Hadi Jawad
April 5, 2023

Moureen Kaki [00:00:02] Hello, hello. My name is Moureen Kaki, and I am an oral history fellow with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life. I am here with Hadi Jawad. Today is April 5, at 1:17 p.m. and I am calling from San Antonio, Texas. Hadi, would you mind introducing yourself and telling us where you're calling from today?

Hadi Jawad [00:00:22] Oh, yes. My name is Hadi Jawad. I live in Dallas, Texas, and that's it.

Moureen Kaki [00:00:33] Thank you so much. And thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today. I'm excited to learn more about you and get to talk with you. I know we've been in conversation for a while about this, so I'm grateful for your time. Hadi, would you mind - one of the favorite questions I like to ask to start with is what's the earliest memory you have as a child? Because this is oral history, so we start with contextualizing who you are. And I'd love to know, what's the first thing you remember on this earth?

Hadi Jawad [00:01:03] Oh, gosh. That's something that I haven't thought about in a long time. But I've had a memory when I was very young, very, very, very young. And when I asked my mother about that, as I was growing older, she said that was impossible, that I would have a memory that far back. This was a time when my father and my mother, my family, were in what is known today as Bangladesh. I was born in Pakistan, but my father was in the oil and gas industry, and he was transferred to what was known back then as East Pakistan. And I had a memory of some people playing soccer, and the ball got kicked so far away that it rolled down a hill, a steep hill. And beyond the edge of the soccer field, there was just a thick, thick jungle. And I just had a distinct memory of that all my life when I was a child. And I my mother said that it is not possible that I would remember that, because I was only about six months old at that time. So there you have it.

Moureen Kaki [00:02:36] Wow. I think six months might be our youngest recall of memory to date that I've done in interviews, which is pretty remarkable. That's crazy to think about.

Hadi Jawad [00:02:45] It really is. And I hadn't thought about that in a long time, but I've had that memory all my life.

Moureen Kaki [00:02:50] Wow, wow. Okay, so you said that your parents are from Bangladesh, and you were raised in Pakistan, or born in Pakistan?

Hadi Jawad [00:02:58] No, no, they weren't Bangladeshis. My father was actually born in Iraq. His family moved to Bombay. That's my grandfather and my grandmother from my dad's side. They moved to Bombay, India, when my dad was eight years old from Iraq. And my mother was an Iranian descent woman living in Bombay also. And that's where my parents met. And when Pakistan was created in 1947, they left Bombay, India, and migrated to Pakistan, where I was born. There's a complex history. I've got family in Iraq. I've got family in Iran. I have family in India. And of course, I was born and raised in Pakistan.

Moureen Kaki [00:03:51] And what was that childhood like?

Hadi Jawad [00:03:55] Growing up in Pakistan was interesting. It was a different time, a different era. I went to Catholic schools, got a really good education. The school was quite

cosmopolitan. We had Hindus and Christians and Muslims and Zoroastrians and all kinds of ethnicities together. We grew up in a great learning environment. It was good. And Karachi back then was a city of only three or four million people. Today it's over twenty million. Back then I'm talking about - I'm seventy-one years old, so I left Pakistan in 1971. So until that time, my memories are very fond and good. Pakistan back then was a very beautiful place. Karachi, especially.

Moureen Kaki [00:04:59] What was your happiest childhood memory that you'd be willing to share with us?

Hadi Jawad [00:05:04] Oh, I was just thinking about this the other day. I'm blessed with five sisters, so my older sister, the one right above me in age, I think she must have been in sixth grade, and I was in fifth grade. And she also went to a Catholic school, all girls Catholic school. I think her class went on a picnic. There was probably about forty or fifty girls my sister's age, and my sister invited me to go. So to be on that picnic with forty girls on the beach for a whole day is one of my fondest memories in my life to be the only boy in that group of girls [laughs].

Moureen Kaki [00:06:01] That's very sweet of your sister, too, invite you along.

Hadi Jawad [00:06:04] That's right. Yeah.

Moureen Kaki [00:06:06] That's funny. Thank you so much for sharing that. That's good. And what was school like? You mentioned that you went to a Catholic school in Pakistan, but did you grow up Catholic? Was that the religion that you were raised in?

Hadi Jawad [00:06:23] No. No, we're Muslims. The schooling was great. Just absolutely fantastic. The teachers were phenomenal. Even though we were in a Catholic school, we had Islamiyat, Islamic studies classes every year throughout our education. I joined the school in fourth grade, and back in Pakistan, the school ends at tenth grade, and then you go to what is called the intermediate college. So my early education was in this Catholic school, and they broadened our horizons and broadened my mind and exposed me to great Western writers and Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Hardy and the great English literature. Yeah, it was a great experience, and I'm really grateful to the Catholics that opened up these schools to educate us. Yeah, I'm really grateful. I'm really grateful.

Moureen Kaki [00:07:38] What a lovely memory, a concept of sharing across religion, even in schooling across religion, and to walk away with such a happy memory from it too. Especially in the contemporary when we hear all these ideas about how these religions supposedly clash. But the reality of the experiences that people have is not that. So that's a lovely framing, so thank you. And you mentioned you immigrated from Pakistan in 1971. Is that correct?

Hadi Jawad [00:08:08] That is correct, yeah.

Moureen Kaki [00:08:10] You came to the United States?

Hadi Jawad [00:08:12] I came to the United States, yeah. I came to Indiana, a city called Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the middle of winter, which was quite an experience because growing up in Pakistan, which is in the tropics, I think the coldest temperature I'd ever experienced in Karachi was probably back then, probably about fifty-five degrees. I think it

might have been the coldest temperature I'd ever experienced. And I landed in Fort Wayne, Indiana on January the second, and it was extremely, extremely cold. In fact, when I got to the apartment where I was gonna stay, a friend was already there who came, picked me up at the airport, and took me to his house. I asked to use the bathroom, and I locked the bathroom, and I began to cry because it was so cold. I had never experienced - I mean, the snow was piled up three or four feet high alongside the road. This was January the second that I landed in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1972. And I was in that bathroom, and I was crying because I thought that God was punishing me for all the bad things I had done, and I was in hell, except hell was very cold. My goodness, you're a good interviewer, you are eliciting all these memories.

Moureen Kaki [00:09:56] Thank you.

Hadi Jawad [00:09:57] Wow.

Moureen Kaki [00:09:59] Oh my gosh, that one sounds like a tough one.

Hadi Jawad [00:10:02] Isn't that crazy? Oh my god. Yeah, I couldn't believe. And then, of course, six months later, I moved to Chicago [laughs]. That's even colder.

Moureen Kaki [00:10:14] You didn't get a break from the cold, yeah.

Hadi Jawad [00:10:14] It's even colder in Chicago. Yeah, I think for the first time in my life - I haven't experienced it since then - forty below zero in Chicago in 1973. I used to question, I mean, how could human beings even survive in a place like this? So shortly thereafter I moved to Texas because I just could not comprehend how I was going to survive in that kind of a environment, that kind of a region.

Moureen Kaki [00:10:51] Wow, no kidding. So what was the prompt? What prompted you to migrate to the US from Pakistan to begin with?

Hadi Jawad [00:11:02] Well, I was a good student and ranked high in my classes and my grades. My parents wanted me to pursue engineering, and like most of us, this was drilled into us while we were growing up. If you're a boy, you're gonna be an engineer or a doctor. I mean, that's the only options we had. And we were sort of brainwashed into doing this. And that is such a shame, because that's not where my heart was. But it was forced, "forced" is the right word, forced into not looking at anything else, considering anything else, other than just engineering. So Karachi had just, the city I was born and raised in, only had one engineering school in a city of four million people back then. So getting into the engineering college was not easy, even if you were a good student, you had to be in the, probably, ninety-nine percentile to be able to get in on grades, and I was not that good. Or you needed to pull some strings to get in, if you knew the right people that could get you to go to that college.

Hadi Jawad [00:12:42] So the door seemed to be closed to me. And at that time, the only option I had was go to merchant navy. I was always drawn to the sea and shipping and ships as a child who grew up in a coastal city. But the school was in what was at that time East Pakistan, and I applied to that school and got accepted. But a month before I was set to leave for East Pakistan, the war between West and East Pakistan broke out, and East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and that door was shut for me, closed for me. So at that time, a few of my friends had left for the US for further studies. Under peer pressure, I applied to university here, to the University, the Indiana Institute of Technology in Fort

Wayne, Indiana and got accepted. So lack of opportunity in Pakistan, not seeing a clear future for myself, lack of educational opportunities, I think that's primarily what prompted me to come here.

Moureen Kaki [00:14:17] And aside from the freezing cold - did you know to expect that, by the way, the freezing cold in Indiana when you arrived, or was it just you were told, but you still couldn't fathom how cold it was?

Hadi Jawad [00:14:31] It's the latter. I was told, "It's cold, it's very cold," but unless you experience it, that's the only way to learn that lesson.

Moureen Kaki [00:14:41] Yeah, yeah. And aside from the shock of the cold, literally, how did it feel? How did it feel? I mean, you'd grown up in one place, and then you come, and you're what age at that time? I'm sorry.

Hadi Jawad [00:14:55] I was nineteen. Nineteen years old. Close to becoming twenty, but nineteen still. It was a shock. It was a shock. I was on a culture shock for probably at least couple of years. It took me two years to get socialized into American society. The university was surrounded - the college that I went to in Fort Wayne was in a low income area, so it was high crime. The cold and the crime and just the newness of the city and the newness of the American experience was a cultural shock. I didn't have linguistic issues, language issues. We grew up speaking English as a language. I was fluent in English, even as a child, but the cultural shock was palpable and real and took a while.

Moureen Kaki [00:16:12] And so the move, after you got here, was Indiana first and then Chicago. Was that by choice? Was that the plan? What was your thought process with that?

Hadi Jawad [00:16:30] Chicago was where all the jobs were. And we were maybe a hundred miles away in Indiana from Chicago. So it was just a logical step to go to Chicago in the summer. That's when I left. I left Indiana after six months. So around May of 1972 with a friend of mine who knew some other guys in Chicago, so we had a place to go to and a place to stay, moved to Chicago and worked there. My plan was just to work there for the summer and return to college, but it didn't work out that way, and I stayed there for the rest of the year. So I was in Chicago, May through December of 1972, and basically just worked. Worked two jobs, sixteen hours a day, two shifts in two different factories in Chicago, and just saved all the money that I could save before I moved to Texas, which was quite - that was unplanned. The move to Texas was unplanned.

Hadi Jawad [00:17:38] It just so happened that some guys from the Dallas area had come to Chicago also for work, and met them, and they informed us that the University of Texas system was having trouble populating the universities, was looking, was seeking foreign students to come. And the incentive that the UT system was putting out for foreign students at that time was that if they would come and go to school in the UT system, the state would pay half the tuition. That's something that a lot of people don't know. The UT system was brand spanking new. I don't know if brand spanking new, but quite new. And there weren't enough students enrolled in the one that I went to, which is UTA, University of Texas at Arlington, did not have enough students. And the state of Texas was incentivizing foreign students from all around the country to come to Texas to go to school. So that's how I ended up in Texas.

Moureen Kaki [00:19:01] Wow. Very cool. I had no idea that that was the thing either. That's pretty remarkable. I wanted to back up. I meant to ask you this earlier. What was the process of doing the immigration actually like? Because I mean, we hear horror stories in contemporary about what the immigration system is like. But when you immigrated, that was fifty years ago. I imagine it was a lot different. Just for context, would you mind sharing what that was like, whether it was difficult or easy or whatever you remember from it?

Hadi Jawad [00:19:35] What I remember is it was quite easy. There was not much focus, nobody was paying attention to us. I realize things are quite, quite, quite different now. But yeah, once you were here, nobody was monitoring us. Nobody was asking us questions. We had a student visa, so we had a visa for four years. So we were pretty much left alone. I think the only bugaboo we heard in the early days was about jobs and job permits and stuff. But companies and businesses weren't aware or mindful of those issues back then, too. If they were looking to hire people, they never questioned you as to whether you were allowed to work or had a work permit or not. None of those questions seemed to matter at that time.

Moureen Kaki [00:20:33] And of course, things changed that triggered a series of events, as we know. But we'll get into that here in a minute. What can you share about your experience at Arlington? What was it like to be a college student in the US in the '70s?

Hadi Jawad [00:20:56] Mostly good. We stuck to ourselves. There was maybe a hundred of us at UTA, University of Texas at Arlington. We kept to ourselves. We were sort of into the music scene and stuff, so we would go to concerts, Tom Jones, people that we used to listen to in Pakistan that would come to Texas, to Dallas. That was a big thrill for us that we could get to see somebody we had listened to, admired back in Pakistan, that we could see live. I got to see George Harrison, for example, live, Engelbert Humperdinck. These are strange names now. Tom Jones. So that was all good. But we pretty much stayed to ourselves. We had a Pakistan Student Association, and we held events every year.

Hadi Jawad [00:22:15] But going to college was such a huge priority, and working pay our expenses because we were pretty much on our own. Pretty much is not correct. We were entirely on our own to take care of ourselves, to sustain ourselves, to take care of our needs, financial needs. And we met our emotional needs hanging onto each other as friends and colleagues and fellow countrymen and tried to maintain our cultural identities, celebrating the important days of the festival, Eid and prayers. There weren't such a thing as a mosque in this entire area. There weren't any restaurants. There weren't any stores that catered to our needs. So yeah, it was an interesting time, sort of a bygone era fifty years ago.

Moureen Kaki [00:23:20] I have to ask, out of the concerts, which was your favorite and most memorable concert experience?

Hadi Jawad [00:23:28] I think Harrison was probably. I mean, I loved him when I was a kid, so he was my favorite Beatle. So we got to see him in person was just absolutely mind blowing.

Moureen Kaki [00:23:42] That's amazing. That's amazing. So what did you study in college?

Hadi Jawad [00:23:51] Engineering.

Moureen Kaki [00:23:52] Engineering. You mentioned that earlier, thank you.

Hadi Jawad [00:23:54] I was programmed, I was programmed.

Moureen Kaki [00:23:56] Okay. That's right. Yeah, it's funny you say that, because my brothers, I have three brothers, and out of all three, one is an engineer, one is a doctor, one is a lawyer.

Hadi Jawad [00:24:08] That's it.

Moureen Kaki [00:24:10] They each checked a box.

Hadi Jawad [00:24:12] Yeah.

Moureen Kaki [00:24:13] Yeah, so you graduated college, and then what happened next for you?

Hadi Jawad [00:24:24] Well, in the last semester, I just had three hours left to finish. Began interviewing and the school would set up, the university would set up interviews, and after three or four interviews, it dawned on me that every company that I was interviewing with was tied to the defense industry. Halliburton, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics. Every single interview was tied, and it began to concern me, even at that time. I was twenty-four years old. I was getting a little bit uncomfortable with the direction that my life was going in. And they weren't offering a lot of money either. The country was in a recession, some kind of a recession back then, '76. So these defense industry guys, they were hiring, they were hiring engineering students. And UTA, I found out subsequently, the engineering department is heavily subsidized by the defense industry, because that's where they get their talent, young engineers fresh out of college.

Hadi Jawad [00:25:58] And I remember in the senior year, especially around the study of mathematics, which I really enjoyed. We loved mathematics, even growing up in Pakistan. That was our big deal, math. When we'd hang out at each other's homes, three or four or five or however many, instead of watching TV, or we didn't have cell phones obviously back then, we would solve math problems. One of us would come up with ten math problems. And then the test would be who solved the problem the fastest. So math was a big deal in my life. I enjoyed math, still love math. And the math that they were teaching us in engineering school, most of it was related to - the stuff that I found fascinating was the stuff that was related to coming up with mathematical equations that would predict the behavior, for example, of a missile that was fired and it encountered - just an example for you to see what I'm talking about. What if a missile encounters a gust of sixty mile per hour wind? How does this missile, which is controlled automatically, get back on its target on the latitude and longitude coordinates that it's supposed to go to? Am I making myself clear? Does it make sense?

Moureen Kaki [00:27:44] It makes sense as much as it can make sense to my very non-mathematical, scientific brain. I understand what you're saying, but I can't -

Hadi Jawad [00:27:49] I love the math that goes into figuring out what's gonna happen to a missile that is moving at 300 miles per hour, and all of a sudden a gust of wind pushes it out of its trajectory. Trajectory is the right word. And how do we get it back to its trajectory? There was math, and it was fascinating math. And we did this without computers, we did

just by hand. And you could spend the whole night and write up the book this thick with 300 pages in it, solving one equation. It was fascinating stuff. But it occurred to me that all of this work, all of this learning that I have done is gonna be going towards war and misery and killing. I didn't understand that completely, but it was beginning to filter into my mind, coupled with the fact that they weren't paying you a lot of money. And I says, "Do I really want to?" I began to question my choice and my future life as a worker.

Hadi Jawad [00:29:04] So it was in the last semester. I used to go to the placement office all the time to get counseling, to get updates on what's available out there. What can I do? Who can I talk to? Who can I interview with? I saw they had this board in the office which listed local companies asking for part time help, and I had a lot of time on my hand. Like I said, I had only three hours left. And I was looking to find something to do work-wise. And I saw this notice that grabbed my attention. It was handwritten note, very well written, as if almost calligraphy, and it was a company here in Irving, and they were inviting young students, college students to come to work for them for $10 an hour, which in '76 was a lot of money. I think minimum wage was probably around two or three bucks or something. So I said, "Okay, and part time," I said, "I'll give them a call.".

Hadi Jawad [00:30:23] And the name of the company was Forklift City. They were in the forklift business. So I interviewed with them. It was a young man who interviewed me, very suave, very smooth, very cultured, and just hit it off with him. And by the time I got home from the interview, he had called my roommate and told him to call him back, and he hired me. That was in 1976. I'm calling you from where I interviewed, the same place where I interviewed. The name of my company today is Forklift City. So I ended up buying the company that I went to work for 1976. I bought it years later. I'm retired now, and my son runs the company. I never chose engineering as a field to work in. I've been in the forklift business since 1976. Well I'm retired now, but all my life.

Moureen Kaki [00:31:38] Wow, what an incredible story. But did you finish your degree?

Hadi Jawad [00:31:43] Yes.

Moureen Kaki [00:31:43] Okay. So you just never went into there. You just stayed working them after college. That's incredible. How does one go from being hired to be a minimum wage salaried employee to owning the company?

Hadi Jawad [00:31:59] Yeah, it's a testament to our country and the society we're part of that you can do this over here. And it took a lot of work and a lot of ups and downs and through five or six recessions. But it's a niche business, and it didn't take a lot of money. I didn't have a lot of money to get started in the business. It depended more on how hard you worked and how many relationships you could have in the industry. And our business was countrywide, so we were dealing with other companies, similar companies that are in the same business as we are, forklifts, around the country. So it was it was challenging and interesting and always new, always fresh. My engineering background obviously helped me in repairers and service and many aspects of our business.

Hadi Jawad [00:33:12] But overall I'm really grateful for this opportunity that that I got and got into it very early in my life and raised my family and did good. The best thing it did for me, Moureen, is the next phase of my life, which was the late 1990s, I became a full-time activist. So here I'm running a business, and I'm also a full-time activist. So being self-employed gave me the opportunity to be an activist. And I was advocating and fighting for

things that a conventional employer would not have tolerated, is my guess. But that's something I think you're gonna get to later, so I'll stop there.

Moureen Kaki [00:34:19] Yeah. No, I mean, I think that's a fantastic transition, and so let's talk about it. So what were some of those things that you advocated for and what inspired you to become an activist?

Hadi Jawad [00:34:29] Yeah, So this is the late 1990s, and like I said earlier, I have family in Iraq. I still do. My dad's cousins and second cousins and their families. And you know how our families are, even these large extended families, we are so family oriented. So from Pakistan, my parents used to travel to Iraq quite routinely. I'd say every three or four years they would go to Iraq on pilgrimage, to Karbala and to Najaf. And that's where my extended family was, in Karbala, so they kept in touch. So in the in the mid-1990s, my sister, my older sister, the one who took me on the picnic, called me and said that one of our relatives, a distant cousin, had shown up at her house in Karachi, destitute, holding a few bags, had his teenage kids with him and said that things got so bad for them living in Iraq under the burden of the US sanctions that they were well-to-do folks, middle class, but eventually, just to make ends meet, they started selling their belongings and jewelry and furniture and TVs and cars. And when everything was gone, they knew that they had family in Karachi, Pakistan, and decided to move.

Hadi Jawad [00:36:28] So I was taken aback a little bit. I had no idea what was going on in Iraq. And well, we heard about Saddam Hussein and this and that on the news, but I was not paying attention to what was really happening. So I looked into it just to check and see what was going on, and I was just horrified, just completely horrified what was happening to - looking beyond the government of Iraq, obviously Saddam Hussein had already been demonized because of the first Gulf War. But looking beyond all that stuff, the effects, the suffering of the Iraqi people in the mid-nineties was just horrifying. Already by that time, half a million children under the age of five had died directly related to the US sanctions. So it just turned me upside down. The more I looked into it, the more horrified I got. And then not knowing what to do. I had just a really difficult feeling of helplessness that now that I know this, what do I do? What do I do with this information? And I felt, that's the only word, helpless. Just that I felt helpless.

Hadi Jawad [00:38:17] So anyway, I came up with an idea. I had a drum that I used to play. I started playing African drums in the early '90s. I had a teacher who came from Nigeria that taught me West African rhythms. So we had this big drum that you play with a stick and a bell. And I said, "Okay, I'm gonna go and stand in front of the federal building in downtown Dallas, put a little sign on my drum that says, "Stop killing Iraqi children," and every Friday afternoon after work, about 4:00, I'll go there, and I'll and I'll stand in front of federal building and play my drum and see what happens. That's the only thing I could think of doing. I didn't know what to do, so I said, "Okay, I'll just play this drum." So I did that for a couple of weeks, and somebody at a group called the Dallas Peace Center - I didn't even know they existed - found out that there's some guy standing in front of the federal building every Friday, plays this drum, and it's got a sign about Iraqi children getting killed. So they reached out to me and invited me to one of their meetings or events. And I got there, and they were actively involved in education and awareness and lobbying and writing and decrying and denouncing US foreign policy in Iraq. So I joined that group, and that's my step into activism. The rest, as you say, the rest is history.

Moureen Kaki [00:40:21] It must have been a lot more to go off of, because, I mean, that was the first Gulf War that you're referencing, right?

Hadi Jawad [00:40:30] Right, in between. In between the first and second. So I'm talking '96-ish.

Moureen Kaki [00:40:38] So this is '96 and this is the beginning of your activism. But then there's the second Gulf War, and then there's 9/11. So then there's the invasion of Iraq. So I'm guessing your activism didn't stop, and it certainly didn't level.

Hadi Jawad [00:40:55] No, no, no. It still hadn't stopped. So yeah, I don't work in the forklift business anymore, but I come to my office, which is the same office I've had all these years. My son lets me come, so I can carry on my activism. Yeah, still got plenty issues. So yeah, I didn't stop. So back in '96, all our efforts were geared towards raising awareness, educating people about the devastating effects of US sanctions on Iraq. Of course, as the years went by, well, 2001, obviously 9/11 happened. But by that time, I just want to drop this in, I had become well-known in the media circles and in peace and justice circles in the Dallas area. This is relevant to my history and to my testimony to you. Because I had lived here since I was a teenager, I had no fear of speaking out as compared to a lot of folks that come to the US, have not grown up here, and tend to not speak up or speak out in fear of retribution. So I had no such fear. I totally believed in the rights and privileges I had as a US citizen, as somebody who grew up here. I did not differentiate myself from anyone else who had those rights and felt emboldened that this is not Pakistan where I should be afraid. This is the United States of America, and if I have a grievance, I have a right to express my grievance.

Hadi Jawad [00:43:09] So I was quite outspoken. I educated myself about Iraq, looked what's happening to Iraq, the history of US involvement in Iraq, and the Middle East for that matter, and Latin America for that matter. I organized speakers and events, teach ins and rallies, and you just name it, the entire spectrum of tools that are available to an activist and to push all the issues, in particular, the issue of Iraq back in those days, '96, '97, '98, '99, 2000. And then, of course, 2001 happens, which is a game changer for all of us. So I'll stop there and see what you want to ask, how you want to go forward with the 9/11.

Moureen Kaki [00:44:14] Yeah. I mean, I guess the simplest question is, where were you when 9/11 happened? What was your memory of finding out about 9/11 and what was your reaction? How did you feel?

Hadi Jawad [00:44:28] I was getting dressed to go to work and turned the TV on. That was my habit, watched the TV in the morning as I got dressed and saw the planes flying through the buildings just like everybody else. Yeah, it was that simple.

Moureen Kaki [00:44:49] And I mean, I think you might be one of the few people I've had a chance to talk to who was an adult with activist history by the time that 9/11 happened. So what was your immediate response to this? I mean, clearly devastation and those kind of things, but just walk us through you saw it on TV, you went to work or you were getting ready for work. This is not an ordinary piece of news media.

Hadi Jawad [00:45:20] Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, I could tell. I mean, my immediate reaction was fear. I was afraid. I was afraid that the violence that we had perpetrated, we being the US had perpetrated in the Middle East, in Iraq and Iran over the years, and the violence done to the Palestinians and the violence in Lebanon. The history of the Middle East is replete with the violence that Western nations have perpetrated on that entire

region for years and years and years. So my fear was based that the violence that we have inflicted upon that region is now coming here. And so I myself, as a US citizen, need to be careful now because the country is under attack. So I'm in fear of myself, my family, my neighbors, my friends, that we are being drawn into this fire that we have been throwing all of these years over there.

Hadi Jawad [00:46:52] The next thing I got afraid of, and I felt this fear on all these levels, is that this is bad. This is really, really bad. What is happening to us, to here in the US? If New York today, is it gonna be Dallas tomorrow? And what is going to be the reaction of my fellow Americans? I know I'm a minority in this country, although I am completely assimilated. I have married a White woman. I've married two White women. I'm assimilated completely. I'm as American as anybody else. But what happens to me? What happens to me now as a - how will I be treated? How will people look at me and all these fears, actually, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 became real because especially getting on an airplane became quite an undertaking. Before nobody gave me a second glance. Nobody would look at me twice before 9/11. And now people are staring at me. I mean, they're staring at me in marketplaces. They're staring at me in public places. And especially when I get on a on a frickin' airplane. It's like the eyes of the entire plane are on me and just trying to drill into me with their stares.

Hadi Jawad [00:48:46] And the other layer of this, my discomfort and fear, was that I was in the public eye. The newspaper folks knew me. The reporters knew me. So I was getting calls from the news media here in Dallas, the electronic, the TV camp, the TV stations, and the print media about my reaction as a Muslim to 9/11 or to explain what's happening. So I was compelled to answer the questions, to speak out. Some of this stuff was really difficult to navigate. The imams at the mosques began to tell their congregations to lay low. That was the thing coming down from the pulpits in the mosques is to stay low. "This is a dangerous time to be a Muslim. Don't make any noise. Just stay in the shadows. Just don't say a word.".

Hadi Jawad [00:50:07] And here I was on TV and news, talking, trying to protect my fellow Muslims, telling people not to judge us by the actions of these people who attacked New York. So the mullahs, the preachers, the imams began to tell the congregations to stay the heck away from Hadi Jawad because he'll get you all in trouble. So it was a difficult time for somebody like me who's in the spotlight, who's an activist, who's in the media. It was a rough time. I had support fortunately. I had support from a lot of people, particularly my friends at the Dallas Peace Center, the White and Black Americans, peace activists, justice activists who were saying that, "We're behind you. We support you. Don't be afraid to speak truth to power." But thank God we got through that period.

Moureen Kaki [00:51:33] And you talked about this earlier a little bit after seeing what you saw and hearing what of the atrocities that happened in Iraq that drove you towards your activism. But what is it that inspired you to continue this kind of work? Because like you said, you were being isolated at the mosque as somebody who could potentially just get others in the spotlight or be a threat to their safety because you might have the spotlight on you in that sense. And then so you're isolated from your own Muslim community. And then it's hard work, and you've got your full-time job. Where is the moral energy coming from, if you will?

Hadi Jawad [00:52:17] I don't know exactly, to answer the question, where the moral courage comes from. But 9/11 happened, but it spawned a lot of other injustices right here in my community here in Dallas. So one of the first things that happens over here is the

story of - I think I mentioned this to you in a conversation earlier - the shooting of Rais Bhuiyan. A White supremacist named Mark Stroman, eight or nine days after 9/11 happens, goes on a killing spree. He's a White supremacist, shaved head, heavily tattooed, declares himself the "Arab slayer" and is gonna avenge the 9/11 attacks on New York City. Goes into a restaurant and asks the convenience store clerk, "Where are you from?" And before they can even answer, shoots them at point blank range, kills them. Killed a guy named Waqar Hasan. He was from Pakistan. Two days later, he kills an Indian from India, Vasudev Patel. And Rais, my friend Rais who became a good friend, still a good friend, Rais Bhuiyan, also working in a grocery store, shoots him in the face with a shotgun, almost kills him. I mean, he almost died, falls down. But Stroman leaves thinking he's dead. But Rais miraculously survives. That's one story that happened right here in Dallas, in our neighborhood.

Hadi Jawad [00:54:17] The other story that happened here in the aftermath of 9/11 was the great tragedy of the Holy Land Foundation, where the U.S. government, the Bush administration, the Department of Justice, came in and shut down the largest Muslim charity at that time, the Holy Land Foundation. Arrested five men. I knew some of them, knew one of them real well, the CEO, a guy named Shukri Abu Baker. And sentenced Shukri Abu Baker and Ghasan Elashi to sixty-five years in prison, and these guys were humanitarians. These are humanitarians with every sense of that word "humanitarian," kind, compassionate. And they were Palestinians, and the US government was looking for some, what's been described as a "low hanging fruit," somebody to kick, somebody to punish. And Holy Land Foundation, at the insistence of the government of Israel, because the government of Israel participated in their trial. I just mentioned Shukri Abu Baker just two months ago. He's serving a sixty-five-year sentence in Beaumont.

Hadi Jawad [00:55:51] So these gross injustices came about as a direct result of the attack of 9/11 on my community, my circle of friends. My life was turned upside down. It was effortless to get involved. I'm trying to figure out the moral courage question, where does moral courage come from inside of you, if not - maybe it's just outside of you, it's the injustices that you see over and over being repeated that just have kept propelling me to continue to do this work because this seems to be no end to it, and there's a need for somebody.

Hadi Jawad [00:57:00] And I think this has probably been my reason for doing what I do is that somebody needs to speak up and speak out. And I feel like I don't have the luxury to wait around and see if somebody else will. I feel like it is my obligation, it is my job, my responsibility that if I see something so grotesque, so upside down, so crazy, and if I ignore it, how do I sleep at night? How do I live with myself? Once I know something and I ignore it, I just can't. It's just hard to ignore. I think that's the reason. Yeah, that's where the moral courage comes from. It's just hard to ignore. I wish I could. Sometimes I say, "This is a double-edged sword." This takes a toll. It takes a toll on your life. It takes a toll on your own peace of mind, on your own health, on your own finances. I wouldn't call it an obsession. It's never been like that. It's not self-destructive, because you are making a difference every once in a while.

Hadi Jawad [00:58:31] I guess every once in a while we have a small victory. Because the other thing that I've learned doing this. Again, you're such a good questioner, oh my god. In this business, in this business of activism, anybody who gets on this path, if they are going to do this because they're gonna have a lot of victories, I've got bad news. We lose most of the times. It's a long, dusty, difficult road, and losses are plenty. I mean, it's just all the time. I've said this before, I say, "You lose, you lose, you lose, you lose, you lose, you

lose, you lose, and then you win." And then it repeats like that again. So the wins are far and few in between. So it takes a certain amount of stubbornness, some kind of grit, some kind of stubbornness. You have to be stubborn.

Moureen Kaki [00:59:40] Persistence too, might be a good word.

Hadi Jawad [00:59:43] Persistence, that's a good word. Stubborn is a bad word.

Moureen Kaki [00:59:46] I think you have to be a little bit stubborn to be a good activist.

Hadi Jawad [00:59:49] Yeah. Persistence is right. You got to persist. Yeah, that's the only salvation is just you've got to persist.

Moureen Kaki [01:00:03] Hadi, I want to ask you, what organizations are you working with now, and what is it about the missions of the organizations that -

Hadi Jawad [01:00:10] Actually, we started a group called North Texas Peace Advocates. It's a non-registered group. Our mission is, again, education and raising awareness on issues of peace and justice, nonviolent means to resolve conflict. We've done some webinars, many webinars in the last couple of years around these issues. Also, I work very closely with SMU, Southern Methodist University Human Rights Program. The director is a very close friend of mine, Dr. Rick Halperin. He's an internationally recognized authority on genocide, death penalty, and human rights issues.

Hadi Jawad [01:01:13] I worked closely with him on the Texas death penalty issue. We organized five webinars last year. One of them was an amazing webinar that created life of its own because people are repeating it around the country. It was I had the idea that in the last election cycle, several candidates for district attorney in major metro areas of the country ran on a anti-death penalty platform and won. So I was taken aback. Places like Tucson, Arizona, Saint Louis, Missouri, Athens-Clarke County in Georgia, obviously LA, San Francisco. I'm forgetting a couple more. So I reached out to all of these DAs after they got elected and said, "Hey, you are unique, that you ran on a anti-death penalty platform and you won your election. Would you be willing to get on a webinar with some fellow DA's that did the same thing? And let's see how you did it, so we can inspire some other DAs to run like that," especially the one guy we got here in Dallas. One more in Austin, Travis County DA José Garza ran on a anti-death penalty platform and won.

Hadi Jawad [01:03:08] We just heard recently that the DA in Los Angeles, George Gascón, his office gathered up DAs on the West Coast that are against the death penalty and had another webinar similar to the webinar we created. So I'm really, really happy and proud about that, that we initiated a dialog between DAs around the country who have successfully become DAs while still opposing the death penalty, which is supposed to be a bugaboo, you can't do that and still win in major metropolitan areas. So I think I got off on a tangent.

Moureen Kaki [01:03:55] No, it's a great tangent though. I appreciate you sharing the work that you all have accomplished and congratulations, because that is pretty incredible. Yeah, I wrote his name down too, to just try to see if I can follow up. So if you have contact for him -

Hadi Jawad [01:04:08] Yeah, yeah. José Garza, great guy. Great office. You asked me what organization I'm working with. I don't have a registered organization right now. I did

serve as the executive director of the Dallas Peace and Justice Center until about two or three years ago, two years ago. Before that, for twenty-five years or so, I was very active with the Dallas Peace Center that I mentioned earlier, twenty years or so, served on the board and served as committee chair dealing with the Middle East peace issues.

Moureen Kaki [01:04:53] And one question I wanted to ask you earlier, too, was about when you were mentioning Rais's story, who I actually was able to interview, by the way, so thank you again for that connection.

Hadi Jawad [01:05:05] Hold on just a second, let me turn this off. Something just came on my - sorry. Well, you did you did contact Rais?

Moureen Kaki [01:05:12] Yes. Yeah, we actually got an interview, and I think his interview already published on our website. He is a remarkable human being. Yeah, he had just an incredible story. It was something to listen to. And I don't think the chills in my arm went away the entire time that he spoke. Yeah, just a remarkable human being.

Hadi Jawad [01:05:40] We launched his campaign, me and Dr. Rick Halperin were the ones that launched his campaign.

Moureen Kaki [01:05:48] Very cool, very cool. When you were talking about Rais, you were also talking about the Holy Land Five, the Holy Land Foundation as a result of what happened post-9/11. Did you ever experience anything yourself that was directed at you? Maybe not in the same capacity as getting sentenced to sixty-five years or surviving what should have been a fatal hate crime, by all statistics. But was there anything that affected you personally also, following 9/11?

Hadi Jawad [01:06:19] No, nothing. Nothing personal directed at me. Some remarks here and there and that type of stuff. But nothing for me to complain about. My own personal reaction, my own personal feelings were quite illuminating for myself in my own education and my own growth as a human being. That country that I had lived in from 1972 to 2001, which is what, thirty years, all of a sudden, I was a stranger in a strange land, just by the way people were responding to me and addressing me and talking to me. So that was quite a shock. Quite a learning experience. Like, "How did this happen so fast? This is my home. I'm completely at ease here and totally comfortable here. But now I'm a little scared. I don't walk outside at night anymore. I try to keep my head low and not look people in the eye," those kind of things. And that lasted for a while. It's gone now, but I remember those feelings were still around for quite some time, maybe a year or two years before people got over it, so to speak. Anyway, nothing personal done to me.

Moureen Kaki [01:07:57] Yeah, yeah, except the disruption, like you said, of your comfort and your sense of security as a human here, which is something that was a sentiment echoed by many Muslims and people who either are Muslim or are publicly interpreted as Muslims or somehow associated with the perpetrators of 9/11. It's been a common expression that -

Hadi Jawad [01:08:28] My experiences, because I was in the public eye - for example, we opposed the Afghanistan war. When the Afghanistan war started on whatever it was, October 18, 2001, me and my colleagues at the Dallas Peace Center, all pillars of the community, they weren't just activists like me. They were esteemed and revered ministers from both the African American and the White community. United Methodist,

Presbyterians, all well known, well recognized, very well-respected people in the Dallas community that were out on the street protesting the Afghanistan war.

Hadi Jawad [01:09:16] And I was there, and I remember that day clearly. There was maybe about twenty or twenty-five of us, probably that much media, a lot of media, because obviously it was a hot topic, hot subject, and about fifty or sixty counter protesters, people dressed in the American flag. You know what I'm talking about. Their pants are made out of the US flag, waving the American flag, and literally foaming at the mouth, just abusive vitriol, just poisonous. And I was only Brown person, anybody who looks like a Muslim there in that gathering, and I caught a lot of their venom. But I had to take that in stride. I can't take that personally, because I had compassion for them, because they were reacting to an event of 9/11 that shook people up. I mean, it scared the daylights out of people here. They had never seen anything like it, so I didn't particularly take it personally. I understood their pain and their suffering and managed to stay calm and polite and let them cast their venom at me in the hopes that if they relieve themselves of that pain and burden that they're caring, they might feel better. What else can you do?

Moureen Kaki [01:11:01] That's an incredibly gracious response to a very difficult situation. I can only imagine.

Hadi Jawad [01:11:10] I felt like they were my fellow Americans. These are people that I care about. They are my neighbors. When the FBI came and talked to me, and they said, "Well, if you have some information about anybody who's planning an attack here in Dallas, please let us know. Will you please let us know?" I said, "Of course, I'll let you know. These are my neighbors. I love this city. I am grateful for the life that have gotten in this country. You don't have to call me. I will call you." So that was another harrowing experience with the guy in the FBI. I'm sure you heard other people talk about that. But they came knocking on my door. They told me I was the go-to guy in the community. Therefore, I must have some information that I can pass on to them.

Hadi Jawad [01:12:03] They wanted to take me out to lunch and dinner, become friends. "We're on the same page," they kept telling me, "Mr. Jawad, you and the FBI, we're all on the same page. Let us just spend some time together so we can get to know you." In other words, become an informant. I said, "I'm not interested, bud. I don't hang out, I don't have lunch with the FBI. I have no desire to hang out with you guys. But please be assured that if I know or see something that is going to hurt my family or my neighbors or anybody in the city, I'll be beating a path to your door to let you know to stop this." So anyway, that was something else. That was bizarre.

Moureen Kaki [01:12:50] I can imagine how paradoxical that might be is an activist who you don't necessarily want to converse with the FBI, but at the same time, there's this issue, this pressing idea, that of course you'd report something that could prevent the injury of hundreds or thousands or whatever, no matter how many people it is. Was it confusing? Was it scary? What was it like?

Hadi Jawad [01:13:18] All of that. All of that. Yeah, confusing and scary. Who am I, talking to the FBI all of a sudden? Why am I in their eyesight? And they keep telling me, "You're not a person of interest. Pease, you're not a person of interest. But we would like you to help us, help the neighbors." In other words, become an informant. That's all they were interested in. "Pass information on to us. What's going on in the mosques?" And they were inside our mosque. They were coming there. So I kept telling them, "Look, you're invited to any event that we are doing. Just come and sit around, and you can listen to us talk, see

what we talk about, see how we talk, because there's nothing that we are hiding, nothing that I am hiding from you." I'm glad I got through that and we got through that period unscathed, because they're ideologues. I mean, these are smart people. They're highly educated people. They're very smart. They know how to talk to you. They know how to manipulate you. They're not just ordinary folks. I mean, they're trained. They're highly trained, highly disciplined, and they know how to befriend. I could sense that they were trying to befriend me and make them -

Moureen Kaki [01:14:55] Appeal to you.

Hadi Jawad [01:14:58] Yeah. It was strange. It was a bizarre experience. All of a sudden, the frickin' FBI is in my life. And the first call that I got from them was very unnerving. They said, "We're coming to your office. We know where your office is." Very sweet, very kind, very non-threatening. "But please don't call anybody to tell anybody that we are coming. We just want to have a little chit chat with you. We won't be there long. Just a few minutes, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes at the most. We'd just like to come and acquaint ourselves to you and get to meet you." Very nice, very cordial, very, very sweet. And I hung up the phone. He gave me his number. He said if you have any questions, just call this number.

Hadi Jawad [01:15:53] So I immediately called my director at the Dallas Peace Center, a guy named Lon Burnam, who also happened to be at that time a state representative in the Texas House. And I said, "Hey, I just got a call from the FBI. They're coming to see me at my office." And he said, "You get the hell out of your office right now and come to the Dallas Peace Center where I am, and we'll go from there." So I told him I had a number. He said, "Well, give me the number." I gave him the number. He called that number and told the FBI that if they want to come talk to me, they're welcome to come to the Dallas Peace Center and talk to me in his presence. I had a state rep sitting with me in the meeting with the FBI, and he gave them a tongue lashing, I swear, for about thirty minutes. He recited the entire bad history of the FBI for about half an hour. And after he was finished, he said, "Go ahead now, interview Mr. Jawad." [laughs] So that was funny. That didn't deter them. They kept coming after me. But they stopped. They stopped probably around two or three months after that. Every once in a while I'd get a call and, "Everything is okay? Anything you'd like to share?" "No, no, no. I've got nothing."

Moureen Kaki [01:17:25] Wow, wow, what a remarkable life story you've had here in the US. I mean, this migration - yeah?

Hadi Jawad [01:17:36] All because I stuck my neck out [laughs].

Moureen Kaki [01:17:40] I mean, that's all it takes, that you had the courage to do that and that you were persistent about the things that you believe in, which I think most people, myself included in that, find that a very admirable quality. And I think that if people were more persistent and more dedicated to the moral and ethical issues that they wanted to address in society probably, we'd probably be able to get more done. There's not just a handful of folks like you trying to run circles around the same thing. But yeah, so thank you for your story and your incredible work. Hadi, I just want to give you some room here. I'm out of questions for you. I could talk to you all day, really. But as far as the interview goes, I think I don't particularly have any more questions for you other than I just want to offer some space to say any final words about anything you shared or if there was something that I didn't touch upon that you wish I'd asked about or anything like that.

Hadi Jawad [01:18:37] No, not exactly. Just that I want our fellow Muslims, especially - and others - to not be afraid to speak up and speak out. Not everybody can do this. I think what people like me do is a calling, and be mindful of the call, if you get the call. And you know when you get the call. Because my first reaction to the call that I got years ago was to ignore it. To hope that it'll go away. Who am I to take this path, call. What can I do? Yeah, that's the big thing. What can I do? I'm just one person. I don't have any resources. What difference can I make? These kind of things that pop into mind. So if it is a calling and if the call comes once, and we ignore it and try to push it away, and then it comes back and you do the same thing again and then it comes back again, please listen to it. Please listen to this calling.

Hadi Jawad [01:20:10] It's a wondrous path, the path of pursuing peace and justice and human rights. There's no country on the earth can claim that they have effective human rights for their citizens. No country. There's no scarcity or dearth of human rights and violations of human dignity, starting with our own country, our own neighborhood, our own cities. Just be mindful. And if there's something you can do, do it. Like the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said, "If you can't do something, change something with your own hands, then use your tongue. If you can't use your tongue, can't use your hands, pray for it. Pray for them, pray for the situation to improve." There's always something, always something we can do. Thank you, Moureen. Thank you so much.

Moureen Kaki [01:21:22] Wonderful advice from an incredible human being, Hadi. Thank you so much again for that and for sharing your time and your story with us today.

Hadi Jawad [01:21:30] I talk too much.

Moureen Kaki [01:21:32] No such thing, especially in an oral history interview. Everything that you said was fantastic. And I'm grateful that we have it on record for folks to learn about you, and about the work that you do, and just to heed your words of advice about answering the calls that come to you and following through with that. I think your story is a wonderful example of that. So I don't think you spoke too much at all. I think it's an amazing interview for the archives that I hope many people will get a chance to listen to, because there's no doubt they will also be inspired by you.

Hadi Jawad [01:22:04] And you are a great questioner, and you are a great listener, and oh my god, you have some skills going on there, Moureen.

Moureen Kaki [01:22:14] Thank you so much. That's very kind of you. I appreciate it. I hope my boss agrees with you, but we'll let her see after this too.

Hadi Jawad [01:22:21] Tell your boss I said that. Give me the email address, and I'll email.

Moureen Kaki [01:22:29] I happily will. Let me go ahead and pause the recording Hadi, so we can get that.