the airport, because my father-in-law told me if we do that, I can't go to Palestine, they won't let me in. Then it was different because everything that my parents have told me about the village and how they grew up, it was back when they were kids. So when I went in, it was very different trying in my mind, picture what my parents stories, and then put two and two together for what I see.

Samira Abed [00:13:14] But I was very lucky. I had my father-in-law who sat with me on the little balcony, and we could see when they would invade a village, for example, they usually would do it at nighttime. And this is back in 1989. July 7th of 1989 is when I left Brazil. So you could see they would invade, and he would explain to me all about the checkpoints and all about the Jewish one or the Israeli government when they would go to the towns. So the town will blow this huge rocket in the air and it will turn night to day. It was so powerful. And I come from a small town, I never seen such a thing. And then when we go places, like we go to Ramallah from our village, he would explain to me everything. He goes, "This. Those are the guys. Those are the checkpoints." And nothing made sense in my mind. Why are they doing this?

Samira Abed [00:14:22] But the fun things were the weddings, how we dress up and because I'm tall, when they used to - not necessarily, I guess make fun, but in a complimentary way. When I wear the typical dress, the one that's handmade, there was one that was made just for me because I was a new bride. And then I would go to every wedding, and they were like, "Oh, who is she? She's the wife of blah blah, and she's new in town, and she comes from Brazil." So I was like the attraction for that couple weeks for every wedding. They're like, "Oh my God, she looks tall in the pictures, but she's even taller in person." And then I got to meet my father's side of the family and my mom, which is my grandparents, which I was very, very blessed and lucky to meet my grandparents. I was the only one in my family who was able to meet them, because they were already a little bit older by that time.

Samira Abed [00:15:28] But it was fun. The food I would refuse to eat because I wasn't so used to the typical foods. I [liked] a couple of things that my parents used to make, but I guess - and I'm gonna detour the stories - but I guess because my mom was so tired of certain foods that her parents, because of poverty and their circumstances, so she wouldn't cook for us. So that was the reason I wasn't familiar with a lot of the foods. But then I would only eat fruits and vegetables. And then my father was like, "We're gonna send you back to your parents because you're not eating. They're gonna think we're not treating you well." So all those things that if you translate even to English, like by saying, "We're gonna take you back to your parents," it sounds very harsh. It was like I'm a merchandise, but I know what they meant. They meant that they were trying to take good care of me, and they were concerned about me. So it's like almost when you lose the translation, you lose the context. So I was able to now see all this and recognize and value, even though there were different times and times of not much that I knew, but I do cherish those moments a lot.

Moureen Kaki [00:16:55] Thanks for sharing that, Scoop. What are some of the foods that you didn't want to eat at first?

Samira Abed [00:17:01] I think I just have my first place this past Ramadan. It was mloukiyyeh. I never adapted to, I guess, more of the texture and the smell than the actual taste, because it tastes good. It's not anything different. And then mansaf, I could not. I

could not smell the chishich. And the fact that the meat was cooked in boiled water. That was very strange because in Brazil we never boiled meat. We always made barbecue or we sear it. But over there was chunks of meat that they cooked with bone. And we always deboned our meats even different than the US. And then a huge one is that they would hold the chicken in their hands. So I thought that was a little barbaric because in Brazil, you eat the chicken with the fork and the knife. But those were the main things. But like warak dawali, the maftul, the malfuf, those things I was familiar with, but it was the tabiekh. And maqluba I liked, but it was mostly the mansaf and the mloukiyyeh.

Samira Abed [00:18:24] And for folks listening who are unfamiliar with these dishes, mloukiyyeh is a traditional dish. It's served in Palestine, Egypt, I'm sure other places too. But it's actually a plant called jute mallow, and it's prepared in a particular way. And if you do it wrong, it's a dish that can end up very pasty for lack of it. It's an herb, so it's cut, and there's different forms. It's sometimes dried, it's sometimes frozen, but you make a sauce out of it, and you cook the meat in it, but it tends to get thick, kind of like okra. So if you don't like that, texture can throw some people off. But the taste is phenomenal, actually.

Samira Abed [00:19:04] And mansaf, the other dish that my mom is talking about, is a very traditional dish. It's now acclaimed as the national dish of Jordan, but its origins actually come from Bedouin people who are native to what are the contemporary lands known as Palestine and Jordan. And it's made with a dried yogurt, a dried goat's yogurt. So Bedouin people are nomadic people. They don't stay in one place very often. And when they do, they don't have means of preservation. So they use traditional methods. And one of those methods was to dry yogurt into these hard balls called chishich or kishk or jameed, depending on where you're from. And that's reconstituted with a beef stock. And it's a phenomenal dish. And that's eaten with the hands, too. It's a rice dish that you traditionally roll in a certain way. It takes a technique to eat with your hands.

Moureen Kaki [00:19:59] The irony of my mom not liking mansaf when she was young, though, is that she makes some of the best mansaf that I've ever had. She converted my new Lebanese step-father to like the dish. This is not a dish that's eaten in Lebanon, and he was convinced by it. I had to throw that in there to hype my mom up a little bit. So thank you for sharing that, Scoop. And from Palestine, you spent a month there, that was it, and that was your first exposure to Palestine, right?

Samira Abed [00:20:27] Yes.

Moureen Kaki [00:20:28] Then from there, did you go to the US directly from there?

Samira Abed [00:20:33] Yeah, we did. I did. I traveled alone, and my first stop was New York. New York and then actually New Jersey. And that's where we lived for about a year.

Moureen Kaki [00:20:51] So what was that like? What was it like to arrive in Jersey in the US? You'd imagined the Converse, the typical teenage dream, Converse, Madonna, and a cassette player, but what did it feel like, do you remember?

Samira Abed [00:21:04] I was very unaware, and considering now comparing with what the technology that we have, the social media, the interventions or the accessibility that we had to back home or to cultures, mostly I remember as being home, and of course, this is like, "Okay, I made it to America. Now what?" It was no glory to, "Okay, I'm gonna to do all the things that I thought I did in my mind." So I sat in this one bedroom apartment that I cried. I cried a lot because in Brazil it's such a warm culture that if the neighbors see you

or you move in, they're used to that, like in the movies, when you see they're bringing a little basket with the cake and the food and ask, "What do you need?" The only difference is that it happens in other countries. Here in America, it doesn't happen. The movies are definitely fiction here.

Samira Abed [00:22:09] I thought I had done something because I had the neighbors, and we were in our apartment, and we shared doors that if we closed each other's front door and we stand outside, we can't avoid each other. It was so close, but he would never raise his hand and say hello. So I didn't know what was the culture. So I took it very harsh, and I thought it was something we'd done. I remember putting that on my letters when I sent it to my cousin or to my dad. I would say, "The neighbor here, I can't speak the language to ask what I have done, but he doesn't talk to me. He didn't say hi." So those are the things, even to learn how to go get my mail, for example, because that was for me the most important thing, because it was my only method of communication with the people I knew.

Samira Abed [00:23:02] So even things like going to the supermarket or buying food or going to restaurants, everything was completely different, very much, that like I need help. I could not go places or do certain things because I wouldn't know. Even baking powder, for example, to make a cake. I didn't know what was it or how do I call it, how to translate it. I couldn't grab a device and just translate it. So everything, I needed assistant in, of course, it took a few trials of putting cornstarch in a cake rather than baking powder because they look the same, or buying things that are not what I thought it was from the package. So it was different. It was different in that sense, even going to the mall or going to big places, because I wasn't used to. I come from a small town, so being at the mall, I was that person that would look up and like, "Wow, what is this?"

Samira Abed [00:24:11] But I think the most shocking and memorable thing, it was the culture. Yeah, it wasn't good memories. It was all sad to the sense that I was looking for friends, for neighbors, and that didn't happen. So it was always try to figure that out. But other than that, it was a great experience. I remember getting - of course, most of the people who are listening, they're very familiar with the highway called the turnpike, the one that connects New Jersey to New York. And they have lanes only for trucks. And I remember getting on that lane and being around trucks. I cried. I was so scared because it was a multitude of trucks and cars, something that I was not used to it. So I remember going to New York City, Manhattan, and I remember closing the doors of the car and make sure the doors, the car is locked, and I stayed inside the car. I would not move. And I just saw this people coming, people going, but they wouldn't even blink. And even if they did, I was almost invisible. Wow, it was so easy for me to get lost there, even in my thoughts. I imagine myself getting out of the car and going left and going right and not knowing how to come back to the car. Very different.

Moureen Kaki [00:25:56] And what was that culture like? What you're describing sounds typical, typically overwhelming New York culture, East Coast culture, where there's a lot going on. It's a big city and there's so much to see and do. And even people who are from here and speak the language get overwhelmed by being on the East Coast like that, too. Was that the same experience you had in Texas? So you lived in Texas for how long? Let's clarify.

Samira Abed [00:26:24] So Texas I moved to in 1990. 1990 I moved to Texas. And no, Texas was different. Texas was different. A lot of the Mexican culture, and the neighbors, they were very warm. I remember the person who took me to get my license and my Social Security. It was a neighbor of my sister-in-law. Yeah, because my sister-in-law

wasn't very knowledgeable on those things. But she had a neighbor, and the neighbor, her name is Vicky. I remember to this day. And she was like, "Oh, this is my sister-in-law, and she needs this, this, and that." And she made time with her own car. And I never remember asking for anything or anything like that. And she even made me nachos, and I was so hungry. I remember eating the nachos. But in Brazil we don't eat spicy food, and she had put jalapeños, and I had no idea what jalapeños were into the next day. She even made nachos after she took us to the Social Security office and the drivers office.

Samira Abed [00:27:42] But here, coming to Texas - I still call it "here." It was very different. It was very warm in the sense that the culture, the people, they blend in. I think they either had gone through the same thing where they had come and not find help, or they help each other, and they were so [used to] helping each other. So it was much better in that sense. Of course, you get a lot of questions. Like being on the East Coast, nobody acknowledged you. You are almost invisible. And then when you come to Texas, you stand out because you're not like them. So they would ask you, "Where are you from?" not even knowing you or not even saying hello. The first thing that they would do, it's just ask you, "Where are you from?" So they knew that you were a stranger. And when I said, in Texas it's the people that are not Spanish background. They were the ones.

Moureen Kaki [00:28:44] And so what did life end up looking like for you in Texas? You came to the United States. You came cause you got married, you said. And by this time - born in Brazil, so you speak Portuguese. You went Palestine and picked up Arabic. You spent some time somewhere else, right, before those two?

Samira Abed [00:29:07] Florida. I was in Florida for a couple of months, three months. And then before that I even went to Puerto Rico, the island where my brother-in-law lived there. So the brother of my husband, we were there for nine months.

Moureen Kaki [00:29:26] And so you have now, at this point, what, three languages under your belt, almost four?

Samira Abed [00:29:31] Yeah. And they did tell us that Spanish was easy. When we're like, "Oh, Spanish, you're gonna be able to catch Spanish easier than the English." I did not. In Puerto Rico, if you're familiar with that, you listen to people that's from their - their accent, the way they speak is very different than the Spanish from Mexico or from Spain. So they bite off a lot of the letters and they speak very fast. So it was very confusing going there. A very humid place, a lot of lizards that I'd never seen in my life before. So it was very different. It was a rural life, but even more different than the US.

Samira Abed [00:30:22] But for sure, they were warm. I remember having a celebration. I don't know what was it, but there was a celebration in the islet that they would close the whole neighborhood street, and they would do a potluck between neighbors. And it was something that started breakfast time maybe, and it didn't end until late night hours of the night. But it was music, if we missing a drink or missing a dish, somebody would run to their house and get it. There was no, "It's not my share." It was a very mutual thing, that was each one will take a role, and they would take an extra role if you needed to. So in that sense, it was very family-oriented and I related a lot to them, more than the US, than New Jersey.

Moureen Kaki [00:31:23] And so you found a little bit of community more in Puerto Rico, but then you come to Texas, and this is Texas is where you stay for a long period of time. Of course I knew that, but what does your life look like? What do you do?

Samira Abed [00:31:40] So in Texas, one of the reasons we moved, it was a business opportunity for my ex-husband's family. And they came in as partners, brother, father, everybody was involved, sister. So in the sense that the men worked, women stay at home, and now the family start talking about having kids. "It's been a year that you've been married. How come you're not having kids?" And the husband leave at six o'clock in the morning, they don't come back until eleven. So now you start figuring out how to drive places if you go anywhere. And cleaning was a huge part and just family per se, like the in-laws. They'll come over, and we talk about the weddings that's gonna happen in Palestine in the summertime, who is getting married, who ran away, who died.

Samira Abed [00:32:34] So those were the typical things that day-to-day. It was no like, "Oh, let's focus on education. Let's focus on introducing ourselves to this community, or let's build the community." Or even mosques, we wouldn't go to the mosque to introduce ourself. It was just work. "Let's work to make money to build a house back in Palestine to go to for weddings." So it was very isolated, and it was very oriented to one goal. It wasn't like, "Okay, let's blend in," something that my parents did in Brazil. So it was very different for their lifestyle here. It was frowned upon by my ex-husband's family to blend in. Like, "Oh, those are neighbors. They are Americans. They don't think like us. They don't have the same mentality. We're here to make money and to take the opportunity that was given to us to go back home." That was the mentality. So to make sure that we stay with our cultures within ourselves. And that was it. It happened so quickly. Everything as far as start having kids and moving around and family affairs. And so it happened so quickly that it was difficult to process what was actually happening.

Moureen Kaki [00:34:10] Did that resonate with you? The idea that you had to remain exclusionary, the idea that you would focus on the family goal of making money and then returning home to Palestine, which is your home and will always be, but you didn't really know it. Did this resonate with you? How did you feel during this time? What was it like?

Samira Abed [00:34:39] No, for the matter of fact, there's one specific situation that it was very memorable to me, because I was born a Muslim, and I was raised as one in the sense that I knew I was Muslim, and that was it. I honestly, if I want to be completely honest, I didn't even know what Islam basis. If you had asked me, "What is Islam? What is the pillars of Islam?" Back then, I didn't know because my parents only thought that we were Muslims, and that's it. Certain things are forbidden that we do, and certain things we don't question. But never did the assets of the religion.

Samira Abed [00:35:21] So when we came in, I remember we were in the house, and my sister-in-law was there. We were at my father-in-law's house and there was - what is that religion called? The ones that they come in and knock at your door and offer to cut your grass or talk about religions? Jehovah's Witness. So I remember they came in, and she barely opened the door. She stuck her head out, opening the door very little. And the person was very polite and they were talking. And I remember peeking and listening, and they say, "Oh, we are here to offer to cut your grass." And she goes, "No, it's okay. We are Muslims." She didn't even reply with a, "Hi, how are you?" or anything like that. For me, that didn't make sense. Okay, we are Muslims. They are not the same religion. And I didn't know what Jehovah's Witness was or what did they believe in. But I knew that they were a human being that knocked at the door and introduced themselves. So it didn't sound very right, although I didn't know what the right thing was, but it didn't sound right. They answered that, "We are Muslims," because he's offering to do something because he belongs to other beliefs.

Samira Abed [00:36:39] So no, I always questioned those things. Family time was very important to us in Brazil with my parents. No matter how hard my parents worked, they worked together. We always made time on the weekends and dinner time to eat together. Most of my life that I lived in Brazil, it was the memories that my parents have lived in Palestine. So in that sense, no, it did not make sense to me that making money or working sixteen, eighteen hours a day and collecting the money and going back home, did not. So little by little, I think we distanced ourselves from that mentality of just being involved.

Samira Abed [00:37:27] I knew I had a goal when I start having kids and when I was working with my ex-husband, I knew that the mentality was to put the kids in good schools, to offer them a good education. But I remember I wanted you so badly to learn the piano and to do ballet and little things that was family matters as far as the kids, and being there on every moment. Like, "Oh, today there is Cinco de Mayo, for example, where they sing songs in Spanish, and they do a presentation." It didn't matter what kind of celebrations they were. It was the importance of being there at that moment as a family and creating memories, even if it was we stuck all four of you guys under a tree wearing a soccer jersey or the soccer uniform, and make sure that I take a picture of that. Those were the moments that were important to me that I made sure, no matter how hard we work or how our business was demanding of us, that we still needed to make time for that.

Moureen Kaki [00:38:41] Well, and I know you did exceptionally well because we had a great childhood from my perspective. But I also know now, because it's been years and we're adults, and you've moved on, that it wasn't always that easy. By the time that I was, what, fifteen maybe, you and dad divorced. Am I getting my times right?

Samira Abed [00:39:05] Yeah, yes. Because you went to Brazil when I think you were thirteen, and it was a couple of years later. Yes, it was around your age of fifteen, sixteen years old. Things were already not going well for quite a while, and me coming from where the importance of a family was so important, that I always tried to fix something that wasn't me who was causing it. So I kept hanging onto something that didn't exist until I realized that I could be doing more harm to the loved ones, which was you guys, to make that decision to have a divorce, because I remember even my sister, they kept telling him, "He's not a good person. He have proved to you over and over. So why don't you let him go, so you can do things on your own?" And I remember my sister telling me, she goes, "It's okay to divorce him. You're not gonna go to hell if you divorce him." Until this day, I laugh about it, but it's one of the things that was like, "Wow, I'm not going to hell." [laughs] It's funny the things that you get.

Samira Abed [00:40:23] But it took a lot of that, because it was such a dark thing to talk about it for us women in our culture, not religion, culture to talk about divorce because, number one, it's a failure to the family, for the parents. So most importantly, I didn't want to disappoint my parents, which my dad at that time had passed away, but I didn't want to still disappoint them. Think of what if my dad was alive, what would have happened? So I was trying to avoid that and to break the news and tell my mom. And the first thing that my mom says, it was like, "Okay, now you're gonna be alone. Why don't you come back to Brazil?" So she never saw me as an individual, she saw me as I belong or I'm being taken care of by another person. Although without the divorce, the person who financially was more stable or able to do things or even to raise you guys, it was me. I do take credit for that. Not because he was a bad person, but because his circumstances didn't allow the best of him to do the right thing.

Samira Abed [00:41:38] But now looking back is how my parents saw me. My mom, like she says, "Come back home, because now I don't have anybody to support me." Little that she knew that I could do much better on my own than with somebody who was not capable of taking care of themselves. So in that sense, it still was like, "No mom, I can't just come in. My kids don't speak the language. They've never been there. It doesn't work like that." And then my brothers even offered, like, "Oh, stay-at-home-mom, and we'll send you money." And the first thing that came into my mind, it was like, "I'm not disabled. I know how to think. And I feel insulted that they want to send me money, and they want to keep me home. Why?" I didn't see that as a blessing or an opportunity to stay home and raise you guys. I saw as like, "They don't believe I can do it. Let me show them." It was almost like a daring, like, "I'm gonna raise the kids, and I'm gonna work, and I'm gonna do things on my own."

Samira Abed [00:42:48] Of course, it was very difficult in the aspect of finances. And you were part of it, you know very well. Now you can put two and two together. But I think that's what made us who we are in the sense that we value certain things, and we appreciate each other, and we can laugh about those moments that was ridiculously bad. That we would argue about things, when your brother would come and say, "My friends don't have to work behind the counter to do homework," or when I didn't allow you guys to go to Italy, or you wanted to go to France to go for school. So all those things now have made us who we are. And I don't think I'm any better or any less than most immigrants who came to this country who have stories to say.

Samira Abed [00:43:44] It's not just the fact that you are getting shocked by your culture, by everything that you knew that had disappeared. But the fact that life happens itself, that relationships don't work like the movies or near anything like that. And then little stuff like neighbors, or how can they affect you, or make your life so much better. You can remember people that I never kept in touch with, but they played a big role in my life. Like Vicky, for example. I still remember what she looks like, but I have no contact with her. And she was the person that made it possible for me to drive and work. Without her, I wasn't able to get a Social Security, and god knows what would have happened. How much longer would it have been? So those things or even the coach at your elementary school. When he came to me, and he apologized for the war in Iraq and for things that had happened, and he says not all Americans are like that. And I know I'm taking that out of context, but things like that, little things in your life that people's action, it's what made us who we are.

Samira Abed [00:45:08] So I'm very grateful at the end of the day, because I have successful individuals. And when I said that "success," I mean the way you guys think and the way you guys have done for to build your community, and to do things not just money, not just education, but for you guys to open ways for other people. And that's what's important to me, when I know that you and your siblings, as I'm referring to when I say "you guys." It's a little difficult to have the interview, because the interviewer is you, my daughter. So when I mean "you guys," I mean my kids.

Moureen Kaki [00:46:02] But we didn't become that way out of nothing, so we learned it from you. We learned in the sense of community, and one of the things that I'll bring up and ask you to elaborate on is, eventually after you and my dad had split up, you had bought a gas station out in a small Texas town called Lake McQueeney, which is near Seguin, Texas, if anybody's familiar with where that is. And that was the line of business that you were familiar with. That was what you'd worked in before you and my dad had worked in, and that you'd had experience with. And so that's what you ended up doing.

And that was my first experience in a small Texas town, in a small town in general. I thought I knew small towns. Growing up in San Antonio felt like a small big city, especially compared to places like the coasts, east coast, west coast, that kind of thing.

Moureen Kaki [00:47:04] But that was a whole experience. And after you guys split up, we'd moved out there. And can you just tell me what was that like, the process of becoming a business owner in a Texas small town and just whatever experiences you have with that? I brought this up because you mentioned Ahmad complaining about other kids not having to do homework while working a register at a gas station. So that's the gas station in question.

Samira Abed [00:47:37] Forgive me, because sometimes I speak as if everybody knew my life. But business. So my father in Brazil, he had a clothing business. And so when he used to go have lunch with my mom, I was the one at twelve years old, thirteen years old, who used to take care of the business. And he taught me the numbers in Arabic so I could know the cost. And he taught me how to multiply percentage, so I knew how much we could make a profit. Long story short, so business was always in my family, and we [were] always aware of what business is. So when I came to US, my father-in-law had business, so we were involved. Completely different, but yes, it was business. And then when we moved out of the family business and we started our own.

Samira Abed [00:48:36] But yes, after our divorce, I was starting new. So I got opportunities to start working as a cashier or start working on the little taco place that you helped me with it many, many days. I was running it, so I wasn't unfamiliar with the aspect of the business. But moving to Seguin, Texas, even Seguin, we were out of reach. We were not in the downtown area of Seguin. We were on the deep woods of Seguin. So it was very different. So I remember the owner of the convenience store came to me. He says, "I have a business opportunity for you." I didn't think about it twice. I remember. Do you remember me, you, and Kaki driving on I-10 and going there, and it was an hour and ten minutes away from San Antonio? And we kept going and going, and it was getting outside deeper in the heart of Texas.

Samira Abed [00:49:46] So I was terrified. Terrified. Terrified, because now it's been twenty years that I know San Antonio, nineteen years that I have lived in the city, and I know the west side, the east side, because my ex-husband, your dad, used to sell items that - I knew the city block by block. I know that city very well. And everything that now I built for the next nineteen years gonna go away. But what other opportunity do I have? So I didn't have the time to sit on it and reflect and say, "Is it really better for me?" What went through my mind is like, "I'm gonna be a business owner, and I'm not gonna have anything or anyone to hold me back, and it's gonna be me and my kids alone, and we'll be able to make it financially and be stable." So those are the things that kept me going, no matter how much my thoughts would say, "My goodness, how are the kids gonna go to school?" I would go back to say, "We'll figure it out, the important is that is gonna be my business."

Samira Abed [00:50:50] So yes, I was terrified driving that route. And when I got to the business, and you and I got out, and Kaki, we talked about what we could make. And then it warmed up to me, and I started envision those things. And when we move or took over, and all the things that we did, it was quick, but I was so busy doing it that I forgot how to be. So I didn't know how to reflect. I didn't know how to do a budget. None of that. I was just doing day to day, which was, "Sell," and, "I made more profit today than yesterday. I made it more than the guy that was here. Moureen's gonna be able to buy a car. Ahmad's gonna be able to go to school." So all those things I was doing. It was crazy what I did, but

that was what I had, and that's what I worked with. But those were the things that were running in my mind.

Samira Abed [00:52:02] And I was very well received, I can say, and I think you [can] attest to this, that people liked us. Unfortunately, they liked us because they compared us for wrong reasons, and being a little racist in Texas that people can be. But they didn't see us because we didn't have a hijab. We weren't the typical Muslims. And so they didn't see us as a threat. And I am a woman. And even you told me the stories that I never thought about it, that when people used to come in and ask, "Who is the owner of the store?" and you used to say, "My mom," that people paused and took a second to respond to that, because I'm a woman. Because even Texas, even though we as Arabs have the fame or the reputation of being sexist or a women stay at home, but if you go to Texas and you tell a man there that you own a business, he's gonna look at you twice thinking that you are a little crazy. So we experience that from all sides and from all different cultures, even the most Americans.

Samira Abed [00:53:15] But honestly, looking back, it was crazy, but it was good memories. We had fun, and we built something, and it was ours. Unfortunately, a few events that came out of that, that it wasn't in our control was accident that happened, and it changed our life completely. But again, those are the things that made us us. And I'm very thankful for everything. Business, I think I always look back and I say, "Man, it was fun." It was fun being able to see you guys, you especially coming in with your keychain attached to your jeans.

Moureen Kaki [00:54:04] We got very Texas. We got -

Samira Abed [00:54:05] - very Texas. And so all those things that they kept us, they gave us memory. I look back, and I look at the good things that happened in our lives. So I'm very grateful for those moments.

Moureen Kaki [00:54:28] You mentioned this, and again, this is something you'd rather not discuss, that's okay. But you mentioned this, so I want to ask, do you want to talk about the accident and how it relates to the business at all? Or would you rather just skip that?

Samira Abed [00:54:43] No, it's okay. I mean, I don't want to get into that, because it's not about our life in Texas, it's about a family event that happened, Kaki's accident. Was your sibling, and he is my middle child. And we just finished the construction. When we were about a month - Moureen, help me out here. About a month into the taco shop being open inside the Chevron.

Moureen Kaki [00:55:13] Probably a little more.

Samira Abed [00:55:15] Yeah? And we were gonna do a grand opening, and everybody was helping, from Moureen to her siblings. And it was a day before the grand opening, meaning the grand opening. Budweiser was gonna be there. Miller Lite's gonna be there. Texas Lottery was gonna be there. So we had all this arrangement that was gonna be live music, barbecue made by one of our locals, all those things that were gonna happen. So I was wearing different hats with the help of you and your siblings, and I had sent Kaki to the bank to go make a transaction for the business. And unfortunately, he had an accident to the bank, which has changed the trajectory of our life, and his especially. So he became

a quadriplegic due to that vehicle accident, which now I understand it was a complete accident, but I felt very guilty.

Samira Abed [00:56:18] And I don't know if we talk about that a lot, but for me it was like I was even afraid of going to the hospital, because in my mind it was something - back then, it was in my mind something that I had caused by having a business and sending Kaki to the bank. So that's when I started beating myself and saying, "Why didn't I took my brother's option when he wanted to give me money and keep me at home? Maybe he knew better. Or my mom when she says to come back home. Maybe they were trying to protect me from something that I didn't understand. But time pass, and you are able to reflect on things a little bit differently, and you understand that I was not in control. Kaki was not in control. Nobody was. That's why they call it "accident." The definition of accident has changed for me. Now I understand the word much better. Nobody was in control. It was something that happened, and nothing that I had made or choices or we as a family could cause or prevent that.

Samira Abed [00:57:30] After that happening, it's when things change, and we had to let go of the business. And I remember you looking at me and asking me, "Mom, what are we gonna do now?" Because you were very well aware of our finances, and that was our bread and butter, that you were like, "What do you mean we're closing?" You were very gentle with me in the sense that you would tell me or you'd question me, but in a way that allowed me to reflect and say, "Mom, what are we gonna do?" It always, subconsciously, it's in the back of my mind, even when I come across a little lizard on the floor, and I have to detour, it's like Moureen telling me, "What are we gonna do now?"

Samira Abed [00:58:16] I said, "We'll figure it out." And we did. We did. We did as a family. We did it together. And I think we are able to with the help of wonderful people. And now it's another three-hour story. We're gonna talk about the nurses and doctors and the neighbors and the friends and the people that came to our life or were in our life and even showed us so much love and so much care. And I would always be thankful to those individuals, even if I don't get a chance to name them one by one. They would always have a place in our history, in our story.

Moureen Kaki [00:59:07] Yeah. That's a lot to talk about, and I appreciate that you're sharing. I know it was a difficult time, but I would like to go back, actually, because I think there's a lot to what happened that day, and I know this is hard, but would you mind sharing the story of what happened on the day of Kaki's accident?

Samira Abed [00:59:27] Yeah. So it was daytime. It was past twelve, that I know for sure, because Kaki had a class at three o'clock, and you couldn't go, and Ahmed was home, but I don't remember the reason why he couldn't go.

Moureen Kaki [00:59:46] He had class too.

Samira Abed [00:59:48] He had a class, yeah. And Mohamad was in high school. So Kaki had just graduated high school, and he was taking community college, because I didn't let him - he actually got accepted to University of Texas, San Antonio. And he never told me that he applied. He just came with the letter of acceptance. And he was like, "Mom, I got accepted." And I was like, "No, you're not moving out." I thought I was doing the right thing by holding onto you guys, not knowing that. Anyways, I had to ask him. I called, I said, "Kaki, can you go to the bank for me?" And he goes, "Mom, I have class in two hours." I said, "It will be very quick. I just need this transaction, so I can pay for a delivery." I don't

remember if it was a beer delivery or a Coke product delivery, but I had to ask him to go to the bank and get me some money and make a deposit.

Samira Abed [01:00:48] And I was going to San Antonio to resolve another business problem that I had, so we could proceed with our grand opening. So I was driving on I-10 while he was driving on a farm road in Seguin. I don't remember the name of that road.

Moureen Kaki [01:01:10] 46.

Samira Abed [01:01:12] 46, thank you. And I know this is a touchy subject as it is for me, so I appreciate you, too, Moureen. I got a phone call from a number that was not on my contacts, and I received that phone call, and I looked, and of course, owning a business and being older, we have the tendency to answer every phone call, even if it's a spam. So I answer, and I heard your voice, and you didn't say hello. You just said, "Mom." And the minute I heard you, I slammed the brakes, and I exited on the service road, and I turned around. And she goes, "Kaki got in an accident."

Samira Abed [01:01:53] And not much from there. It was a little blurry. I remember arriving at the accident site, and unfortunately, the event that happened there. Kaki got airlifted, and eventually we drove to the hospital to be given the news by a resident at the hospital that Kaki would never walk again. You were the first person there. You were alone. You knew that news before everybody else, I believe, right? So that took away a lot from me, almost like you were a mother, you were a sister, but you did it all alone, too. I do carry a little bit of guilt in the sense that I gave you guys a lot of problems that didn't belong to you guys, and again, you and your siblings.

Samira Abed [01:02:59] But I remember seeing you when the double door opens, when they finally let us in, when we told them that my son was inside. I remember the double doors opened, and I remember you being there and your face, I think I was able to read that the situation was much more alarming and much more serious than I want it to be. Not that I was oblivious of what had happened. It was just a denial mode, I guess, and a defensive mechanism that I thought I was in control or I could fix it. Everything goes from there, but I refused to look at the ugly side of the things, those little events that happen. And I still look forward.

Samira Abed [01:03:47] And I think Kate, I think Shawna, I think Dr. Zell, I think Alejandra, I think the Muslim community, so many of the youth community that wrote letters they made posters and had the students at the school sign and put Kaki's name. And when Kaki took off his trach, the first thing that he did was a letter from one of your siblings' friend that gave him a little dua, which is a little Qur'anic verse that talks about difficult times. So those are the things I keep in mind, that I keep saying, "This is what made us go through this in such a easier way than others." And Kaki is a successful individual. He had spoke in regards of his disability and how to overcome difficult times and continue your life as a whole, as an individual, even with a disability that will impair you from being, quote-unquote, "normal."

Moureen Kaki [01:05:05] Thanks, mom. And yeah, from there, life looked a little bit different. We ended up moving back to San Antonio because it was easier for Kaki's appointments and rehab and just getting him into a better position for what he needed with the adjustment. I want to loop back and ask you, because you'd mentioned what it meant to you to grow up Muslim and how you were taught in that, and you brought up the dua

again. And in times like those, it's easy to question your spirituality and sense like that. Was that hard for you during that time with Kaki?

Samira Abed [01:05:05] Oh yeah, absolutely. And like I said, I always like to focus on the good, but I even have an individual that had come from the same villages as ours, that she asked me, she goes - because traditionally in Islam, and I may be corrected by this, but we slaughter an animal, and we give to individuals that are less fortunate than we are. We just give it away as a thank you for the blessing. So she questioned me. She goes, "When your children were born, did you slaughter? Did you sacrifice the animal on behalf of your son?" And I looked at her, and this is between Kaki's life and death situation. And I looked at her. I don't remember who she is, believe it or not, but I do remember her standing in front of me and asking that question. And I was like, "No." And so she looked at me almost in a way, it was like, "This is what's happened. This is why this is happening."

Samira Abed [01:06:55] So in my mind, I was like, "This is not a punishment," but I did question my faith. I questioned God's will. Why him? Because Kaki was the happy kid. He was always that one that made friends. I said, "Why not a person that haven't done things?" And now I cannot re-say those things. Not even - when I think about it I was like, "Why did they even think that way?" that I would have like, "Somebody else deserves this, not my son." But now I know. I understand that that wasn't a punishment. That was nothing from God. But absolutely did I question.

Samira Abed [01:07:40] I didn't even spoke with my own family, although my brother came from Brazil, my sister was here for a couple of weeks. They always offer financial help, and they were always there for me. But I didn't want to talk to anybody. I didn't. I blamed everybody and everyone for have left me alone, for what brought me in this country, for my faith, for my religion, for my community, for myself. Most importantly, it was me who was at fault. But then your thought takes you places. And yes, I did question, and it took me a very long time to understand that was not a punishment from God, not to me, not to my son.

Moureen Kaki [01:08:23] And what does Islam mean to you now?

Samira Abed [01:08:27] What is what?

Moureen Kaki [01:08:28] What does Islam mean to you now?

Samira Abed [01:08:30] Islam means surrender. Surrender in the aspect that we have no controls about our events that happen in our life on a day-to-day. But we know that being a good individual, it's the most important part for Islam, that we can pray five times a day, we can go to the hajj, we can give sadaqah. We can do all those things, which are important, I don't dismiss them. But for me, the most important part of Islam that have gave me peace of mind and gives me a sense of living, the fact is that I surrender. I surrender for things that I'm not in control of. And I just am who I am, and I do what I do because it's what being a human is. It's the right thing to do in the sense not that I want to compensation or I'm expecting paradise. It's because that's what life is all about.

Samira Abed [01:09:49] So to connect those two, your being as an individual, interconnected to Islam and to the references of accepting it, for me it's important. For me, I'm not a very religious person, meaning I don't fall by the book, again, because I wasn't necessarily raised with that from day one. But now I understand, and I have learned from family that things are much more spiritual Islam than what appears to be, that when family

used to do certain things, just to show others or to reputation or do things like that. So those things, that's what Islam means. It's like to surrender. I think the most important word here is "surrender."

Moureen Kaki [01:10:58] And I'm gonna change the topic a little bit because we're on the subject of Islam, and because in part you mentioned this earlier, but what was it like? So you came to the US in 1989, and that was about twelve years before 9/11. So you saw the difference in the culture pre- and post-9/11. Did you notice any differences after 9/11?

Samira Abed [01:11:21] I didn't just notice. I went through events that affected you guys. You, my kids. One of them was my first PTA meeting was the day, unfortunately, the day of 9/11. And we had a minivan. It was a Ford Windstar minivan. And on the back of it, because we used to work at the flea market on the weekend, they used to do the letters on the back. What do you call those things, the little stickers that you can write whatever you want? We wrote, "Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine," and it was a way of being active or presenting who I am. I don't know what it was, it's silly, but it was something we did to our car.

Samira Abed [01:12:15] And I went to my first PTA meeting, and we were at the office signing in, and the news, the TV's were on, and eyes were on me by a few parents and by a few administration. They would glance at you and then look down and not say anything. But then they would talk to each other, and they'd talk about the event. But towards me it was just a glance and then heads away or back. And of course, I could not say, "Hey, why are you looking at me?" or anything like that. And for some reason, I went home, I put the car in the garage, which I never did. We never parked the car in the garage. And first thing I did is I removed the stickers, because I was afraid to be target.

Samira Abed [01:13:04] Because if I went to a place of education, a place where teachers, and they were looking at me, imagine what the average - that's what went into my mind - the average person would think, because all we heard was, "Muslims, Muslims, Muslims." And of course, everybody at school knew we were Muslim. So if these educated individuals are looking at me like that, imagine what the average person's gonna look when they see the sign. So I got scared for me and for the kids that something was gonna happen, and I removed that. And in many ways, we had to tone down who we were. That sounds silly or weird, but in the sense that we're like, "Oh, where are you from?" Now like, "Oh, I was born in Brazil." So that came more. It wasn't something Muslim.

Samira Abed [01:14:03] I saw the way you being Moureen, which is a name that is not Arabic, and how Ahmad and Mohamad was treated at school. I did see a lot of, unfortunately, the way the teachers treated Ahmad, especially, and Mohamad, very different. They already made a misconception or a judgment on Mohamad and Ahmad's actions, even that Mohamad was going to an anger management class because he answered the teacher, or he did something very minor. I'm not justifying an action of an individual who did wrong, but how they treated him because his name was Mohamad versus Alex or Zach or George, whoever. So those things now I see it. And back then I knew it existed, but I didn't know what to do with it. I knew that I had to stay quiet, that the world, especially the US, was furious with the Muslim world. I took guilt. I took responsibility for something that I didn't even know where it happened, in the sense that I had to defend myself or to protect myself by hiding or not making things as clear as I would a few months back or the day before.

Moureen Kaki [01:15:33] And do you think that's changed now, the attitude you have towards who you are?

Samira Abed [01:15:39] Absolutely, absolutely. I have no - Unapologetic. First and foremost, I'm an unapologetic Palestinian. And I lived in Florida where the community here is a little more ignorant, or they choose to be about the Palestinian cause. And I'm a Muslim. So I'm very unapologetic, and even now I tone it down, the Brazil, because before I used to say, "I'm Brazilian with Palestinian parents." And this is thanks to each and every one of you, my kids, who have taught me this. You guys taught me how to be me without an apology. And every time I say, when people start talking, I was like, "I'm Palestinian." And even when they say, "Oh, we are from Israel. We can have a civil conversation." But I would never compromise or say, "In Israel." I would always refer to as back home, in my mother's and my dad's house in Palestine. Our food, our hummus, our tradition, our music.

Samira Abed [01:16:54] So yes, I carry it with much pride in a very different way. I'm much more knowledgeable on how to be active and to be myself in a productive way. Of course, I can never be compared with a Palestinian who have lived there, so I didn't suffer like they did. So I would never put myself in that situation. But that doesn't make me any less Palestinian either, because as we know, discrimination comes from both sides. Because if I go back home today, they will never see me as a full Palestinian either. But nobody can take it away, not the Palestinians themselves, and not the US, and not any culture or, God forbid, any other event that will ever happen in the world that the Muslims or the Palestinians will take fault.

Samira Abed [01:17:43] I now know in political and in day-to-day events, thanks to - what do you call them? Influencers. Instagram and Facebook that I have followed that they live in Jerusalem, and they have educated me. And people like you, I watch your activism, I watch your brother, and people that you guys surround, people Dr. Judith Norman, Dr. Harry Gunkel, and people like that, that I have so much admiration for, because they are not Palestinian. They haven't gone through what I gone through. And yet, they have so much understanding and knowledge of what it is to be a Palestinian in Texas or anywhere else. So I progressed in that sense, and I carry that pride of being a Palestinian, if it's in Texas, if it's in Florida, whatever the case may be. But absolutely change for the best.

Moureen Kaki [01:18:54] Okay Scoop, that's pretty much all the questions that I had for you. I want to leave you any space if you want to say any last words, or if there was something you wanted to touch up on more that you didn't get a chance to talk about or something that you'd wish I'd asked, that you wanted to talk about. Anything you want to.

Samira Abed [01:19:12] No, I appreciate you in so many ways, and I know that strangers that are gonna come in and listen to probably are not gonna understand, they're gonna need a translation or to bring it to context. But I appreciate the opportunity that you have given me and thought of me as being on this important aspect of history. And if I could clarify anything or if you need to add or take it away, please do. And I appreciate the opportunity, and I appreciate you as a daughter, as an activist, as a future restaurant owner, and all of the things that you are and you want to be. I appreciate you, and I love you so very much, and thank you for the opportunity.

Moureen Kaki [01:20:02] Hey, thank you, mom. Aside from being an exceptional mom, my mom is also an incredibly talented human being who has taught me not only how to be a decent person, but is an incredible businesswoman, a great student, a committed person to the people that she works with and around. And there are so many things that I could

get into that I admire about you. But then I think I'd be bordering on super biased in terms of perspective. So I just want to say thank you so much for sharing with us your story. I know there's a lot of things in your life that have not been easy, and so for you to be open about those means a lot. And I hope that people get as inspired as I know I've seen people be by my mom and hearing her story. And so thank you so much. I love you. I appreciate you.

Samira Abed [01:21:04] I love you, too. Thank you again and again. And thank you for University of Texas, San Antonio for the opportunity that's giving us too.

Moureen Kaki [01:21:12] It's actually UT-Austin that this is, and the Institute for Diversity and Civic life. So yes, many, many thanks to them too, but yes, that's it.

Samira Abed [01:21:21] Thank you again.