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Oral History Interview with Zein Rimawi
Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.08
Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on March 23, 2018
at the An Noor Social Center in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

STRONG: Today is March 13th. It's a Tuesday, 2018. My name is Liz Strong. We are here for the Muslims in Brooklyn Oral History Project, with the Brooklyn Historical Society.

[laughter] I can hear the birds, yes. Oh, that's a great idea! Thank you.

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: Welcome back. Thank you for moving the birds.

RIMAWI: Sorry.

STRONG: [laughter] No, that's perfect. So just say your first and last name and when and where you were born.

RIMAWI: My name is Zein Rimawi. I was born in a small village, 25 miles northwest Jerusalem.

STRONG: In 1954, right?

RIMAWI: Nineteen fifty-four, yes, ma'am.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about your childhood. What do you remember about your family and life in Palestine?

RIMAWI: My family is a big family. I have six brothers and three sisters. I went to school in my village's school from the first grade to the tenth grade. Then I have to go to the city to study math and science. I graduate from Ramallah, or Al-Bireh, in Palestine.

STRONG: Tell me, what do you reme-- what was your village like? What was the name of your village, first of all?

RIMAWI: My -- the -- my village name is Patrimus [phonetic] [0:01:42]. My small -- small village, about now 5,000 people living there. We depend on olives trees. Farmers. One thing about my village is well known in Palestine. It's -- the people there, high-educated. It's -- I can say almost more than eighty percent finish colleges. Yeah.

STRONG: What do you remember about your parents?

RIMAWI: My parents -- my [pause]. I don't know. You remind me of my parents. [pause]
Talk later.

STRONG: Okay.[Interview interrupted.]RIMAWI: [inaudible 0:02:51] you remind me of my--

STRONG: You haven't seen them since you left Palestine?

RIMAWI: Since I left Palestine. Okay. I'm ready.

STRONG: All right.

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: What would you like to say?

RIMAWI: Okay. We start -- we go back to my parents. Yeah. My father is from my village.

My mother is from a village next to Jerusalem called Lifta. My -- my father used to be the mayor of our village. Quiet person. He -- very quiet. He doesn't talk, almost. Yeah. Wise man. I like him. I love him. My mother is tall. Fat. I remember, yeah. It's okay. She the one took care of raising us more than my father, because she don't -- she didn't work. My father used to work, so he's a lot the time outside. So, she took care of that. And of course, my -- all the brothers used to take care of us. Like, the difference between myself and my brother is about eight years. So -- and my relationship with my father was very, very, very good. I don't know why. Usually people they love -- they love their mothers more than their fathers, but I don't know why I love my father more than my mother. [laughter] That's very strange.

One thing about my father -- and when I was in school -- school -- I want to study journalism. I like it. I don't know why. I used to take care of the -- the -- the newspaper of the school. And I like it. And I told my father, "I want to study journalism." He said, "Are you kidding? One of two things: most of your life you will be in jail, or you'll spend your life poor. So, try to find something better than that." And believe me, until now, I would like to do it. I wish one of my daughters, the smartest one, to study journalism. But she told me, "No, Dad, it's -- it's a very difficult subject. I don't want to do."
[laughter] Yeah.

STRONG: What did you like about it? What was -- what was your favorite thing about journalism and working on the newspaper?

RIMAWI: I don't know why, but because I start writing the newspaper when I was young. I -- I was, I think, eighth grade. I used to write it. Most of the time I collect articles on the teachers, and I -- I remember I -- I -- I did an interview with my father, as the mayor of the city. Yeah. And I remember, he -- he -- he a little bit -- he start -- he talked with a -- he was so proud of his village, of course. And how our village -- like, we are well educated and -- and -- and when you go to our village, the truth, you see all of it full of trees. Green. Which is -- in -- in -- in the West Bank, that's not normal. The whole village is full of trees. Yeah. I remember, my wife -- my mother -- told my father, "Come on, come down. Don't talk like -- you are so proud of your village." [laughter] 'Cause she's from different village. [laughter]

I don't know why I like journalism or media. But now I like it because one thing: they control the whole world! Media is controlling the whole world. That's what I believe. That's what I believe. It's a difficult job. It's a very hard job. But still it's in my blood. And I -- by the way, even when I went to college, when I went to camps, I used to do the Walleh [phonetic] newspaper. Even in Germany I did it. Yeah.

STRONG: Well, let's talk about what happened next. You said you went to school in the city. Was that Jerusalem?

RIMAWI: No. It's called Al-Bireh, or Ramallah. It's -- this is a school -- the only school -- for the whole area to study math and science. Yeah. So, I studied two years there. And I graduated from -- they call it Al-Hashimia School [phonetic]. Yeah. Finished, then I went to Germany.

STRONG: Tell me about what Germany was like.

RIMAWI: I went -- I had a scholarship. Yeah. The system there is a little bit different. They have college or university. They have what they called ingenieurschule [school of engineering]. When I went there, they said, "Oh, you have to go to ingenieurschule, which is equal to three years of university. So, I didn't like it.

STRONG: Oh.

RIMAWI: Yeah. I didn't like it at all. And they told me to study the subject they want, not the subject I want -- chemistry, which is I don't like also. So, I didn't like it. The life there -- I was in East Germany. I went first to Leipzig. I studied language, then -- the first three months. Then we used -- they used to teach us language and physics, language and chemistry, together. We spent one year; then I went to Mecklenburg. It was hard. The life, not the school only, but the life there. Too much pressure. I feel too much pressure there. And there is a certain way of life in East Germany. Not like here. Here, if you -- if you want -- you -- you -- you find the group you want. Anyway -- what you want you find here in this country. You want to go to the mosque; you find the mosque. To go to the church, you find the church. You want to go to a -- a bar, you find a bar. But there, no. It's one way. You have to live their life. One of the difficulties there, I remember, I used to drink water. They don't drink water. They -- they love beer. [laughter] Yeah.

One of the things I couldn't understand it until now, very -- it's very strange -- I keep telling people about it. If you go from your room to take a shower naked, it's okay. Nobody look at you. Even we were mixed, boys and girls. If you go with your pajama, oh, everybody will start laughing and make a big thing of it. So that's one of the things I couldn't adjust myself with it. So -- totally also different life. You -- a boy, you have to have a girlfriend. This is against my religion. It also was difficult. Yeah. I -- I felt like I'm in a jail.

It's -- honestly -- they have a lot of things, a lot of good things. A lot. Almost life is free there. But too much pressure. You have to think their way. And if you were a German, also, you have to think of the Communist Party way. Yeah. It's -- it's not -- you are not free. So, to me, honestly, I -- I didn't like it.

STRONG: What brought you there? Was it just the scholarship --?

RIMAWI: Scholarship, yeah. Scholarship. And yeah, I -- I finished it from Palestine. We -- you know we had the war, you know, the 1967 war.

STRONG: Right.

RIMAWI: And that war we ex-- we expect -- we expect to win the war. The Palestinians will go to their homes, because they -- they -- we have in the West Bank, Palestinians who came from Haifa, Jaffa, these cities. And so, 1967, they were ready to go home. And we was surprised that -- they call it the Six-Day War. I call it the Six-Hour War. In six hours, everything -- everything finished. And the Israeli army, instead of coming from the west, they came from the east. So, at that age, I -- I tried to understand, "Why? Why keep losing? Why -- why -- why we Arabs and Muslims keep losing, keep losing?" I thought from the books we study at school. It's too old. And --

F: [whispers] Sorry.

STRONG: Oh, go ahead.

RIMAWI: [laughter] [inaudible 0:12:48] I -- I --

STRONG: [whispers] One second.

F: Sorry. [laughter]

RIMAWI: That's okay.

F: I know you have the mics on.

[Interview interrupted.]

RIMAWI: Where we were, and let's talk.

STRONG: You were thinking about why -- why did we lose, and you were -- thought it might because --

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: -- the books.

RIMAWI: So, I thought, "This is the books, what we study, is no good." And so, I start to read a lot from outside, not from the schoolbooks. I remember, I keep -- I tell my kids, even I try to lose -- when I -- when -- when I got accepted in Germany -- to lose the knowledge I gotten from our schools. Because I thought, "It's too old." And then one of the reason we lost because of this knowledge. So, when I went to Germany, I was so surprised. I was so surprised. The first test in math, algebra, we take, in college, the one we used to take in eighth grade! And from 27 students, only one girl passed. So, I was so surprised.

Then when I started studying more, oh, no, no, no, nothing wrong with our books. Nothing -- nothing wrong with the curriculums. Oh, no, no, no, something else wrong. And I start to be more religious from there. I said, "Something -- no. It's not -- it's the knowledge. It's not the books. It's not -- it's not -- no, no, no, no. Something else." So, I start to be religious. I -- I start to -- even to understand our culture, and -- and -- so this make -- make it -- make it more difficult for me.

STRONG: More difficult how?

RIMAWI: To live there.

STRONG: Oh, in East Germany.

RIMAWI: In East Germany. Because --

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: So, you were saying about your religious and cultural education after that point.

RIMAWI: Yeah. I -- I -- I -- because at that time when we lost the war, I start to -- a little bit -- to keep away from religion. You know, we live in a village. My -- my father is religious. He go -- he prays five times. So, the whole village, we can say, they go by religion. So, I -- I -- I start to, a little bit, to keep away, little by little, little by little. I used to -- to fast. I used -- but when I went to Germany, I found this is what we took in school is equal to what they -- we are taking now in college. I say, "Oh, no, no, no. That's -- I mean, that's not in our religion. It's not the books. Something else -- I have to find it."

And I change. I became more religious. Yeah. I never drink in my life. I never had a girlfriend in my life -- which is very, very, with my respect, very, very hard. In -- in our class, I remember, 27, I think we have more than 22 girls. So, it's not easy. But, praise God, I never had a girlfriend in my life. Not in Germany, not here. My -- my wife is my girlfriend.

This is in Germany. So, I -- I finish in -- in Germany. I went back to Lebanon. I applied for the American University. I went to the -- the -- they said, "You have to take this test, in English." So, at that time I forget the English language. I -- I speak German. So, I

looked, and the test was -- was so -- so hard. So, what to do? I said, "I'm here; I'm already here." It's, you know, like here: A, B, C, D. So, I said, just do it. So, I fill it up, and I went home. They ask me, my friends, "How is it?" "Oh, I'm -- I'm not going to pass, because that's what happened." Said, "That's okay; this is normal. Just they want to know what level are you." So, I was surprised that I passed. When I came -- [laughter] I went to Jordan and I came back. So, "Oh, you passed that test." So -- so I applied. They accept me, American University. When I went there, I find that guy, I know him. He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Okay, they accept me, I'm going to study here." He says, "Are you crazy?" I said, "Why?" He said, "Oh, no good." He was a student there, studied pharmacy. I said, "Oh, so what you want me to do?" He said, "No, no, no, no, go -- go study in the Arab University of Beirut." I said, "Yeah, do you think so?" He said, "Yeah, of course." And honest, because I came from Europe I was not happy in Germany. And American University is totally different than the other universities, part of America. So, I said, 'Yeah, okay.'

So, I went to the Arab University. "What -- what's available?" They said, "Civil engineering." So, I studied civil engineering. I -- I -- I found that I made a mistake when I went back to Jordan. Jordan -- and, by the way, I went back to Jordan and Palestine. So, I -- I -- when I left the first time to Germany, I saw my family, cause I went back, as a visitor. Cause I lost my ID, the Israeli ID, they took it from me. So, I went as a visitor. I thought -- I made a mistake. Cause too much difference. When you say, "I went to American University," big thing. "I went to the Arab University of Beirut," "Oh." Yeah. So even the -- the studying there was so good. But still, the name. Like if you go here to Harvard University, "Oh, Harvard University?" God knows how did you do in Harvard University? [laughter] Maybe you -- you graduated from here, if you go to Kingsborough [Community College] and you study nurse, it's a very good school. Maybe it's better than another university. But still, it's Kingsborough Community College.

This is my -- I went back to Palestine, visit my fa-- as a visitor. Cause I lost my ID. I visit my -- my -- my -- my parents, yeah, my family. I used to stay about one month there, yeah. Then I came here, came to this country, to study -- a scholarship, also -- to study -- what they call it? -- industrial engineering here. We call it overseas production engineering. Yeah. Scholarship. Be-- this is the time of the war in Lebanon.

STRONG: Nineteen seventies.

RIMAWI: No, 19-- now -- no, 1980s.

STRONG: Nineteen eighties now. So still it's on.

RIMAWI: Yeah. So, I -- I -- I came here, went to Wagner College. Yeah. Was a good, a very good, school, by the way. I like it. Yeah. Especially the most important thing I like in Wagner College is the cafeteria. [laughter] They have a good one. Yeah. I studied there, waiting for the scholarship, keep calling. Then they told me, "Listen --" -- before -- a friend said, "Come study where I study until your scholarship comes." I went there to Raleigh, studied. But the scholarship didn't come. So, I quit. I came here, to New York. Start another part of my life. When -- I work. I work for not too -- less than one -- one year. Then I opened a store, the electronics store. Spent seven years of that store.

STRONG: Before we go into that --

RIMAWI: Yeah. Yeah.

STRONG: -- I'd love to go back.

RIMAWI: Go ahead.

STRONG: What do you remember about your life in Jordan and Lebanon --

RIMAWI: Oh --

STRONG: -- during that war?

RIMAWI: -- in Lebanon, it -- it -- you feel like you are human, being in Lebanon. 'Cause it's a free country. At that time also the Palestinians, they have power in Lebanon. Of course, the -- the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] were there. So, you feel really you are hu-- the first time in my life I left the -- a -- a -- a human being in Lebanon. Because when you are in Jordan, you are not -- you are nobody. Even though, even though my -- my uncle, who's the brother of my father, used to -- used to be the prime minister of

Jordan. Yes. But I never liked it. I never felt like I'm free. The same thing when you go to Palestine. You are -- you -- you -- even -- you are not a human. You are not a sub-human. You are nobody there. You are nobody. Anyone, any soldier, male or -- or female, she -- she or he can take you from your family, ask you to take your clothes or hit you or to stand up for -- holding your hands up and -- and you cannot do anything. They don't like your face -- "Where are you going?" "To Jerusalem." "Go back."

So -- in -- in Palestine, well, it's very hard. It's my -- my country, my land, my homeland. But very hard. Very hard. It's -- you feel very, very sad there. And angry. In Jordan, it's totally different. It's -- it's controlled by the police there. You cannot say anything. You -- when you go to the cinema, you are watching the movie, the first thing comes the picture of the king. You have to stand up. You don't stand up, six month jail. Yes. And so -- [laughter] so I never liked it.

In Lebanon, yes. It's free. It's a free -- and a student. The -- the -- the student's life is good anyway. Yeah. I like Lebanon. Most of my family's -- they live in Palestine. My -- my -- my sisters, my brothers. I have -- then after that two of them lived in Jordan. They're still living in Jordan. One of them is living in the Arab Emirates. The poorest one of our family. He's an imam, a sheikh there. But he's doing very bad. He's doing very -- yes. We've been talking about Arab -- the Emirates, United Arab Emirates, a lot of -- a lot of money, and people there, they are suffering.

Okay. What else? Where you want me to go?

STRONG: So, you came here to Brooklyn. What was life like? You came to Bay Ridge first?

RIMAWI: Yes. I came to -- when I came back from Raleigh?

STRONG: Yes.

RIMAWI: I came to Bay Ridge. I lived in Bay Ridge, 92nd [Street] and Third Avenue. Nice apartment. Yeah. Then when I -- when I got married, 1988, I lived in Bay Ridge also.

Senator [Street] between Ridge [Boulevard] and Third. Nice apartment. Nice area. At

that time, I remember I used to pay \$517. Which is what you ma-- less than you make in one week. The rent of the house, \$517. Two bedroom. Now that house, or that apartment, I'm sure it's more than \$2,500. So, you have to work the whole month to pay the rent. So, this is what -- how change here, in -- in -- in New York. Yeah.

STRONG: How did you meet your wife?

RIMAWI: I never saw her in my life. [laughter] This is the strangest -- the strangest thing in my life. When my old brother get married, or engaged, I used to make fun of him. I'd say, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" He'd say, "Why?" "How you get married to somebody you don't know? Just you see her, and you sit with her a couple of times and that's it, and you --" He said, "Okay, we'll see how you are go to get married." And they say -- they told me, "You know this guy?" "No." "You know that family?" "I know some of their family, yes. Her sister used to be in my -- the same age." "Her -- her sister is related -- the girl I know is single." My mother -- my brother told me, "Oh, she's good, and then she graduated from Jordan -- Jordan University. And she doesn't mind to come to United States." Okay.

I don't know what to tell you. It was not easy. It was difficult to accept in this way. But I was here by myself, no relatives almost. Nobody. So, this is one way or the other to get married. So why not? So, they send a picture of her. I look at the picture. We talk on the phone. I remember the first time we -- we talked on the phone the bill was 900-something dollars. [laughter] So I keep telling my kids that I -- I became poor because of the phones I used [laughter] to call your mother.

She came here. And it was -- I -- you think it -- or if -- if you tell somebody, they say, "Oh, your life must be difficult when you get married." No. No. We got married. Most of the time I'm working. She -- she doesn't work. So -- and the -- the first thing, when I used to come -- of course she doesn't know anybody here. She -- the only thing she used to do, watch the TV. She doesn't speak good English, so it's not easy for her. So the first year was very difficult for her. Very, very difficult. She doesn't know anybody. After that,

when -- especially when we got kids, and -- she was busy with the kids, and everything was okay. Until now -- now we almost married 30 years.

STRONG: Thirty years?

RIMAWI: Thirty years, yeah. Yeah. I got six kids. This is a subject I like to talk about it.

Mohammad is a foot surgeon. He will graduate in a couple of months. Fatima graduated from the school, medical school. Yeah. Yeah. She -- yesterday they called her and said, "You are -- they accept you." But which is better we don't know, to -- to -- for the residency. Asmaa, she's studying medicine in Harvard. This -- she is smart. That's the one I pushed to study media. She -- she studied in Harvard. She has a bachelor's degree from Harvard. She got the scholarship from [University of] Cambridge, in England. She did her master's. Then she came back. They accept her to study medicine in -- in -- in Harvard. So, she's studying medicine in Harvard. I have Mariam. She graduate from Barnard, Columbia. Yeah. Double major -- what they call it? Computer and economy. She's working with IBM as a consultant. Yeah. Aya [phonetic], college. And Hadijah [phonetic], the youngest one, is high school. These my kids.

STRONG: Tell me about teaching your kids their history, and what you'd learned about culture and religion and --

RIMAWI: They went to Al-Noor School.

STRONG: Aha.

RIMAWI: We started Al-Noor School. Mohammad, my oldest son, went first grade, went to it. And he was at that time in Palestine. So, when he came back his English was not so good. So, in the first year he has difficulties in English. Yeah. So, the school, they -- most of them graduate, except Hadijah. The rest of them graduate from Al-Noor School. They used to teach them Arabic and English and Islamic study. They went to Palestine many times. They spent more than -- every time they go about two months with their family. Yeah. Asmaa and Mariam, they went to Palestine many times. Asmaa because her master's is about Palestine and history in Palestine. They have many -- two or three programs they got from Columbia University, I think one from Harvard, to go to Palestine to -- to -- one of the subjects about the intifada.

STRONG: Oh wow.

RIMAWI: Yeah. And the last one, Mariam, went to Palestine to teach, to teach computer.

STRONG: When they were young did they go with you or just with their mother?

RIMAWI: No, with their mother. After my parents -- after my parents passed away, I didn't go. I -- when I came to this country, I didn't go. That's it. I didn't leave. The only time I left this country, I went to Saudi Arabia, to make Hajj, we call it. Yeah. Otherwise I -- I didn't go. Yeah.

STRONG: How did you stay in touch with your family? Just --

RIMAWI: Phone.

STRONG: -- phone?

RIMAWI: Phone. Phone. I keep calling them. Yeah. It's been -- they became big, big family now. Every one of them got married, kids, and -- I don't know their kids.

STRONG: Oh, never got to meet them.

RIMAWI: Don't know their kids. Yeah. They met my kids, but I haven't met their kids. But they are living good. Most of them living good, except the one in United Arab Emirates.

STRONG: Right.

RIMAWI: He has difficulties. He's poor, [laughter] very poor. Yeah. But he did good. His kids graduated, good school. Two of them engineers. The -- the other, the girl, the oldest one, is a dentist. The other one is -- is something has to do with machines in the hospital, the -- fix it or something. But also, an engineer. Yeah. He's -- he's -- I helped him as much as I could.

STRONG: Your brother?

RIMAWI: Yeah, my -- my brother, yeah.

STRONG: Tell me about when -- when you first came to Brooklyn, you founded the Islamic center almost right away, right? Within a year?

RIMAWI: Almost right away.

STRONG: Tell me about that. What was that like?

RIMAWI: We used to -- I used to work for people. So, when I -- Friday -- Friday you have to go to pray in a mosque. You cannot pray home. So, I used to go -- it takes between 30 to 45 minutes to go; then you pray for one hour, then come back. Which is -- so I said, "Why -- why we have to go there?"

STRONG: Where were you going?

RIMAWI: To -- they call it Al-Farooq. It's Atlantic and Fourth Avenue. Said, "Why we have to go there?" So, because next to us was a Turkish mosque, Sixty [Street] and Eighth Avenue. But they speak Turkish. [laughter] Yeah. We cannot understand him. So, I -- I -- I start talking to people, yeah. And everybody likes it. Just they want somebody to lead. So, I -- we rent a store, 115 Bay Ridge Avenue, and we started from there. Yeah. Then after that a guy came and offered his first floor, we did it as a mosque, Forty-Sixth [Street] and Eighth Avenue. Yeah. Then the -- this guy here, the Mosque Musab [bin Umayr], the guy came and said, "Listen. I will -- I will give you these three stores free as a mosque, and the backyard and the basement."

STRONG: Wow!

RIMAWI: Yeah. So, we took it, and we -- since that, now 25 years. And 6807 Fifth Avenue. Musab. Yeah. Before that, we -- before we came to Musab, we start Al-Noor School. We start to talk Al-Noor, to -- building Al-Noor School. It was difficult. Not because of one thing. We were young, poor. In our society they respect only the rich people. So, when they -- when we were talking about building or opening or buying a school, they look at us -- "Before you buy a school, go find yourself a good pants or maybe a good shirt, before buying a school." One of them -- one of the Palestinian leader, the girl went to him and said, "I would like you to donate some money to Al-Noor school. It's going to open after one month." He said, "After one month we will see. After one month he's going to open a new -- a school after one month." And we opened after one month. 'Cause he didn't expect us to succeed.

Like I told you, nobody knows us. Most of us in their early twenties. Yeah. And the most important thing: poor. So -- the -- the -- the community, they have money. They

have money. But they didn't think about opening a mosque. They didn't think about opening a school, or opening a -- a youth center, or -- or anything. No. They were busy collecting money. Money. Collecting money. Working. Most of them supermarkets they have, and the grocer is working seven days a week. Yeah. I don't know, maybe this is the way of our community.

So, we built the -- the mosque, and now we have this mosque. We built Al-Noor School. We took the -- after that, we rented from him the second floor. We opened like, a library or a bookshop, which is -- was almost the third or the fourth in Brooklyn to sell books. Yeah. We went to New Jersey; we brought it from New Jersey; then we imported from Egypt books. Was very successful. Then we opened a -- a -- we opened --

M: How you doing?

RIMAWI: It's closed sir. It's closed sir.

M: Yeah. I need two seconds.

[Interview interrupted.]

RIMAWI: -- where, and -- and talking about -- yeah. We took the -- the second floor. We opened it, like, as a bookshop.

STRONG: At the Islamic Center.

RIMAWI: Islamic Center, yes. Then we -- we moved the bookshop from the second floor to the first floor, and the -- the second floor as a youth center. We brought -- you know, at that time -- what they call it, the machines, the flippers, the one you play with it -- the big machines. And Foosball and --

STRONG: Oh yeah!

RIMAWI: -- these machines and table tennis and -- yeah. Maybe the sign is still there. Also, we became a member of the food bank. We get food from the bank and -- the food that the people donate, and we -- [inaudible 0:35:06], thanks God -- we give -- we open two days, one day for men, one day for women. We give food away with no question. Doesn't mean anything you -- your religion or your color. Anyone who needs food, come on. Yeah. We teach Arabic as a second language. We teach people to rec-- the

Qur'an, to recite the Qur'an. Some of them they recite the whole Qur'an. Young people, 18, 19. Yeah. And they lead the prayers, some of them now. Yeah. Rest is what the activity. We became active in the area, cleaned the streets, cleaned the park. Especial-- we want the -- the young people to work. We don't want them to have too much time. Yeah. Let's see, what else you want to know about that area?

STRONG: Well, let me think. When you were starting the -- the school, Al-Noor School, who else was involved early on; how did you build that initial coalition?

RIMAWI: That -- that exactly Al-Noor School, a guy came from another state, Massachusetts or -- I think. It's an Iraqi guy. I still remember him. He is now in Saudi Arabia. He -- ah, Madaturk [phonetic], his name. And he came to the mosque.

STRONG: To the Islamic -- to --

RIMAWI: No --

STRONG: Oh.

RIMAWI: -- the small mosque, 115.

STRONG: Oh, yeah!

RIMAWI: The small one.

STRONG: Back when you were there.

RIMAWI: Yeah, when we were there. At one -- he -- he was very active. He became a member of the board. At one time he was talking about opening a school, because they have a school there. And honestly, to tell you the truth, I looked at him and said, "This guy one of two things: he crazy or he doesn't know anything. We cannot afford to -- to -- to open a small mosque. And he's talking about a school, cost us millions?" Then he left. He went to Saudi Arabia. But the idea still in my mind, [inaudible 0:40:21]. And another guy, his name is Mohammed, Mohammed Rothman [phonetic] -- very active guy. He's -- he memorized the Qur'an, he knows a lot about Islam, and then he was an imam. Yeah. From there we started. Mohammed Rothman and me. How to start? Many ideas. But the idea we -- we -- we -- we -- we called the mosque arou-- mosques around us, and said listen, "This is what we are going to do. So, we need from each mosque two people

to work with us.” So, we -- at the first meeting, I think, we maybe -- we were 24 people, 26 people. Yeah. And we started from there.

I remember sometimes in the meeting we used to meet -- one day I remember it exactly. We finished the meeting, and I went to work. We didn't sleep. Worked very hard. The -- the school, it cost us \$1.8 million at that time, in a bad area, 20th Street and Fourth Avenue, which is at that time bad area. Yeah. The people there u-- they used to give us a hard time. They used to throw beer at the school. What they call it -- meat. Pork meat.

STRONG: Oh, my God.

RIMAWI: Yes. Yeah. They used to do it. Now the school worth between -- the property with the school -- between \$60-80 million.

STRONG: Wow.

RIMAWI: From \$1.8 to \$60-80 million. At the beginning, the school was very successful. Many students went to good universities, like Harvard, my daughter, in her class. The other one went to Columbia. The other -- other student went to -- what they call it -- Sophie Davis or something School. That's where you go study medical from the first year. You don't study college four years then you go to medical school another four years -- no. You go to this school from the first year you study medicine. Yeah. So was very successful. And after we opened that school also this guy, gentleman, Mohammed Rothman, we didn't agree. So, he went to open another school, Third and Third. Then another mosque, and another mosque. Yeah. And the group went -- but the same group, all of us, were in that mosque, the small mosque. All the other mosque.

STRONG: Farooq?

RIMAWI: No, the one on Forty-Sixth and Eighth Avenue.

STRONG: Oh.

RIMAWI: Yeah. Most of us from that group. Yeah. And we have now -- this Mohammed, like I told you, he came back, he was in Egypt. We have -- they are building a bigger school in Queens. Yes. They want -- they have a big mosque. Yeah.

STRONG: So, they gained their experience from this first project.

RIMAWI: Yes. Yes. Be-- yeah. People there need these things. They need these things. From -
 - from the Al-Noor School, if we -- if we -- if I tell you, "Okay, we have 700 students," I
 can tell you none of them on drugs. Or alcohol. Which is very important. Very
 important. Yeah. It's -- this is one thing. The other thing, they teach them Arabic and --
 and Islamic studies, which is very important for any Muslim or any Arab. What do you
 want more than that? And we started, the tuition was \$2,500. We have the school here,
 [inaudible 0:44:31] School -- 92nd and I think Fort Hamilton [Parkway] -- \$25,000 they
 charge. Yeah. There is a school -- my -- my friend sent his son there -- [inaudible
 0:44:44], International School -- \$25,000 a year. So -- and we used to charge \$2,500. It's
 not --

So, this is -- so people, they like to -- a mosque now we -- we pray in the street, the
 sidewalk. And the community here, they complain about us. They put our picture on
 the Facebook, "Look, they are closing the sidewalk, and --and -- " Complaints -- a lot of
 complaints. A lot of complaints. It's okay! But at least we are very peaceful. When we
 came here I remember in Bay Ridge, this block, half of the stores not rented. You can --
 you can rent -- the bestest store cost you \$1,000. Now look. Now the stores \$6,000,
 \$7,000, \$8,000. The café, the corner café here, Ovington [Avenue] and Fifth Avenue,
 \$8,000. The real estate went up. Never went down in Bay Ridge. Never. Never. The --
 the -- like I told you now, I saw an ad here, next block, one bedroom, \$1,500. Fifteen hun-
 - one bedroom.

It's -- it's -- we -- I cannot say we are better, the Muslim community or the Arab
 community, better -- better than the other communities, no. But we don't -- we don't --
 we -- we -- when we come, or we live in an area, we don't bring alcohol with us. We don't
 bring drugs with us. No mafia. No nothing. And we work very hard. Yes, most of us
 work seven days a week. What's wrong with that? We have -- we have -- we are different
 than the people who live here, I agree. This is -- we have our culture; we have our

religion. So, it's not easy to mix with the community in one year or two years. Still many communities here, United States, if you ask somebody, "Where are you from?" he's not going to tell you, "I'm from Brooklyn." Say, "I'm Irish." "I'm Italian." "Italian? When did you come here?" "Oh, no, no, no. My grand-- grandmother came here." Or "My grandfather." So why you -- why -- why -- why this is okay with the other communities and -- strong with the Muslim community or the Arab community -- to mix and really mix. Anyway, this is -- this is a part -- oh, when where we reach --

STRONG: Yeah.

RIMAWI: -- oh, go ahead.

STRONG: So, when you -- [laughter] I'm trying to go back now -- oh, your -- your earliest meetings about Al-Noor.

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: You had 26 people there.

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: How did you -- how did you come up with a vision for what the school would be like? Were there disagreements? What were some of those early conversations?

RIMAWI: A lot of disagreement. Even the name. We -- Al-Noor. You can write Al-Noor with "A-L" or like I -- this center -- "A-N." We -- we -- it took us more than one -- one meeting [laughter] to agree that the -- we didn't -- if I tell you we have a vision, that's not true. We didn't have a vision. We just want to open a school to teach our kids Islamic -- Islamic studies and Arabic language. That's it. But how it works, what we have to do, no, none of us have any idea. 'Cause none of us were a teacher. So how -- so I -- I don't want to tell you, "Oh, we have a vision and we planned this and -- " No. We didn't have -- just we tried to copy the other schools. That's it.

STRONG: How did you raise money for it?

RIMAWI: People. We -- they -- they donate. Let me tell you something about the -- the Arab community. They are very generous. They are very generous. They donate. They donate. This is totally different than the other communities. The -- even they don't have

money. No. But they donate. In our mosque, we know, 20 percent -- 80 percent of the people, they don't donate. But -- but --

STRONG: I'll pause.

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: This is going? All right. So, we were talking about early meetings, discussions of -

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: -- Al-Noor.

RIMAWI: Al-Noor.

STRONG: You said you weren't a teacher, so --

RIMAWI: Was not -- was not easy. Was not easy. It was difficult. You know, we came from different -- different countries, different background, different education. So, it's not easy to come with one decision. So, it was difficult. It was difficult. And the money also -- we rent part of the school -- it's a building by itself -- to Brooklyn Hospital. So, they paid us half a million. So we take the money and pay. So, this has helped us. I think in -- how many? -- it's five years, we pay everything. We didn't owe anybody one penny. Yeah.

STRONG: How did you find teachers and a first principal?

RIMAWI: We -- we -- ads, I think in *New York Times*, [*New York Daily News*], that we need -- most of the teachers, women. Because they don't depend on their salary. Because our salary's very low. We used to pay \$2,500 -- \$25,000 -- a year. Yeah. With no insurance, with no nothing.

STRONG: Wow.

RIMAWI: Yeah. But women, instead of staying home, said, "Well, I'll go. I -- I do two things. I -- I work." And it's like -- like you are doing this for the sake of God. You are teaching Muslim students Arabic and Islamic studies and -- so this is the way -- this the reason is a little bit now Al-Noor School is going down because now thirty -- \$25,000 and \$30,000 is not enough for anyone. It's not enough for the rent. The -- the public schools start with \$46,000. And if you have a master's, around, I think, \$68 [thousand], something

like that. Yeah. We used to have a lot of teachers; they have their master's degree. Yeah. And now some of them, they moved from Al-Noor School to public school. Yeah. So -- and some of them, by the way, also, they use it as a -- a -- a station. They go teach in Al-Noor School for two years, three years; they have experience; they apply to the license -- or they -- they go to public school. It's a -- it's -- it's -- Al-Noor School is not the best when it comes to education. But it's not the worst.

To -- in my -- in my idea, in my idea, to have successful school, you have to have money coming to you from somewhere. Like you have real estate; you have shares. Take it from this money and spend it on -- in the school. Why? Bec-- if you want to get good teachers, you have to pay. The city pays 46, you're supposed to pay 50, to encourage teachers to come to your school. We don't have the money. None of the schools -- even the Catholic school, they don't do that. Yeah.

STRONG: So, your own children went there. How did you see the curriculum grow and the -- the education vision kind of take place?

RIMAWI: We -- we tried a lot. I -- I -- I just want to tell you one thing. When my son Mohammad graduate, the principal told him, "If you get 1600 in the SAT, you are good." And we found that as a joke, 1600. [laughter] 'Cause the tea-- the principal, he didn't know. We didn't know, in -- in -- in -- in my son's time, that students go to a school to prepare for the SAT. Yeah. A lot of things we didn't know about it. So, well, it's not our mistake. We don't know. If you don't know nothing -- something -- how do you tell somebody else about it? Yeah. Then, you know, the principal start learning more and more, coming teachers from the city and the state, telling us, "You have to do this, you have to do this. No, to have a good SAT you have to have 19 and up. You go to school and prepare for SAT." Later we started the AP courses. And so on. Little by little, little by little, you learn. Yeah. But we know these things now. Until now I don't know it. The truth -- yeah.

STRONG: Tell me about growing the mosque a little bit more, and the Islamic center. You said a little bit about your programs, and I know you mentioned you were interested in talking about establishing the iftar dinners.

RIMAWI: Iftar dinner, yes. This is -- we establish it 20 years ago. This is the idea: inviting non-Muslims to go join us and to eat with us in -- in Ramadan. We did the first one in -- we call it -- they call it Widdi [Catering] Hall, 56th [Street] and Sixth Avenue. I think -- I think, I'm not sure -- he gave it to us free. He's a Palestinian guy, generous guy. He died, God bless his soul. Yeah. We started there.

Of course, not -- important people, they didn't show up, like congressmen or -- then little by little -- I remember the first important guy was Ramsey Clark. He came to -- yeah, to our iftar. This is the -- then people start coming, like the -- the police chief, congressmen, and so on. Local councilmen, the borough president. Before this guy, Eric [Holder], used to be -- his name -- [Marty] Markowitz. Yeah. I remember.

Yeah, we started that. And people start copying us. Even the mayor copy us now. He has his own iftar. The borough president has his own iftar. Yeah. It's a good thing. You invite people, you explain to them about what's iftar, what's Ramadan. You eat with different type of people. We -- we used to -- oh, the Catholic bishop most of the time used to be there. Yeah, nice man. Yeah. We invited Buddhists, Hindus, all types -- Jews. A lot of Jews. Yeah. We has a little bit difficulty with the Jews because they eat kosher.

STRONG: [laughter] Some similarities with halal, but --

RIMAWI: No. [laughter] Difficult. More difficult. More -- and they are not one kosher. Two type of kosher.

STRONG: Oh, right.

RIMAWI: Yeah. Yeah. Jews are hard. Very hard. [laughter] Yeah. It's -- it's good. We -- we -- we applied to do it last year in the street. Hopefully we do it in the street, invite everybody. We advertise, put tables, chairs in the street. "Okay. Come join us." Yeah.

Some people, they have never met a Muslim guy. You would be surprised. Yeah. So, let them meet with these people.

I remember when I -- when I went to Wagner College. We have a lesson called "Stereotypes." I didn't even know what's a stereotype. But she -- the -- the teacher explained stereotypes. "Okay, all Black people are lazy. All the French -- all the French men like women and like to drink." And so -- "All Arabs live in tents. So -- so -- so who's an Arab? Zein is." And I -- okay. I said, "Yes, that's true. We still live in tents. Even here, in my room, I have a tent. Because I cannot sleep. I'm used to it." I was joking. And after one week, a lady, Japanese student, she said, "Can I come and see your tent?" So, I forget. I said, "Which tent?" She said, "The tent you have." I said, "What -- I don't have a tent." She said, "You said you have --" "Oh my God. Are you serious? Are you serious?" And she believed it, that I have a tent. Yeah. I -- and so on.

It's a -- one time when I was -- when I was coming by the ferry, from Staten Island to here, came to next to me, a student, and says -- and very -- very polite. So, we were talking. He said, "Zein, may I ask you a private or a -- question?" I said, "Go ahead, go ahead. I don't have anything private." Said, "What are you doing here, in New York, and you have four wives in Palestine?" I said, "Four wives in Palestine? I'm single." He said, "You're single?" I said, "Yeah, I'm single." He said, "You said you have four wives." I said, "Because that's a stereotype [laughter] that we have four wives! I was kidding." [laughter] I only 27 -- [inaudible 0:59:23] have four wives.

So that's -- some people, they don't know anything about Islam. And they don't know anything at all. They have different ideas, what they heard from Fox TV or a newspaper or a -- a -- they think yeah, this is true. So that -- that iftar, we meet with different people. This is -- here we are. Here we are. We are a human being like you. That's the idea from the iftar. And to -- to -- to tell them about our religion, what's Ramadan, why you fasting 30 days from sunrise to sunset no food, no water, nothing. This is Ramadan. Yeah.

S: Zein?

RIMAWI: Yes.

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: Who were some of the first communities that you invited? How did you get the word out about the first iftar, or the second -- ?

RIMAWI: My phone.

STRONG: Just -- you called people.

RIMAWI: I still have the names with me. [laughter] Yeah. I still have the names with me.

Every year we add, 'cause it change. The city council change. We add names. We take names. Yeah. Also, we did an iftar -- the Arabs invited African American Muslims. The Arab Muslims invite-- we did it twice. It was good also. It's -- because different culture.

STRONG: What did you learn about each other?

RIMAWI: [sighing] They have -- here -- they suffered a lot, the African Americans. In general, not the Muslims only. They suffered a lot. On top of that, the Muslims suffered more than the others, because they have doubly crimes now. They have -- they are lack, and they are Muslims. Yeah. So, we learned --

STRONG: Oh. [laughter]

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: Sorry.

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: So, you were saying what you learned about each other.

RIMAWI: Yeah. You know, one thing I -- I -- I learned in this country: everybody's proud of himself or his community, his religion, his culture. So, I have to respect that. Wrong, right, I -- I have to respect it. If I tell you, "Okay, this is the -- you worship an idol; you worship a cow; you worship a mice," that's your religion. That's your -- I don't believe in it, but I'm not going to make fun of you. This is the way you are. This is the way you are. I respect you the way you are. You -- you don't eat cow meat; I don't eat pork. Yeah. You pray; I pray -- different way, but you are not better than me; I'm not better than

you. You respect me; I respect you. This is what I -- and we are human beings. This -- this is what I learned here. Yeah.

STRONG: So now I guess we're at a point in your life that's, like, in the -- in the '90s, early 2000s, thereabout. You had a business up on Court Street for a little while.

RIMAWI: Court Street, yes.

STRONG: Tell me about that.

RIMAWI: This is a -- a pet food. I bought that. And after two or three years I opened aquarium. Birds, fish, small animals. Yeah. I like it. I like that area. Nice area. Quiet area. Nice people. I think I spent 10 years in that business. It's the longest time I stay in one business. Yeah. I like it. Then after that I get bored -- especially after my son went to school, to medical school, so nobody's helping me. So, I sold it.

STRONG: What was it like up there in that time in the early 2000s? There were a lot of, you know, Arab American businesses up there and that kind of community in that time. There was -- Sahadi's is still there, and there are a few others.

RIMAWI: By the way, people -- Arabs and Muslims -- they used to live on Atlantic Avenue. Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Yemenese. Atlantic is well known Arabs. Yeah. But lately, after -- Atlantic became very expensive. They told me the house -- they used to buy a house, forty -- \$30,000, \$40,000. Now this house, \$30,000, worth \$3 million. So, 20 years and more, they -- people start coming from Atlantic, living here. On Bay Ridge, Sunset Park, Bensonhurst. Or going to Staten Island. Because you sell your house, and - and -- a friend of mine sold his house, for three millions. Three millions. He came back, bought a house here, in -- in Bay Ridge. Half -- half the money, and he put half the money in his pocket.

It's -- so -- if -- Smith Street, I remember, I visit a friend there, 1987, '88, something like that. He told me, "Zein, after sunset, don't go there." On Smith Street, yes. Smith Street now, I don't think there is a store have restaurants in the whole world more than Smith Street. And very expensive street. Yeah. It's -- everything change. Like Bay Ridge. Bay Ridge -- you know what they used to call Bay Ridge? First of all, Bay Ridge -- the name

of Bay Ridge is -- is Yellow Hook. The old -- the old name of Bay Ridge, Yellow Hook. They used to call it White trash. Especially before Verrazano Bridge was built. After Verrazano Bridge built, it changed. When I -- I -- I came here to rent a store -- before I opened my electronics store on Sunset Park, I came here. No traffic, no people. Yes, you can rent any store you want. One thousand, \$1,200, that's it. But you need traffic.

So, I -- I didn't open here. I opened Sunset Park. Was tough -- very tough area. Very tough area. Very tough. But a lot of people. A lot of people. So, the -- in that time, in -- in -- on Court Street, I like it. Quiet. Quiet. And it's not busy. People there, friendly people. They like, you deal with young people most of the time. [inaudible 1:07:04] people, they're -- most of them live in the city. They work in the city. They live there. I like that business. Yeah.

STRONG: And the only reason you sold it is 'cause your son wasn't working with you anymore and --

RIMAWI: No, it became too hard.

STRONG: Aha.

RIMAWI: Too hard. Usually he used to help me. And he's better than me in business. Yeah. I never considered myself a businessman. I always say it. I just -- I work; I pay my bills, my rent. I don't have -- I don't own a house. Not here, not -- not in Jordan, not in Palestine, not anywhere. I just want to teach my children, to send them to good schools. By the way, I didn't pay one penny for any one of them. All of this is scholarship. All of this is scholarship. Not one penny. And -- are you recording?

STRONG: Yes.

RIMAWI: I -- can you turn it off? I tell you something.

STRONG: Okay. I'm turning it --

[Interview interrupted.]

RIMAWI: All of them got a scholarship. This is the most important thing.

STRONG: Yes.

RIMAWI: This is the most important thing, believe me. Money -- I -- I almost -- I use what I use; the rest of the money I donate it. I donate. I'm not rich, but I always donate. Always donate. Any -- any nonprofit organization comes to this mosque, I donate. To a point that the last two years, when I opened this here, I couldn't donate. So, I -- I borrowed money from the mosque. I tell them, "Okay. I pay \$1,000 when I get the money. I pay \$1,000 when I get the money." So, when I got the money, I gave it to them back.

STRONG: Tell me about opening this place, about establishing Al-Noor. Oh, do you need a minute?

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: Okay. It's on again.

RIMAWI: Yup. This is my -- my philosophy on life. I'm not going to collect money to anybody for my kids. I have some land in Palestine. I keep it. I will write nobody can have the right to sell it. Keep it. For them. But they cannot sell it. They have to depend on themselves. I -- I -- you went to the best school in this country, that's it. I -- that's my job. That's my job. I have one of the -- my daughters, I always tell them, "This is the one I'm going to live with." [laughter] I call her my favorite daughter. [laughter]

STRONG: She's going to take care of you when you're old.

RIMAWI: Yeah. She's very patient, very patient. [laughter] So I said, "You're the only one who can accept me and my way when I get old." Yeah. This is -- this is really my philosophy on life. Collecting money for whom? Why? Why? Tell me why. I don't know why people collecting money. Why? To do what? We're here; we can eat anything we want. My [inaudible 1:10:18] children. We can buy the clothes we want. We -- I have a car. So, what else? I have insurance. That's it! My -- my message, to educate my children. That's it.

STRONG: So, tell me about opening Al-Noor? What was the idea here, and -- ?

RIMAWI: Al-Noor -- see that guy who came?

STRONG: Yeah.

RIMAWI: We went, me and the executive director of the mosque, to open a senior center.

We met with a lady, and we were talking -- I said, "A friend of mine, he's Pakistani, will

come and he will tell you how, because he opened one.” When he came, he said, “No, I didn’t open a senior center. I opened an adult daycare center, which is different. So -- and this is better for you and for the people.” So, the idea came from there. It’s -- it’s not easy. Believe me, that’s the most difficult job I have. You are dealing with people, and who -- what type of people? Old people. It’s --

STRONG: I can hear a little bit. Do you want to pause for a minute?

RIMAWI: Not for [inaudible 1:11:39].

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: So the daycare, as opposed to a senior center: what were the benefits of that?

RIMAWI: Of the senior -- a different --

STRONG: Oh, having people come sort of as a daycare thing?

RIMAWI: These people -- these people, a lot of them -- a lot of them, they live with their children. And it’s very, very difficult. Okay, your son will accept you, but his wife is not going to accept you. Yes. And the houses here, it’s not big like the houses overseas. It’s everything -- it’s open. So, I have people, they come here before we opened. Some of them, if I -- if I accept them to stay here, they will stay here, five, six, seven, eight -- as long as I’m here. That’s the reason I have this closed and I put the curtain -- yeah. And I swear, people -- they go and try to look, if I’m here, from the curtains. So I put “closed,” in English; in Arabic, “mughlaq.” And people start -- and some of them, what they do, they call me. [laughter] So I can’t -- now, by the way, we see people outside. But they cannot see us. From the window, no, they cannot see. They -- so, you see this woman. If she looked at us, she cannot see us. It’s -- we have a -- like a net.

STRONG: Yeah.

RIMAWI: Yeah. They can see us only from the door. So, this is -- it’s very hard to deal with old people. Very, very hard. Everyone you have to deal with him in a special way. Everyone. Believe me. Sometimes they call me, talk to me nonsense. That’s -- that’s just -- they want to talk. They go to the office to talk to the ladies in the office. They don’t want anything, just to talk. They bring with them some letters or -- “Oh, we received this; we received --” No. They want to talk. They want to talk. It’s -- we try our best.

I'm a little bit tough also. In the beginning, when we opened, some of them, they tried to control the others, pulling the others, like in a school. [laughter] I asked three people to leave. Which, when we opened, we need every member. But it's not the money. I told them, "Listen. We opened this -- we want to live as a family." People, they are running away from their troubles, from their headache. I want people to wake up in the morning and they are happy. Why? Because they are going to Al-Noor Center. When they come here, they -- I want to enjoy -- them to enjoy sitting here. Not to -- like at school, somebody wants to control them or -- or -- so, one after one, I said, "See the door, sir? It's open." One of them, still, his son is here. He comes to the center. I throw out the father. [laughter] It's -- this is what I believe. It's okay to sacrifice one. Let the people, the other people, be happy. Let the other people be happy. I want them to be happy.

When we order food, the way we order it, I call at least four restaurants. I tell -- I -- we -- we ask them, "What did you cook today?" So, we -- we -- we said, "Okay, Restaurant A cooked one, two, three, four. Restaurant B cooked one, two, three." We came to every member: "What do you want?" Said, "I want this from this restaurant," and so on. We take them Tuesday -- like today, we take them outside -- the women. Just out like, [inaudible 1:15:52], Staten Island Mall, IKEA. Just to spend some time there. Then they eat outside, they come. Thursday, we take everybody to a restaurant like Yemeni restaurant, a Chinese buffet, open buffet, a Turkish restaurant, a Moroccan restaurant we have here. You want them to enjoy it.

I look at them. When they're happy, believe me, I'm happy. It's -- usually I don't know what to say, but in Arab-- in -- in -- they -- they pray for me. Or they -- God bless you in this. I like -- I like it. I like it. I like it. At the end of the day when they say -- they say these things, I -- I feel so happy. So happy. Yeah. And they are happy. Alhamdulillah [praise be to God]. We have not Arabs. We have Italian, have Greek; we have Spanish, Puerto Rican. What else we have? Yeah. And they are very happy. We have a lady who

speaks Spanish, and we -- we don't know how to communicate with her. And so, on the day before yesterday, I was talking to her, and I said -- yesterday -- no, Friday -- I was talking to her; I said, "I'm sorry I cannot talk to you." She said, "I'm happy." [laughter] "You are happy? I'm happy." That's it. Yeah.

This is -- this is the main thing. This is the main thing. I want -- I want people to be happy. And these people, they are old. But they are like kids. Any small things make -- make them happy; any small things make them upset. I -- a woman, a member here, was upset. And say, "Why she's upset?" You will be surprised now when I tell you why. They told me because she got a small banana and the others got big bananas. [laughter] See? So, I say, "It's okay. Give her another banana. Why not?" [laughter] Let her be happy. What's the difference?" Yeah. One day she -- the same lady, she said, "Why don't you bring, I think, certain fruits and --" This is very expensive, that fruit. We cannot bring it for 40 people. I said, "What --" I said, "Oh my God." I said, "It's very expensive." Then I said, "Oh my God. Maybe she cannot afford to buy it." So, I went I -- I bought for her only. I put it in a small bag, and I gave it to her.

I -- I try to understand people, because sometimes you forget that because you have money, you think that "Oh, everybody has money." You -- you can go and eat in that restaurant; you think everybody -- no. Not everybody. There are some people they cannot. And this woman, she lives with her son. He's a limousine driver. And from the way I understood, he's -- he has two kids from his first marriage. So, this means he's not doing good. So, this lady, she sees this fruits, and she cannot afford to buy it. So, buy it. How much it will cost you, a couple of dollars? It's not going to make me rich or poor. So, she was so happy. Yeah. So -- but, believe me, yeah, she was so upset because that -- the banana she took is smaller than the banana her neighbor took. [laughter] Yes.

You [inaudible 1:20:06] -- you have to be a little bit patient. You have to understand them. It's old people. And it's good; it's good when you put a smile on somebody's face. You go home with a smile. Yeah. You go home with a smile.

STRONG: So, you've seen a lot of changes in this community over the years.

RIMAWI: A lot.

STRONG: What stands out in your memory, not just from the street physically, but

important moments in the community's history, opening of important businesses, or --

RIMAWI: Yesterday a lady came to me, a Palestinian woman. She used to be very active, in the '80s. She came old, very old now. She's in her eighties. Oh, she hugged me, kissed me, "Oh, you're my son." And we were talking. She told me, "Zein, the -- the community changed. Twenty years ago, 25 or 30 years ago, we knowed -- we used to know each other, one by one. Now we have a lot of people." Which is true. Now, like here, in -- in -- in Bay Ridge, we have a lot of Yemenis, since the war in Yemen. Usually when you want to rent an apartment in -- in Bay Ridge, it's very easy to find an apartment. It's not difficult. Now it's very difficult to buy -- to rent an apartment with the price they want. Like, okay, you're ready to pay \$3,000 for a three-bedroom, but you cannot find it. The -- a guy here, he wants to rent an apartment; the government pay. It took him more than one and a half years. And -- and then he found an apartment; he pays \$2,700. So, it's -- it change also, a lot of people from here, this -- this -- Bay Ridge. Not -- this is -- used to be the home of the Norwegian people. Until now they come, and every year they celebrate that here in Bay Ridge. Now, I bet you, if we go house by house, store by store, we cannot find any Norwegian.

That is the -- this is life in -- in New York. Change a lot. Change a lot. A lot -- used to be a lot of Greek, a lot of Italian, Irish. Yeah. Now you see a lot of Arabs. You see African American. Still we have Greek, we have -- so -- in -- in -- in Bay Ridge, nobody can claim, "Oh, this is my -- my -- my area; this is my home." Like if you go to some areas, like Bensonhurst, the Italians, this is their home. Yeah. But it's -- not here. Not here.

The Chinese, a lot of Chinese came. If you go to Eighteenth -- Eighth Avenue, you'll be very surprised. And they came -- believe me, they fill Eighth Avenue in six months. This guy used to have a warehouse on Eighth Avenue. And he went to Palestine, so I didn't visit him. After six months, almost, I went to visit him. I walked -- I like to walk. So, I was walking. And when I reached Eighth Avenue, I said, "Oh my God, I reached Thirteenth Avenue without noticing." So, I went back. But I looked; it said, "Eighth Avenue." Eighth Avenue used to be empty. I mean it. It was empty. Empty. Nobody. In the '80s -- in the -- in the block you see one person, two person. After six months, the Chinese -- you full. You cannot walk. "How much you want, 300 for your house? Here's 310, cash." Yeah. It's -- so it's changed. Chinese people are very peaceful people, by the way. They -- one thing about them, they deal with each other. They have their own closed community. You go to Eighth Avenue, it's for Chinese. It's a lot of people. Their -- the houses for Chinese; the stores for Chinese. They deal with each other. Yeah.

STRONG: One question I want to ask you about, you know, developing the community locally is the -- the city council campaign that you helped support --

RIMAWI: Yeah.

STRONG: -- [Khader] El-Yateem.

RIMAWI: Yes. Yes.

STRONG: Talk to me a little bit about that campaign and what made it different from other city council that you had seen go by.

RIMAWI: Okay. Before, the city council I know all my life used to be the state senate. His name is [Vincent] Gentile. Then he lost for Marty [Martin] Golden. Marty Golden become state senate, and Gentile became a city council. They switch almost, like -- yeah.

I can tell you, none of them helped us in anything. Anything. Anything. Name it. None of them. Not Marty Golden, not Gentile. And the best thing, they -- they used to do to come to our iftar, say hello, eat, and give a speech. That's the only thing. Why? Because we don't vote. We -- we vote, but not with a good number. I remember, 20 years --

maybe 20 years ago, a friend of mine, Ralph Perfetto -- he was the president of the Democratic Party -- he tell me -- he told me, "Zein, take this book, and I want you to circle the Arabs and the Muslims in this book." So, I -- I read it once or twice. Anyone who next to the Arab name, I circle it. Less than 500 who vote. So 10,000 people vote, from them 500. [inaudible 1:26:44] go to hell. I don't care about you. So -- and this is what goes on here in this country. You vote; you exist. You don't vote; you don't exist. It's not right or wrong. No. Voting. But the vote is very important. Dollar -- your dollar, and the media. This is -- these are the three things. We don't have [laughter] any one of it. Yeah.

So here, when Father El-Yateem ran for city council, it make the Arabs anxious a little bit. Also, don't forget, we have been now -- in -- in here, in Bay Ridge, almost the mosque 25 years. We worked very hard. We used to bring people from Washington, DC, from another countries, to encourage people to vote. So, people -- because people overseas, they vote. But the vote doesn't mean anything. You say yes, you go there, it's no. You say no, you -- say, there is a joke about Hafil Essett [phonetic]. He -- a guy ask one of Hafil Essett -- what they call them -- lovers or -- he said, "Nobody --" -- because he won with 99 percent -- he said, "Nobody vote said no?" He said, "Yeah. A lot of people said no." "So how come 99--?" He said, "No. The one who said yes, he said yes to the president. The one who said no, he said no to anyone else."

So people, they come with this idea that the vote doesn't mean anything. The government will change it. They think it's here the same. So, when you tell them, "Go vote," they say, "Why should I?" No, it's totally different. Here -- overseas the government change the votes. Here in this country, the votes change the government. So, people start little by little. Then you are talking about the new generation. When I came here, I came by myself. Now, we have six votes -- seven votes -- in my family. All of them, they vote. This makes a lot of difference.

So, El-Yateem really, they work very hard to make sure that El-Yateem would lose. A lot of people. A lot. Some of them, they don't live here. Even though he got 31st, and Justin [Brannan] 38. Thirty-eight percent to 31 percent. So, Justin, the councilman, he knew that without our vote, he cannot win. And he came here. He sat there. He said, "Listen, without your votes I lose. So, you have to vote for me." "Okay, we vote for you. Why not? But also, you have to listen to us. You have to help us." He said, "Why not? You are part of Bay Ridge." So, we agreed. The difference between him and the Republican, John [Quaglione], was 900 votes. And he knows that the difference came from us, from the Muslim and Arab community.

Hopefully, little by little, we will have some people in the city council, in the congress, and -- the same thing like you -- you told me what you learn from the African Americans? I used to -- when I used to work in an African American area, I see everybody is Black, except one advertisement for the city council or for the congressman who was White. Cannot you vote for somebody from your community? No. So the same thing with us. So, they learned -- we learned. The borough president is African American. [inaudible 1:30:39] is the comptroller. What's-his-name was the mayor -- after Ed [Edward I.] Koch, I forget what's his name. He was African American. You were young.

STRONG: [David] Dinkins.

RIMAWI: Dinkins. Yes. It's changed. So, people start learning about -- about -- about voting. A guy told me about the sea -- what they call it? The people who work in the sea -- seafarer, I think, they call them. A guy used to want to be in the -- in the union, used to be the president. And the president, always the president. Smart guy. Said, "I want to go to see how." So, he went one time. He found that all of the people who voted, less than 20. So, the -- the second time he took more with him, and he -- [laughter] he became the president. Because nobody votes. And here, that's what's going on. Nobody votes. If you -- if you look how -- the percent -- the African Americans 13 percent of this country. The Spanish, more. But when you see about the representative, the congress,

the Senate, the city council, the state senators, the governors, most of them White. Why? Because we don't understand the -- the value of voting. That's it. And with Khader El-Yateem, I think people start understanding. Yeah.

STRONG: What did you do to help people vote? What were the -- the outreach tactics?

RIMAWI: Explain to them how it's important. Like I told you, if you vote you -- you exist. It -- you know, here, you -- the judge, you vote for a judge. But just let me tell you something. If I vote a judge, I donate for a judge, and work very hard on his campaign, and one day I am in front of him, is he going to say, guilty? No! He's not. If -- even if he has to say, guilty, he -- he will give me the minimum. And the politician also the same thing. If I vote -- if I -- if John -- John, who's the Republican -- won the seat, can I go to him and say, "John, listen, I need this help"? He'll say, "Zein, you don't vote for him -- you didn't vote for me." Even if most of them -- "They didn't vote for me. Why are you asking me?" But if I go to Justin, I say, "Justin, help me," he cannot say no. Because after four years, he has to run again.

And this is -- with my respect -- this is the pro-Israeli -- and I don't want to say the Jews -- I say the pro-Israeli here -- they know the game. And they vote. And everybody has to listen to them. It's like the gun, rifle lobby. Who's -- who -- who can say no to them? Not because they love them -- no! Because they have the biggest lobby, and people are afraid from them. People are afraid from these people. So, this -- this is the way here, in this country. It's a free country, but also, a lot of tricks. A lot of tricks. I don't want to talk about politics.

STRONG: [laughter] We won't. But I would like to know, how -- how was El-Yateem different? When you say people started to see that it mattered more --

RIMAWI: He -- he is one of them.

STRONG: Aha.

RIMAWI: Yes, he's a Christian. He's a Lutheran. But he's an Arab. He's a Palestinian. He -- and I worked with Khader El-Yateem for more than 20 years. And I -- I tell the Muslim people, "He never lied to me. He never told me something -- "I will do that" -- and he

didn't do it. Or I will say that, and he didn't say it." He worked very hard, in every -- after September 11th, he used to be always in the front, defending the Muslims. Always. Always. He -- I -- honest, I respect this man. I respect this man.

And people, they know him. I remember when his -- his nephew graduated as a priest also. He -- he invited us to the church. I looked, and the church was here. I found that more Muslims than -- than Lutherans in the church. [laughter] That's true. And some people, they think he's a Muslim. [laughter] Because he always with the Muslims. You know, he speaks Arabic; he -- and like he introduce himself always, "I'm a Christian with an Islamic culture." And this is true. He went to public school. Public school, he learned Islamic studies. He knows more -- maybe more than me. Yes. And so, he live in a -- a village or a town, 80 percent of it Muslims. His -- most of his friends Muslims. Here also we work with him all the time, all the time. He's very active also. Smart. Polite. I like him. Honestly, I like him. Yeah.

STRONG: And did you find the -- the community knew him already and recognized him, or -

RIMAWI: Yes.

STRONG: -- did you find you were --

RIMAWI: Oh yeah.

STRONG: -- introducing --

RIMAWI: No, they --

STRONG: -- him and --

RIMAWI: -- know him. They know him.

STRONG: Yeah.

RIMAWI: Because he -- he comes to the mosque a lot. He -- we work together. And so most of the people, they -- they know him. He -- you would be surprised if I tell you, one time he told me somebody called him, I think, three o'clock in the morning, say, "You come or -- or -- or I will divorce my wife." I said, "Are you crazy?" to him. "Did you go?" And "Father, what's the difference between you guys the Christians and the -- us, the

Muslims?" He said, "No, he's not a Christian; he's a Muslim." [laughter] Said, "The guy who called you at three o'clock in the morning and told you 'You have to come, otherwise we will be divorced?" He said, "Yeah, he's a Muslim." [laughter]

So, this is -- so people, they know him. He's very active. Some people, they have trouble -- I remember one time with a student in Fort Hamilton, his daughter had some difficulty with a teacher, he went to there and talked with the principal and then -- yeah. No, he's active. He's for everybody. That's the -- that's the reason people they like him. So, they helped him. When it came to money, by the way, he -- he didn't have any difficulty. He -- he had more than he needs.

STRONG: Just from people donating --

RIMAWI: Just \$20, \$30, \$50, \$100, yeah. He had more than he needs. He stopped taking money. In the -- the early days. So, people like him. People trust him. So that's the reason he reached -- we reached this point, together. Together. Not because of him by himself also. Honestly, the whole community was -- were behind him. The Muslims more the -- than the Christians because most of the Christians here in this area are Republican. So, they -- they cannot vote for him.

STRONG: So how did you -- how did you get people to register? Were you out there with clipboards? Were you meeting in mosques? Were you -- ?

RIMAWI: Yes, in the mosque.

STRONG: What was the outreach like?

RIMAWI: Stand here, stand in front the Arab American Association [of New York]. School, homes --

STRONG: Just knocking on doors.

RIMAWI: And you know you can register by internet now. You -- my -- my daughter, registered by internet. Her -- I told her, go do it, and tell your friends to do it. So, they did it. And when they vote, they went together, they vote. So, this is the way. Like I told you, we -- the new immigrants, like me -- we totally -- our mentality, our education, our culture -- different than our kids. Totally. So, the way they look at life here -- I -- one day,

I -- I was -- I thought maybe I can go back to Palestine, so I was talking to my daughter, Fatima. Told her “[inaudible 1:39:43], I was born in Palestine, I went to school there, all my relatives there, all my friends there. So, I would like to live there.” So, I spoke with her maybe more than 10 minutes. Said, “Finished, Dad?” I said, “Yeah.” Said, “Dad, I was born here. I went to school here. All my friends is here.” Said -- so it’s -- yes, she’s my daughter, but -- but different culture, different mentality. It’s a -- the way they look at things, it’s -- I cannot -- I can’t say -- I don’t want to say totally different, but we have different ways to see things.

STRONG: Can you give me an example? Something they did differently?

RIMAWI: Like I told you, they look -- they look at -- at this country, their country, their homeland. That’s it. They -- yes, their parents came from Palestine. I’ll -- I live here. I’m American. But I still -- my heart, my mind, is over there in Palestine. Which is -- even while I lived here, it was my dream every year to go back, to go back, to go back, to go back. They -- them, they would never think about it. Why go back? Where? To whom? This is their country. It’s -- many things, they look at it different way. It’s a -- it’s a -- it’s small things -- don’t laugh at it. One time we were in the car, and a woman -- really fat woman, crossing -- crossing the street. But she has pants. And she looks so ugly with her pants. [laughter] So I went -- told Fatima, “Doesn’t she have a mirror to look at herself?” Said, “Dad, maybe she likes herself the way she is!” Say -- I said, “That’s a different way of looking.” [laughter] It’s -- they are not wrong. Also, I am not wrong.

Everything change. If -- if I go there now, to my village, and sit with the people -- my friends, who are my age, went to school together, and then -- they will look at me the way I change my -- my body, my face -- my -- also, my ideas change. They will look at me different. They will -- I look at them different. It’s -- it’s -- when I -- I lived in Lebanon, my accent became different than the Palestinians. Used words that we didn’t use it there. Not because I like it, because I lived there. And you copy them. You learn from them without knowing that. Yeah. I -- people -- I see people, Chinese people, going with pajamas to the supermarket. [laughter] I -- I don’t like to sit in -- when -- I sit

there, when somebody comes, I -- I wear something else. I'm sure it came from Germany. I didn't like it, but it still affect me. Yeah. So, my daughter told me, "Dad, you don't have to do that." Her friend came, said, "What's wrong with it?" I said, "No, no, no."

So, you change. You change. It's -- your son, your son will be different than you. Be different than you, the way he thinks, the way -- because the time we were born or when -- up to 20 years ago we didn't know anything about computers. Them, they were born with a computer in their hands. [laughter] It's now, when they -- you -- like a -- a guy came to my house to hook up the internet. We were talking -- he's Irish. I said -- I was -- I told my son, "Go, call your daught-- your sister." She's on second floor. He said -- he took his phone, and he write a me-- I said, "I told you go call her." He said, "Why, Dad, should I go call her? I sent her a message." [laughter] They're sitting next to each other, and they're sending messages to each other. They don't talk to each other. My [inaudible 1:44:36] we -- we talk to each other.

So, people -- they think that in the future the -- the language of the new generation will be totally different. They -- they will have difficulty talk-- writing and talking. 'Cause they -- I remember my daughter -- my favorite daughter, the one I said I want to live with her -- sent me -- send her a message and said -- she send me "Kk." "Kk?" So, I called her. Said, "What's 'Kk'?" Said, "That means okay." [laughter] So from now on, when I send the message to one of my daughters, I say, "Kk." [laughter]

STRONG: So, they're teaching you and you're -- you're changing too. [laughter]

RIMAWI: Yeah. So, it's -- we change. We change. It's not up to us. We change. I give you -- I tell you something. See that, the handicapped people. Handicapped people. They go with groups. You'll find three, four people, and somebody with them. Take a look at the -- the man or the woman with these four people. Sometimes it's -- it's difficult to know who is the handicapped, who's not. Little by little they -- they walk like them. They talk like them. And they -- their life became their -- like their lives.

In Germany, by the way, the teacher used to teach us language. Okay. We understand her; she understand us. The Vietnamese students, they have difficulty talking. They are very smart in writing, in math, in science, the best. But in talking, you don't understand them. Like the Chinese here. So, when they go the first time to college, the first time, the teacher comes -- the teacher who teach us German, she translate. She understand them. But the other, the colleges, they don't understand them. Why? Because she used to them, their -- to listen to their language. And when you see these people, the handicapped, take a look. You'll see -- because that's it, when you -- when you talk to people, walk with people, eat with people, you copy them without -- especially with kids. Especially with kids. How they learn? They look and they do -- they try to do -- the same thing you do. Yeah.

STRONG: It makes me wonder, the -- about the ways you've tried to influence change, by being -- bringing different groups together for iftar, by encouraging people to vote. What are positive changes that you would like to see, and how would you -- how would you influence them, or how would you like to have influenced them, looking back on your life?

RIMAWI: It's -- first of all, we want to learn from them. It's -- they have experienced more than us. They live here. Especially the other -- the other communities. The Jews here, they used to be unwanted. Nobody likes them. Nobody was -- signs -- I heard about signs, "No Jews, no dogs, no Black" -- something like that. So how -- how -- what did they do to make -- to make the other accept them? So, we learn from them. The same thing the African American. Slaves. Everybody looks at them low. Now different. So, we learn from them. What did they do?

At the same time, we want to tell the other people, like when it comes to religion, "Here is our Qur'an. Read it. Read it." Every -- every -- every -- every time we read verses, different verses, from the Qur'an, and we translate it in English. We are not bloodthirsty, or we are not killer; we are not -- read the Qur'an. I don't want to say,

“Read the Torah or the Bible and compare.” No. No. Because honestly, if I -- if I want to show you some verses in the Bible or the Torah, you’d be surprised.

This is the idea -- to know each other. If -- you will be afraid from me as long as you don’t talk to me. You talk to me, you see -- oh. Little by little, oh, we understand each other; we respect each other. That is the -- that’s what we want. We respect each other. You have your life; you have your religion; you have your education; you have your background. That’s good for you. Same thing for me. Don’t tell me I have to change because, oh, you don’t like that. So, I have a lot of things -- oh, so I want you -- I don’t like it in you. But I’m not asking you to change. This is the way you are. So, you have to expect -- accept me the way I am. And then the way I expect you -- the way you are, you have -- the same thing. This is the idea.

It’s a lot of -- a lot of people, they don’t know anything about Islam and Arabs. A lot. Most of them -- politicians. A lot of politicians that don’t know the difference between an Arab and a Muslim. They think every Arab is a Muslim and every Muslim is an Arab. So no, it’s not. We have Muslims -- American Muslims, Russian Muslims, Chinese Muslims. It’s a religion. It’s not a nationality. Arabs -- we have Arabs. We have Arab Jews; we have Arab Christians; we have Arab Muslims. It’s -- and we live together, by the way. We used to live together, in Palestine and the Middle East. We -- we don’t have -- we don’t have any -- any -- any [inaudible 1:50:42], not any problem or struggles. No. Start later, the troubles, when they start coming to Palestine, the immigration and -- otherwise, before, we used to have a good life. Yeah. That’s the idea from the iftar.

A: You doing the interview?

RIMAWI: Yes.

A: Are you guys recording, or -- ?

STRONG: I am recording. But, you know, this is all the questions I have. I’m happy to let you go, unless there’s anything I should have asked you.

RIMAWI: It's just we want to mention the -- the university --

STRONG: Yes!

RIMAWI: -- and the clinic.

STRONG: Okay. Tell me about those two things.

RIMAWI: Yeah. The university we started two years ago. It's three levels. Yeah. Up to the master's. And Arabic and Islamic studies. The main office is in New Jersey, the main building. We bought a building, big building. Used to be for Verizon. And we have an office here, 6808 Fifth Avenue. He's a -- I'm a student. He's a student also there. Yeah. I enjoy it. I like it.

A: [inaudible 1:51:56], you know?

RIMAWI: I enjoy it. The clinic we will open next week. It's across the street from the mosque, 14 rooms, physical therapist. We welcome everybody. You have insurance; we take your insurance. You don't have insurance; we are not going to tell you, "Go home." No. But if you have insurance, give us your insurance. This is the idea of the -- the money we get from the clinic, we will spend it in the university, the -- the college, the mosque, and so on. We're not going to put it in our pockets. At the same time, we are giving service to Bay Ridge in general, and the Arabs -- a lot of them don't speak English. So, when they go to the doctor, how to explain it? But when they go to a doctor who speaks their language, first of all, the doctor has to understand what they are -- what -- what they are complaining of. Where's the pains? Until now, it's not easy for me to go to a doctor and start talking about my body. I don't know the whole body in English, the liver, the stomach, the colon. So, imagine somebody who came from Yemen, and they don't speak English. Remember, my daughter used to work in Maimonides [Medical Center]. One time she called -- they called her and said, "Oh, Mariam, we -- we want you to come to translate. We have an Arab patient." And she said, "God, God, I don't want him to be Yemeni. I don't want him to be Yemenese." Said, "Why?" Said, "I don't understand him." 'Cause different accent, different -- said, [inaudible 1:53:52] -- said, "Yeah, he was Yemeni. [laughter] So it was difficult for me to understand." Imagine the doctor.

STRONG: Yeah.

RIMAWI: Yeah. This is what we expect from -- we have that idea a long time ago. And when we used to start, we have difficulties. We had insurance. High insurance. High insurance. This is what usually stopped us. By the way, Ibrahim used to be one of the founders of the mosque. We were in the twenties, all of us, and he used to be poor, like me. [laughter] And now he's totally different. Yeah, this is, in general, about the -- the college. We have a lot of hope about the college. Like, we have difficulty teaching our kids the language. Okay. Sending them to a private school is not easy. Money. Okay. We have weekend schools. Weekend school, none of these teachers are qualified how to teach a kid for one day a week. And when he comes next week, he remember what he took last week. So, we try to -- to teach teachers, in that college, how to become a weekend schoolteacher. We brought a guy, a doctor from Texas, for two -- for the last three years, to teach about these things. Yeah, I have some idea, good -- very good idea -- idea. He's successful there. Yeah. This is one of the things.

Also, we have -- we hope that this college explains the real Islam -- not the Islam they talk about in -- when they talk about Daesh or what's going on in Iraq or Yemen and -- this is not our religion. So, we hope that this college will -- will teach the real Islam. And hopefully a lot of imams will graduate from college and -- imam sheikh. Because now it's very hard to bring an imam from overseas. And even when they come from overseas, they don't understand the community here. He came -- like, most of them come from Egypt. First of all, he doesn't speak English. Second, he -- most of them came from a village. Imagine, a village in Egypt, coming to New York. How he's going to deal with people? He's not going to understand them. He is not go-- they are not going to understand him. Both. And until now, we suffer from this. Yeah. The -- all -- most of the imams don't speak English. The -- the young people, the new generation, they speak only English. Even when they speak Arabic, they don't speak the high language. They speak the street language. So, it's not easy to teach him when it comes to religion. Hopefully we will start imams that graduate from this college. And so, they

-- now they speak English. They were born here. They know the culture. And they speak Arabic also, at the same time. This is the way we look at.

It's a long way, a long way. But in Palestine -- most of the people in Palestine depend on olive trees. We live with trees; we have a tree 4,700 years old. And it takes time until it grows, and you can get olives from her; that olive tree takes 15-20 years. So, you plant it, not for you, for your children. And the -- the college is for our children. We start -- the clinic we start. So, it's up to our children. If they are really wanting to help their community and this -- and Bay Ridge, the clinic will be maybe a hospital in the future. It's -- if you look here, in this country, you -- you -- people here, like Catholic, Protestant, Lutheran, they start with what -- church. After church, school. After school, college. After college, hospital. You see? Here, next to us, was Lutheran hospital. The school here, Lutheran school. And so on.

So hopefully -- we are a new community, the Muslims, especially the Arab Muslims -- hopefully we'll do the same thing. And after, it's up to our children. They success, good. They failed; we did our best. Yeah. It's -- it's not easy. We worked very hard. We came here. We worked very hard. We started from zero. Different culture, different language. Big family. And we did something. So, it's up to our children. They were born here. They speak good -- we sent them to good schools. So, they have to give back to the community. It's -- what's good to the Arab here or the Muslims in Bay Ridge is good for everybody. When you have a street without drugs or alcohol or -- it's good for everybody. When you have a street with no double park and with no [laughter] [inaudible 2:00:00], it's good for everybody. Yeah. This is what we hope. I hope I unders-- I answered most of your questions.

STRONG: You answered all of my questions.

RIMAWI: Good. Yeah.

STRONG: And you're a beautiful storyteller. Thank you for staying late.

RIMAWI: Thank you. Thank you.

STRONG: I'll let you go now but thank you very much.

RIMAWI: Thank you, thank you.