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Oral History Interview with Ahmed Jaber**Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.01****Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on January 24, 2018****at the Arab American Association of New York in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn**

STRONG: I'll just say today is Wednesday, January 24th, 2018. My name is Liz Strong. I'm here with Dr. Ahmed Jaber. We are conducting an oral history interview for the Brooklyn Historical Society's Muslims in Brooklyn Project. So to start with, tell me when and where you were born.

JABER: Yes. I am -- my name is Ahmed Jaber. I was born in a small village in Palestine called Yamoun within the district of Jenin, [date redacted for privacy] 1947. And there I grew up until the age of 18. Where I had my High School diploma in 1966, I ranked as number three in the general exam at the time Palestine was part of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan -- which I had a scholarship to study medicine in Iraq in 1966.

STRONG: Tell me -- you know, before you were 18th, before you got the scholarship -- a little bit about your siblings and your mother.

JABER: Yes. My -- my father passed away when I was three years old. And my mother took care of us. We were five kids, two girls and three boys. I am number four in sequence. I have two elder brothers, and one elder sister, and one younger sister. So I am the youngest among the boys. As an orphan, we didn't have much means to survive, especially in a village. So my mother has to work to sustain our livelihood after my father passed away. She dedicated herself to raise her kids in spite of all the offers which had been given to marry another person. And she was teased. "What do you think is going to happen to you tomorrow? The kids will grow up, and they will be thrown out. And you will be just like any other -- anybody else." And she was confident, and told them that, "You will see, tomorrow, I'll be called the mother -- the mother of the teacher." As the teaching at that time in the 1950s were the highest education which you could get in Palestine, which was part of Jordan now. And behold, now they're calling her the mother of a doctor, rather than a mother of a teacher.

And she worked hard. She was carrying goods in -- in -- in a big container made of -- of straws. And she was walking around in the alleys of the village. And I remember I was walking with her and she used to hold my hand. And when she presses it, I have to raise my voice. And I say, "We have a cucumber. We have tomatoes. We have eggplant." And people open the doors, and we will have to barter our goods with either loaves of bread or wheat, and sometimes money.

So that was my childhood. We used to go to school. And we didn't have much. You know, black [phonetic] clothes. I remember I used to go walking barefooted to the school in January, the coldest weather, with shorts. And I do remember that we used to have packages from UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East], United Nations Works for Refugees.

And -- and I am the youngest. So I imagine my eldest brother who was supposed to be in high school and preparing for his matriculation, which is like 11th grade at that time. And she used to say, you know, "As soon as your brother will be graduated in high school, he will become a teacher. And he will take care of us." Fortunately or unfortunately -- I don't know -- my brother was also excellent in high school. So he got a scholarship for the highest institution in Jordan, which is the -- they call it the Teachers Institute. And now he was debating, should he become -- join the institution? Or should he start working as a teacher? [The] difference [was], [it was a] three-year program. But comparing the salary which he will get after graduation, between, like, \$30 and \$60. And what will happen to his mom who was waiting for him to become a teacher and take over the family?

After debate, she said, "Son, I waited for six, seven years. God will help me, take one more year. And your other brother will be graduating high school. Maybe he will go for teaching." And he did join the teachers institute. My second brother did not become a

teacher. He passed his matriculation, but he never found a job. So still she was working until my elder brother graduated. And he became a teacher. And they did call her the mother of a teacher.

STRONG: Is this the same brother who you said was in Kuwait at the time that you were in medical school?

JABER: Yes. So this is my elder brother. He -- he became like a father to me. And he really did take care of the family with his profession as a teacher. My second brother, again, went to another teaching institution. Also he graduated three years later and became a teacher. And of course, they now -- both are working. So they take care of the -- of the family.

So since they didn't have a chance of pursuing post graduate studies as they wished for -- so they [decided] that "our youngest brother shouldn't have the same fate which we did." But in order to give the opportunity for me to study, I had to be -- study abroad, outside the Kingdom of Jordan or Palestine. Because they didn't have medical school or engineering school at that time. We're talking about 1965.

So he decided to leave to the Gulf region, to Kuwait, where the salary would be five times the salary in Jordan. By that he will be sustaining our -- all of the family, as well as my studies abroad, if I take medicine, or engineering, or whatever I choose to. So behold, 1965, he left. And at the time, he was almost to become like a principal of the -- the school in -- in our village. But he sacrificed that and he decided to go to Kuwait.

Unfortunately or fortunately -- again, I don't know -- in 1966, I had the -- the high school exam. And ranked number three. And they decided they will give me a scholarship, rather than be sustained by my brother. But at least I believe that the scholarship was not enough for me to continue. So I did need the help from him anyway.

That -- that was fine until 1967 when the Six Day War started, and when Israel occupied the whole West Bank, which was part of Jordan. And now we have been disrupted. My brother is in Kuwait -- elder brother in Kuwait. I was in Mosul in Iraq, where I did have this scholarship. And my other brother -- middle brother -- was still in my village, al-Yamoun in Jenin area. And that's how the family became separated.

After the occupation, there was a program by which a family could be petitioned to join, the family say, the father or the mother if they are still single. And I was single. So in 1968, my mother tried to petition me to come back and have the Palestinian citizenship. Israel refused her application, claiming that I'm studying in Iraq. And Iraq is a hostile country for Israel. And so I was rejected to be a Palestinian citizen. Following -- of course, doing the scholarship in Iraq means that you have to go back and serve double the time which you spend in studying for your scholarship in Jordan, So I studied medicine six years in Iraq. So I had to serve in Jordan government 12 years. Or I have to pay a penalty for that.

And 1972, that -- when I graduated from medical school from Mosul University. And I came back to Jordan, where I was -- I had my internship in Ashrafiya [phonetic] Hospital in Amman, the capital of Jordan. And at the end of the year we had exams. And I was number one among those who had participated in the internship. We [are talking] about probably about 50 or 60 doctors who came from different corners of the world.

So I was employed as general practitioner in Amman to work there at Health Ministry. By that time, my ambition wasn't just to be accepted general practitioner of medicines. So I decided to pursue my postgraduate studies. And a friend of mine who came to the United States of America -- he was my classmate. He was a Pakistani. His name is Saqib Chaudhry. We studied medicine in Mosul for six years. His father was the professor of anatomy in the medical school. So he came to the United States.

In order for you to come to United States for postgraduate study, you need to have the equivalent exam. We used to call it ECFMG, which is like an Educational Council for Foreign Medical Graduates. And you had to pass that exam -- which I did in 1972, I think. 1973, probably. And then I applied for my post-graduate studies to become an intern. I was accepted in 1974 to Flushing Hospital Medical Center. That's where my friend Saqib was working.

Of course, that [meant] I am violating the contract between me and the government of Jordan. Because I had to -- to work 12 years. I just only had two years. But in spite of that, I left. And I paid later on the penalty for my violation. So I came here to the United States in June 24, 1974. Greeted my best friend Saqib Chaudhry, whom I'm still in contact with until this day.

STRONG: Wow. So tell me a little bit about your experiences of your career from there, from Flushing to NYU Lutheran and to your practice.

JABER: Right. So now at Flushing I had rotating internship -- rotating internship. And [that was] where I met my wife, who -- who was my chief resident in pediatrics. And we got hooked to each other. We got married February 26, 1977.

BY 1975 at -- the end of my internship in June, I had chosen to have OBGYN residency program. So I applied for different hospitals. I was accepted at Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn. And thanks for the chief of the department, whose name is George Zarou[phonetic], who is a second generation Palestinian man. His program was well known. And he accepted Arabic physicians who come from, you know, the -- the Arabic world. So I joined the program in 1975 and graduated 1978 in the OBGYN department.

STRONG: Tell me about meeting your first wife. What was her name? Did she get to meet your family?

JABER: Yes, her name was Jovita [phonetic]Galang, G-A-L-A-N-G. She's from the Philippines. And I -- she was my chief resident in pediatrics. So I was [an] rotating

intern in the department of pediatrics when she was the chief resident there. And my other -- well, Saqib Chaudhry, he had a girlfriend, American girlfriend. And my other classmate was in Connecticut, in Danbury. He had a Filipino girlfriend. And with the cultural of -- American culture that when you go for partying or for visiting, you had to have a girlfriend with you. So I decided, "Hey, I'm one of them. So let -- let me see." And you know, I was attracted to my chief resident. And so from there, we -- we got hooked up. And then we got married in 1977 after -- before graduation, actually. But she graduated in pediatrics. And she was working as a pediatrician when we got married.

STRONG: Okay, so tell me a little more about this program at NYU Lutheran. What were your experiences when you started there? And, you know, your impressions -- ?

JABER: So the department of OBGYN at Lutheran was great. Because we had a large number of physicians who are from Middle East. My chief resident was from Syria. And his co-chief was from Iran. And the other -- their chief was from Ceylon. And we have a graduate -- or the attending physician from Egypt. So you could see that the department was welcoming the Middle East graduates. And I found myself like in -- in a family. And Lutheran was also accommodating all these foreign graduates. So you didn't feel, like, alienated among all these people. The Arab community at that time was starting to be more and more. And so from there, we started to pick up our practice, and our patients, and our community.

I remember when I first came for the interview in 1975. I had to take the train from Flushing to Brooklyn. And they're supposed to be, like, transferring from F line to R line. Now, I do remember, now. But at that time, I figured I'll -- I'll just walk from 9th Street and 4th Avenue Station to 45th Street. "Eh, it's not that -- it's not that far. I could walk." And it took me about half an hour walking to -- on 4th Avenue to reach my interview. So that's my experience for -- for the subway at that time. And I believe it was [only] like \$0.10 a token.

So -- so, you know, Lutheran then I -- of course, I became a graduate in 1978. I had my written exam. I passed it. And by that time I had my first born, my daughter Reem [phonetic] was born in 1977, [date redacted for privacy]. And I remember that date, because also at that time I had my green card. By that mission, when I came here by -- exchange visitor visa for postgraduate studies. So then I had my J-1 Visa. And J-1 Visa you have only -- they give you only two years. Then you would have to go back to your home country. And by two years, I had finished nothing. I had no specialty. There's -- I have no degree. Why will I go home with no degree? So I have to change that J-1 Visa into a permanent residency. Of course, you had to go through the process, -- the government of Jordan has to approve that transition. And I did apply for the Jordanian embassy. And I petitioned them. I paid my dues. And they granted me the stay.

So my daughter was born, and I had my green card. And I had passed my oral exam. So what a blessing year that was. By that time, there was a Greek, OBGYN. His name is Stavrinis [phonetic]. And he was not interested in having private practice anymore. So he told me, "Just buy my practices and start your own." Which I did. At that time, just \$15,000. I had my office, my patients. My career started as a private OBGYN in Sunset Park.

STRONG: So did you move to Brooklyn around that same time? Had you been living in Queens before, and -- ?

JABER: Yes, only I lived in Queens -- actually in dormitory in Flushing Hospital. But just for one year. My residency started in 1975. So I came to Brooklyn. And I lived since 1975 in Brooklyn. I didn't move. Initially we joined the Lutheran Medical Center housing places. We paid -- we paid rent through the residency program. But when I got married, I moved to Bay Ridge. And I lived in 42 Bay Ridge Parkway between Narrows Avenue and Colonial Road, until we bought our house in 1982, which is 49 74th Street, just one block away from the first place where I lived. And since then, I'm still in Bay Ridge as a resident. I didn't move nowhere.

STRONG: Tell me what Bay Ridge was like at that time -- as compared to now, I guess?

JABER: Very few -- well, it -- Bay Ridge at that time -- the Arab community were second and third generation Syrians who mostly came in the '30s and mostly were Christians. Not too many Muslims. And they had established themselves in -- in Bay Ridge. And -- and most of them, believe it or not, were, like, Republicans rather than Democrat. And their names are well known, whether it's Lutfis [phonetic] family, or Hawi [phonetic] family, or Zariq [phonetic] family. They -- they were like -- they established themselves in Bay Ridge. Very few Palestinians or other ethnicity in Bay Ridge. Majority of the Arabs were mostly around Atlantic Avenue. And -- and some in Sunset Park.

STRONG: What else do you remember about the neighborhood at that time? You know, development-wise, community-wise, you know, anything?

JABER: Well, the neighborhood buildings was still the same. It didn't change much. There's no space in -- in New York City. They go up rather than spread. But most -- the majority of the people which we met are Irish, Italian, Greeks, Scandinavian. So not many -- I -- I don't have any African Americans or -- a few families of Arabic origin. But most of the doctors were in Bay Ridge. The Arab doctors were in Bay Ridge. And that's how I bought my house in Bay Ridge.

STRONG: Through the community of doctors?

JABER: Yes, we have a -- a large number of physicians. Bay Ridge Parkway used to be called Doctor's Row. Most of the physicians, they have their offices there. All different types of doctors, including Arabs, Greeks, Italians, name it.

STRONG: You also mentioned yesterday that at the time that you moved to New York, there were maybe two mosques?

JABER: Yes, that's another experience. When --

STRONG: So where did you go to practice initially?

JABER: Yeah, when -- when I wanted to make the prayer, there were only two mosques in New York City in 1975. One of them is Riverside drive and 72nd Street Manhattan. And one in State Street next to Atlantic Avenue where the Arab community was located -- which is in State Street between Clinton and Court Street, just parallel to Atlantic Avenue. It's 143 State Street. And that -- that's the only mosque which was available for

me to worship. And since Friday ceremonies are mandatory for Muslims to attend, that's where I used to go every Friday whenever I had a chance, and [performed] my duty as a Muslim there.

And there I got to know the founder of [Masjid] Dawood -- which we call, now, Dawood. It used to be called -- called Islamic Mission of America. And the founder was an immigrant from Trinidad. His name is Sheikh Faisal. Daoud Al-Faisal. And he -- I believe he was in his late sixties, early seventies when I was there in 1975. I still recall him sitting on a chair at the entrance of the second floor on the masjid, mosque, when I used to go and pray there.

STRONG: Tell me about him. What do you -- what do you remember about who he was?

JABER: He was a pleasant man. He's African American who is soft spoken and low key. He wasn't, like, a sort of -- of aggressive or loud. I think, you know, his -- his health wasn't that great, because he used to pray sitting in a chair. The director of the -- by which I mean his assistant -- was a man from Morocco. His name is Mohammad Qabbaj [phonetic]. He was working with him. And there was the maintenance man who takes care of the mosque. He was from Indonesia. And his name is Omar Bey[phonetic]. These are the two figures which I remember when I was going there. There was a -- I would say, a preacher, a Muslim preacher, who was giving the ceremony in English. And his name is Abdul Wali[phonetic]. He was a teacher in -- in -- a public school.

And that -- that community in -- in that mosque was of different backgrounds. African American, Indonesian, Pakistani, Middle East -- Eastern. Simply because the location of -- of the mosque was in downtown Brooklyn, close to the court system, the federal government, the IRS. So majority of the people were working in the court system. And they were having Muslim faith. They used to come and pray in that mosque. So since I recall, all -- all the ceremonies were Arabic and English, both being practiced in that mosque. Different mosques later came on. And every nationality has their own language, ceremony, and preaching.

STRONG: And you -- you stayed with that mosque even to this day. And you became very active with the board. So --

JABER: Right. So since, like, I am a professional medical doctor who is practicing and -- I -- I became known in -- in that mosque through contribution, through my English translation, through my free services, which I offer for -- for -- for the congregants. Like, [if] somebody needs a prescription, somebody needs medical assistance, somebody needs advice I'm there for the community. So I was well known for them.

As I recall, not too many professionals were involved in the community at that time. Majority of the people -- there are merchants, or union workers for the 32BJ, or the maintenance workers, or the shopkeepers, grocery stores. So they are not, like, highly educated, like lawyers, or doctors, or engineers. All these people came later on when demographic changed. But at that time in '75 and early '80s, not too many of them were there.

All this changed when the Sheikh Daoud Faisal passed away in -- I believe in 1982. And now what will happen to the mosque? Since he was African American, and majority of the people who converted to Islam were African Americans. So they felt that they have the authority to take care of -- of the mosque, rather than give it to the immigrant Arabic community whom they were operating the mosque. So actually like the -- the one who was running the mosque, not the Sheikh Daoud Faisal, but the Moroccan director with support of the Yemeni community who were living in the neighborhood and who comes regularly. Because African Americans, they did not live there in the neighborhood. Their communities are far. But they used to attend, like, you know, the Friday sermons (Khutbah) because it was the only mosque which was available. But by -- by 1980s, most of them moved away. And they established their own congregation and their own mosques.

STRONG: Most of the African Americans you mean?

JABER: Right.

STRONG: Ah.

JABER: So by that time, when they came to overtake the mosque, we stood against that and said Dawood Masjid would be staying as international, well known. No -- no -- like, no ethnicity should take care of -- of that. And we were able to do that. So we maintained that. And I -- since -- since that time in 1982, '84, I became the chairman of the board of directors till now.

STRONG: I'm curious about that transition. I -- was it led by Qabbaj [phonetic]? And what were some of the conversations that went on? What details do you remember?

JABER: Yes, Qabbaj [phonetic] was the one who was leading figure to maintain the status quo of the mosque and carry on the legacy of Sheikh Daoud Faisal. And Qabbaj [phonetic] -- he was there in the mosque since 1956. So he was the director of the operation of the Islamic Mission of America for almost, like, 22 years. So he did have the authority figure and the transition -- because he was appointed by Sheikh Daoud Faisal as the director for the Islamic Mission of America. So he was -- he was particularly adamant about that.

So we stood by him and we continued the work like that. I think he continued with us on and off, because he became old. 1987 or '88, somehow he became sick and sort of moved out of the area. And he was in Queens. And I think he had Alzheimer sort of -- of thing like that. So maybe he moved back to Morocco. We -- we didn't have any information about him after that.

STRONG: Were you present for any of the conversations or debates about which way the mosque should go? What was the reasoning behind, you know, African Americans who wanted to take over versus, you know, your camp, which wanted it to remain international?

JABER: Yes. I was involved, directly involved. And we had to draft a new constitution or the bylaws amendment with the African American brothers. We said, you know, you are more than welcome to join. You will be part of that administration. And then we will have membership if you choose to. And we will have elections. And we'll continue.

Whatever you need, [you] are more than welcome. And -- and they did. And we had this sort of elections. And then I think two of them were -- become -- became part of the board. But then they moved away and it was hard for them to continue within the neighborhood. And so they never came back. And actually -- I couldn't say never. But they had established their own mosques in their own communities. And still we are in touch with them nowadays. So.

STRONG: So the mosques still have a relationship to this day?

JABER: Right. I mean, you know, that's naturally -- we have a cordial relationship with everybody who -- I mean, like, Dawood Mosque is like a monument in the history of Muslims in Brooklyn. Actually, maybe the States. And it's -- I used to receive letters from all over the world, from Nigeria, from Indonesia, from Zimbabwe, just asking about the Islamic Mission of American. And what -- what can we do for them if they come to the states, and something like that. So it -- it is well known. And actually, Sheikh Daoud Al-Faisal had joined the United Nations as a non-government organization. And registered in the United Nations as such. And in 1956, when King Faisal Al Saud from Saudi Arabia came to the United Nations, the only place which you could find to make the prayer or to be in touch with the Muslim world was the Dawood Masjid, Islamic Mission of America. And he came to Sheikh Daoud Faisal. And he has pictures with him.

STRONG: What other important turning points do you remember in the history of Dawood mosque?

JABER: Now, Sheikh Daoud passed away, he left his wife, Mother Khadijah. We call her Mother Khadijah, because she is the founder, the co-founder with her husband. It's actually -- it's their apartment building which converted in to a mosque. The reason behind it, because Atlantic Avenue at the time was the major pier in -- in commercial shipment. So shipping was -- you know, there used to come ships. And they have to load and unload. That takes about two or three months. It happened to be a number of sailors were Yemenis. So when they come to Atlantic Avenue, they -- they look for a place where they could practice their religion and -- and pray. And he - Sheiku Dawood

was the one who is in the area. And he offered the basement of the building to become a room of prayer, or like half, a masjid.

And since then, it started to become as a hub for -- for the Muslims to practice their religion. And he decided to make it an official. And he registered it as a nonprofit organization in 1944, incorporated in New York State. Practically probably started the prayer room or the basement in 1938, 1939. That goes as far as that.

They were a group of Muslims who runs around internationally. So they traveled from Pakistan, United States, to Arabia, carrying the message of Muslims by taking the message on themselves. And they used to come to the mosque and -- and sleep there. And from there, they continued their journey spreading the message of Islam. And they used to, like -- they have a kitchen, and they could eat. And they could do stuff there.

So that was -- I remember that where the mosque was. And second floor -- so the basement was the place for the prayer. And the people could stay there. And the second floor exclusively for the sermon and the Friday, or jummah, prayer. And -- and for the special occasions. And the third floor and fourth floor were the headquarters where Sheikh Daoud Al-Faisal and his family lives.

Now, when he passed away, his wife stayed there. Now she became old. And to protect her there was a -- the imam -- the assistant imam, or the one who take care of the masjid, the Indonesian guy Omar Bey -- he was single, believe it or not. So -- so in Islam, you can't live with a woman just like that. So he married her. So -- just to take care of her legally, and morally, and, you know, religiously. So he stayed there until she passed away.

So that -- when -- when she did -- now, community has changed. We talk about, like, now 1988. And there was a large influx of Muslims in the area, downtown, as well as in Sunset Park and -- and Bay Ridge. And a few other mosques started to be established. Masjid Al-Farooq in, I believe, 1988 had their quarters on Atlantic Avenue between 4th and 3rd Avenue. They have already school, Islamic school for the kids. And -- and other, you know, gatherings of Muslims, gathering to -- started to become more -- more in the area and the neighborhood. So they established different mosques and institutions.

STRONG: Tell me, how was -- how was worship very different from when you were growing up in Palestine to in the United States at this very international mosque?

JABER: Well, this is the first time I was exposed for a prayer in non-Arabic language. I mean, like, all the sermons [phonetic] which I had been into -- supposed to be Arabic. And to be exposed to somebody who was not Arabic speaking and reciting the holy book with an accent, it's like a foreign for me. But at the same time, it -- it got my admiration. Because these people who are non-Arabic speaking and are willing to memorize the holy book in -- which is not in their native language -- and accept Islam as a way of life, I got my -- like, my admiration was -- was for them even more. Which is part of our teachings, too. Because the Prophet has said that if you -- if you -- if you read the Quran fluently, you will be rewarded once. But if you recite it with the accent and difficulty, you will have even more rewards. So that's to encourage people to memorize the Quran.

So it -- it is an experience for me, which translated the Islamic views into practice. When you live in a homogenous community, you do not believe -- or -- or you say -- you are not exposed for different cultural variation. So now, here it is. And you are in a complete different world. So you have different outlook. And now you have to discuss your religion or give information about religion in different language. So that prompted me to look deeper into my faith and study it in more depth, and in -- in -- in more reasoning, rather than just accept it as it is. And since I am a physician -- which,

we go by the scientific information, rather than just information flowing into your brain without understanding it, that puts me back -- or put me back to -- to study the depth of Islam as a theology.

And I went back and started to dig into the books in Islam. And since my Arabic language, my grammar is strong -- because unless your Arabic is strong, you can't go through these brilliant thorough Islamic books, which gives you the theology and the foundation of -- of -- of Islam. So I went through that. And I became fully acquainted or understanding more than just ordinary Muslim who will just accept whatever he is being taught.

STRONG: And you used this knowledge and skill to help with translations at some point yourself, right? And --

JABER: Right. So my role now was to help out in translating the English -- the Arabic ceremony into English. Or what I was actually doing, I do my own sermon with the same theme of Arabic. Not literally translating, but rather, build on the theme which the Imam in Arabic gives. And I build and I translate the information. But I add or change according to -- to the need.

And that was done after Wali, who was the official khutbah, or the sermon, giver -- he moved out of the area. And he became assistant -- or I think student dean in public school far away. So he couldn't make it on Fridays. So I took over and gave the -- the English sermon myself. We didn't have in the early '80s a regular Imam, meaning that one who was giving the khutbah and make the prayer. So we leave it upon Omar Bey, the one who was just taking care of the mosque. Now he became a regular Imam. But the official sermon giver was changing every -- every Friday based on their availability.

We used to have a teacher. His name is Farid Ghannoum [phonetic]. He was Syrian. He gave the Arabic speech. Usually he writes it and read it. And Abdul -- Wali was giving the English one. And when Mr. Ghannoum [phonetic] wasn't available, I was giving

the Arabic speech. Sometimes people who were traveling from Yemen or from different mosques would come and -- and -- as a guest speaker who will give the sermon.

So we had to manage who was going to give the sermon on Fridays at that time until we became viable and hired a regular imam, paid by the mosque. And I believe probably we went through three or four imams. Now we have our imam who has been probably more than 15 years with us. So we are now stable.

STRONG: During all these years you're in medical school. You have a new family. You were beginning your own practice, which is extremely demanding on your time. And yet, you're also, you know, making it to the holiday every Friday, to jummah every Friday if you can. You're doing your own study. You're praying five times a day. How do you manage all of this?

JABER: Looking backward, I can't figure it out. How did I manage all of that? But when you look at it deeply, I think I was blessed because my wife -- or now my ex-wife -- she was a pediatrician. So -- and we had my father-in-law, mother-in-law, and a living-in housekeeper. So the house was taken care of. So nobody needs me to be in the house. At the same time, like grocery, and shopping, and this wasn't my job. So I just -- only I'm doing my practice and my extracurricular activities, social service, social work, and reaching out to different communities or different roles in my life. So that -- I think that -- that helped a lot.

Although, you know, with -- with my children, I was always the available weekends. Going to Toys"R"Us and going to Long Island, buying them baseball cards and taking care of them.

And, you know, through my medical profession, I joined the National Arab American Medical Association, which I believe is established 1979. And I became a member. And we used to have once a year a convention in one Arab country, every year. So I joined

them. I -- we went to Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait. And with each trip, we have an extension to European countries. So you go to Morocco, then you go to Spain. You go Tunisia and France. You go to Egypt to Greece. You go to Syria and Turkey. You go to Jordan and -- you go to the West Bank. So it's like well organized trips. And it takes about two weeks a year. And I took the children and the family with me all the time. That give them an -- an -- an exposure and -- and -- and at the same time, enjoyment. So enriching your life with the traveling.

Meanwhile, with that I -- by joining the National Arab American Association, we decide to have our own chapter. We have a large physician group here. And we established our Arab American Medical Association, New York Chapter 1988. I was one of the founders with other physicians. We got Ghassans Ashker [phonetic] and Marwana Atalla [phonetic]. And I became the third president of the chapter in 1992, I think.

STRONG: Tell me about some of the activities of the local chapter. Is this part of how you established the prayer space at your hospital? Or is that a separate project?

JABER: No -- no, that's separate. That's --

STRONG: Oh, okay.

JABER: That's only for the physician, Arabic speaking physician. We used to have lectures between ourselves for CMEs, hours for -- as physicians. At the same time, social life where we have a speaker. And we have the dining. And we have partying. At least three, four times a year. Meanwhile, you go to national level, every year there will be a national meeting for the -- within the United States. And then have overseas conferences. So it -- it's a well-organized group for both medicine and -- and -- and social. Mostly to help the community and the physicians get acquainted with each other and also updating their knowledge in different perspective of each specialty.

STRONG: So it's good to have that community support then. And you were saying that while being a very diverse community, there were a lot of Arab -- Arabic speaking Muslim practitioners in your -- in your area, in your hospital, in your network locally.

So it made sense to establish this organization. But in what other ways did that community play a role in your life? You know, I'm interested in the prayer space even though it was separate. But in what other ways?

JABER: Yes. Now, as a physician who -- you know, my background as an orphan who was helped by the community or by the family. So that had an impression on my life and lifestyle. Since I was a kid, I was a leading figure, or -- although I don't seek leadership. But you find yourself in a place where when leadership is needed, you are picked up. Whether because your influence, because of your language, because your intelligence. Whatever reason, somehow I landed up, wherever I go, being in that role as -- as a leader. So even in -- in medical school, it's the same thing. It's like, you know, I played sport. Volleyball, basketball. So you are on a team. And always when you are in sport people look at you.

And as a Palestinian who was in Iraq, then I am carrying my burden on my shoulder as a Palestinian who is being not accepted as a Palestinian. And -- and Nakba, 1967 happens. So that Iraq as a community will seek your knowledge, your information. How can we help you? So you are in a place where you have to become involved in -- in -- in that national aspect. So I -- I am involved in that.

Same thing when you -- when you come here and you go to the mosque. And you speak the language. And you know your religion. So people will look at you and say, "Hey, why don't you help us and do that?" And so you are now in a place where you will become a leader.

So when -- when people -- patients who are looking for advice. So now they found a doctor who is speaking to them not only from the medical point of view, but a social point of view or spiritual point of view. So that makes you engaged more. And if you do have that within your guts that you like to help, then now you become prominent. And you deliver what you believe. And -- and, you know, people look at you.

So with -- within that capacity, all these activities, socially, spiritually, medically, evolved and nourished. And you become engaged. Example, like as an OBGYN attending at Lutheran Medical Center, and we have 20 percent of our patients are Muslims. And when the time for the prayer comes and there's no place, I see them, you know, praying in the hallway or -- or in the private rooms. I approached the administration. I said, "Look, this is a public relation. We are -- at least we have about 150 to 100 employees who are Muslims. And we have 20 percent of our patients are Muslims. So we need a place where we could have a prayer room. You have the chapel, which accommodates the Christians and the Jews. How about the Muslims? The chapel is not convenient, because the setup of the chapel is different from the prayer room. We can't remove the chairs so that we make a prayer." So I convinced them to look into it. And we said, "We will finance it. The Muslim community will finance the place. So let's have it." And I was successful in doing that.

And even before we established that prayer room, we wanted to show -- to show our culture. And through the department of cultural diversity at Lutheran and cultural competency department, we established that relationship. And we started to celebrate our Eids, Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, by offering sweets and some goodies on these days in the lobby of Lutheran Medical Center. And even we had kids from Al-Noor School who comes and chant. So it becomes like a celebration, which helps the -- the image of Lutheran Medical Center through the community and help our community say, you know, we'll find our -- we are not strangers here. We could practice our culture and our religion within the frame of the medical establishment.

And yes we did. And still until now the -- the prayer room exists at Lutheran Medical Center. I call it prayer room. But they call it masjid. [Inaudible 1:02:48] it's about 25 people. There were, you know, a barrier between women and -- and men's section there.

And sometimes when I am there I give the khutbah, jummah prayer for one reason or another.

STRONG: You mention that this was maybe one of the first such places in the -- in any hospital in the country?

JABER: Yes, I believe it was the -- the first officially recognized as a prayer room within -- or a masjid within a hospital. Other hospitals offer the same thing, but either with a universal room, which accommodates every religion. Or they call it meditation room or something like that. Or they offer only on Friday prayers that -- they could use a conference room or a big large room for the gathering on a Friday if they have enough population in -- in the hospital. But as designated as a masjid or mosque in the institution, I believe Lutheran was the first one.

STRONG: And I'm also curious -- I mean, you mentioned, you know, seeing patients and staff managing the logistics of finding a -- a place, a clean place to pray. What was it like for you if you were there on rotations? How would you -- how would you manage it?

JABER: Yeah, well, you know, I have my on-call room, so I used to my on-call room and make my prayer. But not everybody has this on-call room. You know, I had the privilege, because I'm attending physician. And sometimes I take whoever wants to pray to that room and offer them the place. Other than that, there was no -- they had to go home, or go to the mosque, or in the patient's room, they pray in the patient's room.

STRONG: Yeah. So you mentioned your -- your interest in giving back to the community and social services. So let's talk a little bit about some of these or -- other organizations that you helped found. I'm trying to think where we are in time chronologically. Talk to me about the Al-Noor School.

JABER: Yes. Of course, now, any immigrant community when they start to come to a place, they establish two things. One is their faith, so the mosque. And then the education for the kids. So now, you know -- as, you know, public schools do not offer religious education. So as the -- the community started to grow, we figured out we need to have a school. Especially we were successful in establishing other mosques. So now we have a

mosque in Atlantic Avenue, besides -- besides Masjid Dawood -- we had Masjid Al-Farooq. We established another mosque in Sunset Park, Ammar ibn Yasser[phonetic]. We established another mosque in Bay Ridge, Musab bin Umayr. We had all these taken care of. So from the spiritual perspective, we were successful.

So now we -- we turn to education. So we gathered as community leaders with different affiliations, and mosques, and businesspeople, and said, "Let's make this a goal." And there was a building in -- I believe it was a Seafarer union building was for sale. So we gathered and said, "Let's -- let's have our resources put together and establish a school." And we did.

So we gathered. We had different teams going on -- on the national level, international level, the local level of raising funds and converting the building into a school, applying for the requirement by the building department, by the Department of Education. And look for career teachers who are certified. And the whole -- the whole thing. And took about -- about probably two or three years to reach our goal, which we opened Noor School in 1995.

And since then, probably now we have about 650, 700 kids from pre-K until high school that graduates about 26, 25 people every year. At least 20 percent of them are in Ivy League; Harvard, NYU, Columbia, Princeton. So we here -- we are --

Now, although I am not on the board now, I was involved until the opening of the school for probably the first two years. Then I resigned for different reasons. However, my elder brother who was in Kuwait -- and the Gulf War started. He has to leave. Especially because the PLO supported Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait. So the Kuwaiti were angry with the Palestinians. So they decided to deport all of them, or a majority of forced them to leave the country. Fortunately for him, before even he was -- like, finishing his career -- he already retired from -- he has been there for, like -- since

1965 until 1990. Talk about 25 years. So he has his things banked. And he went back to Jordan.

Somehow I had the foresight when I became an American citizen -- I submitted his papers petitioning for my brother. And since 1982, it took about 10 years to have his papers done. And yeah, it was successful. I brought him here. So here he is -- his career is education. So he joined Al-Noor School. And he put the Arabic and religious -- religious curriculum for the Al-Noor School.

So even -- you know, how time evolve and things get started. So now my -- my brother who went to Kuwait to support me, I brought him here to, this country. Before even he came here, all his kids were graduated from Kuwait. They had to have postgraduate studies. I brought them here as foreign students where -- one studied in Iowa -- Iowa or Idaho -- as an electric engineer. He -- he -- he almost -- he was a candidate for PhD engineer. He graduated from Kansas University or something like that. One of them is in -- has a PhD in genetics in Baylor University. He went back to Jordan, and he became the chairman of the biology department. Now he's in Saudi Arabia in Jeddah as a professor in -- in King Saud University. Another of my nephews came. He studied radiation therapy in Memphis, Tennessee. And he went Saudi Arabia for five years. Now he's is back. And he practices in Brooklyn. He works in Brooklyn. Another, he came underage. He was, like, 20 years when he came with his parents. Now he's NYPD officer. Another who was left in -- in Jordan, he joined the family again here. And he's now doing his master in finance in Kentucky.

So all of them are here -- I brought them here, giving the help to study and make their career. And that's my -- always my -- people say, well, "How come you are not rich? How come you are not like other physicians?" My -- I invested in my family's career.

My other brother who was left in the West Bank, he's still there. His three kids came here. They -- one finished pharmacy. And he's still practicing in Kansas. And one finished PhD in Arkansas. He's -- he went -- he went back home now. He's a professor at the American University of Jenin. And one, he finished with marketing degree. But he wasn't happy here. So he left back home. Now he's in Germany.

So it's like -- even back home, my brother who was left behind, we supported him financially. And he's a retired teacher. And I go every year there as an American citizen who visits back home. And sometimes one month, sometimes two months, since I am retired now.

STRONG: Yeah. Tell me -- as we're talking about your family, what -- what came of your mother's life? Did she remain and -- ?

JABER: My mother, she came -- now -- of course, now, when my brother became a teacher, she's no more working. So we talk about the time since 1958, she's -- she's -- you know, she became, like, a mother who -- whatever she needs, we are there for her. She came to this country. She stayed with me for five years with my daughter and my wife. And she went with her grandchildren in Kansas. She stayed with them for two years. She went to Kuwait with my brother for a couple of years when my brother came back to Amman. Now he's in Amman. The elder brother who was here, he worked for 18 years. And he retired. Now he has a house in Amman. So my mom went there. And she stayed there. She stayed with my other brother in the West Bank in Yamoun. So wherever she wants she could go. She passed away in 2014 at the age of 92.

STRONG: Wow.

JABER: She -- you know, we were lucky that she still had -- her brain was bright until she passed away. I think she passed away from pneumonia and complication of a respiratory problem.

STRONG: Thank you. I -- I was curious how her story went from there.

JABER: Now, she's still remembered even in my village. So women who, say, become a widow, and they want to stay with their kids, they will say do you think that you'll be

like Jaber's family? Nobody will be like them or like her. So she is looked upon as a model for -- for women who stay with their kids and accomplish what she was hoping for. And we are so proud of her. I mean, if Islam allows there will be a pedestal that will -- they will put her on a pedestal.

STRONG: Yeah, she sounds like a great lady.

JABER: Yeah.

STRONG: Thank you for telling me about her.

JABER: And believe it or not, she is illiterate. She doesn't read or write. Just basic things, like maybe she signs her name in Arabic. But her brain is like unbelievable. Like, in math, when she used to work for porting -- Bartering? When you exchange things for things.

STRONG: Bartering?

JABER: Bartering.

STRONG: Bartering.

JABER: Bartering.

STRONG: Yeah.

JABER: And she -- her mind just, like -- this is 15, this is 20, this is 30. And she's -- she did good. I mean, that's probably we are after our mother, not our father. Because I don't remember how my father looks like.

STRONG: [Laughs] I was going to say, you probably come by it honestly. Your work ethic, and your education, and -- yeah.

JABER: Yeah. So that's the -- the family side. So like, back to how I could manage all these activities with my career as a physician, solo practitioner who delivers 250 deliveries a year, plus the gynecological procedure and the office and practice. So yeah, the family -- my family helped out in -- in that place. Meanwhile, I managed my time, I believe, wisely. So when there is a need, I am there.

When -- when I have spare time, like, you know -- you -- you have all the time when you are waiting for a baby to deliver. You might have to stay in the hospital for six hours or

four hours. That time, I was reading. I was studying the religion, the medicine. You name it. I wasn't just idle sitting there sleeping or waiting for the baby to come. I was actively involved in that.

Meanwhile, most of the activities are within the neighborhood. So even if I do have a patient in labor, and I am in a meeting, in Bay Ridge it takes me only five minutes to come from the office, or from the meeting, or from the mosque to a delivery room. So it didn't -

That's why I -- I decided to live in Bay Ridge, because of that. My wife initially wanted to go to Long Island or to Staten Island, because there are more fancy houses, large parcels of land. But I said no. And thanks for an attending called Carraba -- C-A-R-R-A-B-A -- who was an obstetrician gynecologist who lived in Long Island when I was a resident. And he used to come, like, twelve o'clock to -- to have a baby, to deliver the patient. And he stayed in the hospital. I said, "Why don't you go home?" And he said, "I have to go home to Long Island. I have to wake up at five o'clock, so I'll come back for - at seven o'clock to do my surgery. So I'd rather stay in the hospital rather than go back home and -- and come back." So I said, "That's it. I'm staying in Bay Ridge. I can sleep, go. Five minutes, I'll be in the hospital."

I remember 1977 there was a large snow, almost like three feet in -- in -- in Brooklyn. And I walked from my home to Lutheran Medical Center delivery room. Took me about half an hour walking. Because cars couldn't move.

So that's how nearby the practice, and the business, and the social life -- all within that close -- closeness. So I didn't have -- have time to be traveling long distance. So I think that helped.

STRONG: Yeah, and you could be active in the community in this way and known.

JABER: Right.

STRONG: So when it was time to, you know, begin the Arab American Association of New York, people reached out to you again. Tell me about that experience, the people who were involved, and what their thinking was at the time.

JABER: Yes. We had an Arabic social organization called Arab American Family Support Center, which had been established, I believe, in the 1990s. And I had -- they were asking for -- for help in the community, especially for domestic violence, and children abuse, and so forth. So we connected them to the imams in the neighborhood to have guidance for their activity.

The response wasn't that great. The director wasn't -- she was Arabic, but she wasn't -- she was a Christian. She wasn't Muslim. Her name's Habiby Browne. And so she followed the line of official story of how to deal with domestic violence. So instead of saying, "Let's sit with the -- with the father or -- or the family," or "Get the imam involved" -- because there is a spiritual need in that. She didn't follow that. I believe she followed the law. So if -- if -- if a man hits his wife, you should take the wife and the children, put them in shelter, and call the police. And he puts him in -- in jail. Or police protection. And that's not what the woman wants. The woman wants a solution, not a radical one. And that -- so the split of the family became a problem.

So we said that style does not work for our community. Maybe it works for the American society, but not for the Muslim society. Because next day you go to family court. and she sees her kids without their father and he comes and apologizes to her. And she said, "I'm not -- I'm not going to go through the system no more." She goes back to her husband, so she will stay with the children. And the abuse will continue. But when the imam or the spiritual leader is involved, he will give him more information. "And that's not acceptable Islamically. And that's not the way you do -- deal with them." So we have more reconciliation, or at least management for the domestic violence issue.

At the same time, she came one time to give a talk cultural competence about the Arab community at Lutheran Medical Center when I was an attending. And I attended the meeting. I didn't like what she said. She portrayed women as an oppressed, that the hijab is not their choice. And that the -- the culture is abusive. And -- as -- I stopped her there. I said, "Maybe you are talking about different population. That's not what Muslims are doing. And you are mistaken." And she was never invited again to give such things. From there, I took the role of giving the cultural competency lectures about Muslims, and Islam in -- in Lutheran Medical Center as an -- an attending.

So we figured out that's not acceptable this way. So we should look for other -- another organization. However, the one which triggers that was a woman -- her name -- a social worker who was working at Lutheran Medical Center as a social -- social worker. Her name is Basemah Atweh, God bless her soul. And a marketing for Health Plus, field markers, Hichm El Anmati, and Suhad Kazma, who was, you know, reaching to the Arab community to give them the Health Plus as a Medicaid management company.

And they -- so the -- this connect between the new generation and the old generation, and women need which is not being met, you know, the -- the fathers are gone at seven o'clock to go to their stores. And they come back at seven o'clock or ten o'clock. And who is taking care of the kids? Mom. And mom is not educated. Mom is not fluent in English. Mom -- when -- when something goes wrong, happen, they call the mom for -- for the principal. And who translates for her? The kid. So it was a big issue. So they figured out we need more just help for that.

STRONG: Yeah.

JABER: So they come up with the idea that, "Why don't we have an organization? And who is in the community who is involved in such things? Hey, Dr. Jaber." So they came and approached me. And this was one of my biggest -- you call urgent passion, to help women. Because I do, in my practice as OBGYN, I am exposed for the women's need. And -- and one of the reasons the -- my success was as OBGYN was not because of

medicine. It was because of the listening capability. Patients would come and complain. And they want someone to listen to them in Arabic. Against their mother-in-law, against their father-in-law, against their husband -- and nobody is listening. And they don't want a solution. They just want somebody to listen to them and -- and -- and say something. So they complain when patients that I take long time when -- when I see the patients. So I said when you -- when your time comes, you will spend your time, too.

So I -- I am involved in -- in that aspect of the need for social services and support for women in our community. So I said, 100 percent I agree with you. Go ahead. So we established, you know, the logistics. The application form, the -- the president, the secretary, and the 501(c)3, you know, applications. And I offered them my office space as headquarters for the association.

STRONG: Which was here on 5th Avenue.

JABER: Which is on 5th Avenue.

STRONG: Yeah.

JABER: This -- this is the -- that was, like, 2000 -- year 2000. So -- so they came up with this. And we looked for -- for the board from the Arab community and made out the bylaws. And we just started as nonprofit organization. And that was in May -- we got the approval for it May in 2001. May -- I believe May 26th. I should look for the papers. And that was -- our mission was just, you know, social services. Help the women to deal with daily problems. And offer them counseling, help them out in marketing for Medicaid and -- and then Health Plus.

And -- and with my position at Lutheran as senior attending, and some grants for reaching out for the Arab community through their department. So I had a grant to support this organization and pay for the director through their fund. And actually, one of them was a board member for our organization. And that's how we kicked off the Arab American Association of New York. And we chose Arabic name, because I -- I

wanted it out of the religious perspective. And at the same time, we didn't want, like, Palestinian, or Egyptian, or Moroccan name. We just want the Arab community in general. It includes everybody. And the board members were also selected from all these various communities. So we have Muslims. We have Christians. We have Palestinians. We have Lebanese. We have Syrians. So whoever -- we have doctors. We have lawyers. We have -- a board member was psychologist. So we have all these together and -- and we were able to manage and form the organization.

Now, September 11th comes. And we were like, "Wait a minute now." We can't afford to have social services anymore. We have -- have to defend ourselves. Now we have to become -- advocate for our rights. Empowerment for our community. Because now we are being harassed. We are being attacked. We are being profiled. We are being -- all things happened after September 11th. And we have to stand up for our rights. So the mission of the organization shifted from not only social organization, giving back to the community, but empowerment and advocacy for -- for -- for the community.

Naturally, the association was organized and based in the Arabic community. And it was a -- a grassroots organization, rather than a top to the bottom organization. So we were supported basically from our community. Whether businesspeople, or professionals, or employees, we were -- we were all together. And I believe -- not to be, you know, boast -- boasting my-- myself. But I was, like, a figure where -- acceptable for all different groups.

So my involvement in the medical association, the Arab American Medical Association New York chapter, made the association giving back to the community from medical aspects. So we used to have a medical day, which is held in -- in, say, Beit Al Maqdis Islamic Center, or public school 102, or in the street. Where a health fair -- where the medical doctors come and -- and render their medical information to the people in general, in public.

My position as a founder for – or chairman of the board for the Islamic mission of America, and involvement in Musab bin Umayr Masjid, or Beit Al Maqdis Islamic Center, or Bay Ridge Cultural Center, or the youth center. I'm involved in all of this. So people look at me. And -- and they realize that I -- I -- I don't get anything from all this activity. Neither monetary nor reputation or anything. Because I'm well-established. I have my practice. I have my career already taken care of. So I pay for the association from my own pocket. I'm supporting -- I offer them my -- my office space. So they have that trust with -- with Dr. Jaber. That helped in the reputation in -- in the community about the association. So we had the full support of the community.

And you know, in the '90s there was the explosion in Trade World Center. And the community were in that time also in hot bed. So our policy was the open house policy, being the mosques are open for everybody. We are not hiding out. We are, you know, law abiding citizens. So we had before -- in -- in Bay Ridge we established a Unity Task Force where different leaders from the community, and the churches, and the mosque, and the synagogue form together a group to have one voice. Or not divide -- not -- anybody to divide us. And that was before September 11th.

So September 11th, that organizational skills were put into task. And we really banded together and have the community covered well in -- in -- in our area. So we, like, had vigil in -- in -- in the parks, walking into the areas and -- with, like, a procession. We had iftar, Ramadan where people come from different faith into breaking the bread with the Muslim community. So that has been already established. So the impact of September 11th, although it was devastating, but wasn't as -- as much as we thought it would be. And I believe that because we had that -- relationship was already built in before the disaster happened.

STRONG: Yeah. Tell me, moving forward from 2001, some of the -- the -- the turning points in your advocacy for this organization. How did you create relationships with, you

know, politicians, law enforcement, you know, any kind of demonstrating or coalition or -- what do you remember?

JABER: Yes. So since we did have this established relationship between -- through the Unity Task Force, we always have engaged with elected officials. Because they figured out that Arabs are here. And they are increasing in numbers. And their votes are important. And where will they go? Well, they have to go to the mosques. But then the word Muslims became edgy -- edgy. So they found probably the Arab American Association is more than -- if they associate themselves within it, it's more safe for them [than] to say, "I went to the mosque. And I am -- with the Muslim group." Although we, of course -- we rejected that idea. And still we took them to the mosque and brought them in there. But you could see the logical shift between Muslim-oriented or religious-oriented information versus non-religious institutions like the Arab American Association. And we, as a civic engagement association, affiliated with ACCESS which is the largest social organization Arabic in the nation. And -- based in Dearborn, Michigan. And we are part of -- of that organization. And they formed a National Network of Arab American [Communities], NNAAC. We were a part of it. So we got all the help from them, all the advocacy and how to reach out. And we established ourselves in that category.

So we -- we -- we went for voter registration, know your rights, with different advocacy group like CAIR. So we as Arab community, we were -- we understand our situation. So we banded together. And as -- as we always say that unity gives strength. Or you're stronger than when you just work alone. So we formed the Arab Muslim American Federation, which is an umbrella organization of different mosques, and the school, and institutions. And it became like one voice in front of the establishment.

Of course, NYPD, and the FBI, and Homeland Security are interested in securing the community, so they will not become violent, or become a hotbed for breeding violence. So they'll be watching. And of course, they will come and approach us. And, "Hey, why

don't you become engaged with us? We are protecting you." And of course, "We -- we are more than [willing to] be working with you, but not on our expense." So we were part of that dialogue between the officials and the community. We have very cordial relationship between us and the precincts. And we invited them to our activities, our galas. We honored them. Even Commissioner Kelly came to our -- the Arab Muslim American Federation for our gala as a keynote speaker. And all -- all of that after September 11th.

But then, all of a sudden, when we discovered that we were being surveilled and spied upon, we feel like a stab in the back. "We were part of your system. We were cooperating with you. We were bringing you to our community. And now you are spying on us? Whatever I say is being recorded? And students being infiltrated, and the program which you are using in NYPD for sports and basketball teams, you ask them to become an informant?" It was like -- really, we felt betrayed. That with the -- publication by the AP Press -- the thing October, about the spying of NYPD surveillance system, which was against the Muslim community in -- in New York City. So we were upset with that.

I -- I mean, I was active in all these relationship. I was even as a -- a member of the Muslim council for Commissioner Kelly. A group of Muslim leaders were chosen to help NYPD in managing the community. And when we found that, we were surveilled - we were disappointed at least.

But we had -- you know, we know now our strength was in our numbers, and our voting, and our registration to vote. We did that. And we harvest the fruit for that when we were able to support McMahon as a Democrat for the Congress seat, Congressional seat, in Staten Island. And he won as a Democrat after 26 years of Republican in the district. However, unfortunately, he was a conservative Democrat. And he wasn't as we expected. And next time, when the elections came, we did not vote for him. And of

course, Grimm won, although he was against the community. And he announced it. He was against the “Ground Zero mosque.” That’s what they called a Ground Zero mosque.

STRONG: Cordoba House, right?

JABER: Yeah. And -- but we -- we appreciated his honesty. But maybe we don’t vote for him. But we do not vote for McMahon either. And he lost. So they know their listeners.

So we focused on empowering our community by that. And this year we fielded a city council candidate for our district. And he -- he was second place. Difference probably about 400 votes. The winner about 38 percent. And he was 32, 33 percent. Next candidate was like 18 percent. So we -- our strategy worked. And our voice are now well heard. And that’s how the organization progressed.

STRONG: Tell me about some of your get out the vote efforts, and registering people, and -- and helping with that. What were your strategies?

JABER: Of course, we utilized all the facilities which are available, mostly the mosques.

Mosques are our strength. Because we talk about, like, thousands of people who comes every Friday. So message spread to them, that’s one. Two, our English ESL language -- English second language program, which the association are -- running, we talk about 200 women who are now reading and writing English. And -- and so our approach to them, and we talk about that for last three years -- so they are there. And our volunteers are all over the place. We do have high school volunteers. So we utilize them in -- in reaching out to the community. Our big festivities, which is Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, which you talk about 10,000 people in one place at that time -- so we have -- [phone alarm rings]

STRONG: Do you want me to pause?

JABER: So we have all this in the place. Plus other organizations started to spring up. So we have the Moroccan community. They had their organization. The Yemenis community had their organization. The Muslim's Democratic Club [phonetic] had their organization. So we have now more connection to each other. And we have a large

youth program in -- in Bath Avenue. So the community is thriving. And organization is being established as -- that's what we learned. That's how organizing is important. And we emphasized that. The youth program is one of the programs which we administered. The youth program, citizenship program, and immigration services is the largest program which we have at the Arab American Association of New York.

So through all this, we reach out for the community. We have newspapers, local newspapers as a media. Now our ex-executive director Linda Sarsour took the organization to a national level with the media, with NPR, with Fox, with Al-Jazeera. So our name became recognized as an organization of Arabic dissent in championing the Arab causes.

STRONG: And when you began, it was all volunteers, right?

JABER: Yes. You know, our first executive director was paid by Lutheran Medical Center.

Our staff were volunteers. And when we went to ACCESS, they provided us with AmeriCorps members. So we probably had six or seven AmeriCorps workers in the association. You know what AmeriCorps program is. You are stipend -- sort of salary. By the end of -- maximum two years, but usually one year, then you get \$5,000 fund for studying college or education, whatever you want to do with that as educational grant. And we -- we utilized that program very well. And that's how the people were running the association. The rest of the board are free. Sometimes if we needed, like, some one to have part-time job, I used to pay them salary through my office practice as if worked for me. But they are working for both [me and AAANY].

STRONG: And then how did you engage fundraising over the years to help the organization grow to the point where now it's -- you know, your entire office, and paid staff, and --

JABER: Right. So fundraising we started, you know, as a community organizing. So people were, you know, my friends, whom I am in contact with. I deliver their kids. I go to their weddings. I perform their marriages. And I'm licensed by the city of New York to perform marriages Islamically. So through that, I got a lot of -- of help. And the doctors in the community, since I know all of them. So -- and the board has a capacity of

reaching out. Because we chose them from all these different backgrounds and different professions. So they are a major contributor to the organization.

And after September 11th, there are funds who seeked to help out the Arab community. Although it wasn't given to an Arab organization. It was given for non-Arab organization. Safe Horizon or Lutheran Medical Center Reach Out program. Or women -- Young Women Christian Association, YMCA. So they knew about our organization in its infancy and growing. So they supported us through that program. And we got the first award from, I think, something called square -- something square foundation. I -- I have to look for it.

STRONG: It's all right. We'll correct it later.

JABER: Yeah. And we got a -- like \$150,000 for three years (\$50,000 a year). So wow, we were just, you know, amazed. And that helped us in -- in keeping growing. As a large, also, Arab American Association in the national arena, ACCESS realized that we provide large services with the least cost. So they provided us also with logistic helps, with information and [they] put our executive director as a liaison. So she was paid by them while she's working here. So we could manage our finance through that system. So between Lutheran Medical Center, between the Health Care Plus, United Health Care -- which are organizations who are using space of the organization. So they pay rent for that, which we use it for paying the rent for the -- the premises. So through that we managed our finance.

Now, when we became well known and -- so we start to be visible major organization like Ford, NYCDC. [phonetic] And we applied -- we learned how to apply for grants from private foundation. And we got it. Because when they came to the association for onsite visiting, they are amazed how much services we are offering. And -- and much, much more than expected. And compare us to other organizations, they say, hey, here -- here's your grant for two, three years. Not only for one year.

STRONG: Tell me about the services you are able to provide now. I think you mentioned you -- you started with a couple hundred clients. Now you have a couple thousand clients?

JABER: Right. Our largest program is the immigration. We have, I think, nine staff now. Three lawyers, which was given a grant by New York Immigration Coalition, where Linda was a board member. And we were actually honored by NY I.C -- New York Immigration Coalition last year as a provider organization. And so we have the largest -- or I think a member of the bar association where you could defend that immigrants in -- in court.

And the second program was the adult education. And that program is being second large for our association with -- I just mentioned. About 200 women every year we help learn English language. And there are different levels, beginner, and middle, and advanced. We had a GED program at one point. So that is administered -- a separate program, the ESL class. And now we -- since we don't have a space -- so we are utilizing Beit Al Maqdis Islamic Center -- where I am a co-founder and a board member in that mosque -- for using their weekend school. I use it regular days, five days a week. And we administer that program through them.

So we had -- then we have the youth program, where you have after school program. We have a teenager program where kids -- they come and -- and talk, and tell them how to defend themselves. And how to be expressing themselves and their emotions in an atmosphere where no -- you know, intimidation, you could say.

And we have a -- a social service. We had a contract for mental health issue. We got a grant by the city of New York through -- supervised by Lutheran Medical Center, which is NYU Langone now. And we have a social worker full time who works with that. Now, we have the health program where people apply for Medicaid through -- their managed

care through the health -- the Empire Blue Cross and United Health Care. And now we're seeking some other health fair stuff and -- and so on.

We have the advocacy program. We have the -- where you could, you know, connect with other different organizations, reach out to them and have a together activity, like youth summit or Arab service day, where we go to the parks or clean up, or you go to McDonald and for one day feed the people in need or for the homeless. And something like that. So -- so these are different programs which we administer. Then in each program has its own grant.

We did have a few help from our elected officials. And work with them when I can now. So we hope we will get more funds from the city. We did have some contract with the city of services. And we tried in the beginning to avoid, because of the paperwork and the logistic things, which is difficult to have when you don't have full-time administrators and workers. Now I think we are capable of doing that. Because we have a full-time executive director, and deputy director, and programs director. You name it.

STRONG: Yeah. Of all these many organizations, and we've only been able to talk about some of them that you've been involved in -- and, you know, your -- your community work, and your work in your religious organizations, what do you think your -- or even with your family -- do you think you're most proud of that you've been able to contribute to.

JABER: Yes. I didn't know that until I was being honored by the Arab American Family Support Center, our sister organization. And at the time of their gala, I wasn't here. I was overseas. And my kids took the -- the plaque. And they were -- not like proud. But they confessed -- And simply by the one who introduced the award, when he told them that, "What can I tell you about your father? There's no organization he's not involved in. If I called him -- if I call him a -- the godfather of the community, I'm belittling him." So they responded back with that. And they all together the four of them came and got the -- the award and the plaque for them. And they spoke out.

My eldest daughter, she's a physician. Now she's involved in the community where she is in North Jersey. And she's being there to be [recruited] to be one of the board members of the mosque there. And my son, eldest son, he's also in Jersey. And he is part of the school with his wife in -- in the area of Monroe.

My youngest one, he's -- he finished his residency in pediatrics. And he went to Texas for administrative emergency medicine, something like that. He's doing his fellowship for three years. And he was in -- in Jordan on a mission with the refugees camp as a volunteer physician to treat the refugees of Syria in Jordan. And he was in the Philippines for a mission to help out through an international organization. So I am proud of him. He said, "Father, like, when -- when I see and treat the refugees in camps, I remember the eyes of my father. I see them through my eyes of my father who was a refugee himself." So that makes me very proud. I mean, you know -- so yeah. The kids are -- are there.

STRONG: What are your hopes for the future of this community in Brooklyn.

JABER: Well, I'm -- I'm happy now. We reached the point that -- you know, a lot of leadership now is being -- rising up. And my investment in the -- in the young generation is getting to a fruit where we can see now the leadership is being from the second generation rather than ours. And my dream or my strategy now is to look for a center which we own and host, the Arab American Association, as its own, rather than paying the rent for the building. And I'm seeking that with coordination with different other organizations within the community which they share the same thing. They are renting. So we would -- I'm planning to -- or that's my strategy to have a building which hosts all these different organizations. Where this is the Arab community center where we are proud of it.

STRONG: Yeah. You know, we've been talking for two hours. I love your stories. Is -- is there anything I should have asked you, or that -- that we [laughs] didn't have enough time for?

JABER: Reaching out for different -- how I reached out to different organizations -- so we -- we have Brooklyn Congregations United, which is an organization calling for social services. That's practically more African American in Flatbush area. And -- and I was on the board for three years with them as a -- a board member through my organization, with the faith organization.

And my involvement with reaching out to the faithful community -- I was the -- I was the president for the Brooklyn Heights Clergy Association for three years, which is, like, about 15 churches, and two synagogue, and one mosque. And we are involved in -- in -- in that. Now I am reaching out to the New York Interfaith organization as a member or as -- as a consultant.

So our reaching out is not limited. I'm all over the place. And say, like, we -- the Ramadan breakfast became a ritual after we introduced it to the community. So the borough president have annual iftar. The mayor, New York City mayor, have every year iftar for the Muslims. And elected -- city hall, city council, have celebration for the Eid every -- every year.

So we reached out to the community. We were able to secure the Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr as an official holiday for city of New York after nine years of -- of advocating for it. What is the other word? Lobbying for it. And although Bloomberg refused to sign the city council resolution, but we were able to secure it with Mayor De Blasio.

So I see a lot of -- of -- of issues around -- and -- and including NYPD surveillance. We were actively involved in that. And we were -- were able to have established the general -- outside NYPD -- general performer or -- overseeing the policy of NYPD. And you know, the -- the disband of the unit which were surveiling the Muslim community. So we were involved in -- in -- in stop and frisk and -- and -- and all this local activity which we were involved in. NYPD violence, Black Lives Matter, and all these events.

STRONG: So when you say we, I imagine you mean you personally as part of any one of these organizations that you were involved in.

JABER: Right. So in other words, my presence was important. But I didn't do it alone. A lot of people are within these organizations. So like the Eid al-Adha, al-Fitr celebration was almost 78 organizations working together. Muslims and non-Muslims, activists, and civic engagement groups. They were all together for the right of -- of -- of Muslims to have their holiday. And we talk about 100,000 public school students who are from Muslim origin who needed that celebration to be under their fingers, rather than being at school, or performing exams, or something like that. So the choice is -- is theirs. So now we are happy we accomplished that.

So when -- when you see that progress within 40 years is -- is amazing. Like, when you -- when I came, as I said, we have two mosques. Now -- probably now more -- more than 300 in New York City only. But probably we were 100,000 people. And now we have 800,000 people. So the community is thriving. And our voice is being heard. And my work, thank God, alhamdulillah, I was well rewarded.

STRONG: If there's -- if there's any legacy, any lasting mark you've made in Brooklyn, what do you think it will be?

JABER: Well, the establishment of the Arab American Association as a voice for the Arab community is -- is one of the thing which I did and I am proud of. Because, the mosques, everybody's involved. Everybody's looking for -- for that. But a social service organization is rarely being recognized. Although the bulk of the work which is needed is through such an organization.

STRONG: Well, thank you. Any -- any last thoughts before we end the interview?

JABER: Well, I -- I guess I appreciate my family involvement, and support, and tolerance, and keep up with me for what I am doing. I do appreciate them.

STRONG: And I'm sure they appreciate your support as well. Thank you so much for your time. This was really a wonderful interview. And -- and if you think of anything you'd like to add, let me know.

JABER: Sure.

STRONG: All right.

END OF AUDIO FILE