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Oral History Interview with Mohammad Razvi
Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.10
Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on March 21, 2018
at the Council of Peoples Organization in Midwood, Brooklyn

STRONG: Today is Wednesday, March 21st, 2018. My name is Liz Strong, I'm here for the Brooklyn Historical Society Muslims in Brooklyn Oral History Project. Today I'm interviewing Mohammad Razvi. So to start, we're going to learn a little bit about your early life. Tell me when and where you were born, and a little bit about your childhood.

RAZVI: Thank you, Liz. My name is Mohammad Razvi. I was born in Pakistan. I came into the United States when I was about six, seven years old. And ever since then, I mean, I've been living in Brooklyn. And I grew up in the projects, when it was known as the projects, not public housing. I grew up in the Sheepshead Bay Projects. And I learned a lot of things there. I learned how to live with others, and more importantly, to understand that we are all in the same neighborhood, we're all the same. Now, I have five kids, four of them are married. I have three grandkids. And I work at this nonprofit, the Council of People's Organization, known as COPO.

STRONG: Let's go back a little bit, before we go into COPO.

RAZVI: All right.

STRONG: What do you remember about Pakistan before you came to Brooklyn?

RAZVI: Hmm, the only thing I remember in Pakistan before coming to Brooklyn is, I used to go to school, and if I didn't do my homework, the teachers would take a ruler, and you know, they would slap it on your hand, like, "Why didn't you do your homework?" That much I remember. But other than that, nothing much. I mean, we were taught English there also. And Urdu, the native language. And then, just came here.

STRONG: Your father came first, or did the whole family come together?

RAZVI: So my parents came first, they actually worked at a pizza shop, and both of them worked at a pizza shop, and my mother also had a second job, she worked at a nursing

home, as a nurse, and they saved money -- they saved money, and then they brought us over.

STRONG: Who were you staying with while -- ?

RAZVI: So when I was back in Pakistan, I was staying with my aunt. I stayed with her almost a year, before my parents came back and picked us up, and brought us here.

STRONG: What do you remember about the transition, or your first memories of Brooklyn?

RAZVI: The only first memory I have of Brooklyn, when I first came here, was the pizza. Because my dad said, "This, you got to try this," and I'm like, "Oh my God, what is this? It's disgusting, I can't. I can't even look at it." But then we tried it, and I loved it. And that's the biggest memory I have. Because you know, I put some garlic -- what is it called? No, I put some oregano and garlic on it, and I just ate the pizza, a lot of pizza. The other thing I can remember, let me see. Well, I had to adjust tremendously, because I didn't speak English as well as the other kids. So that I do remember. And yeah, I mean I had to, I guess I had to fit in, in a way. I tried to understand and learn, and that's what we did.

STRONG: So, your first home, you said, was out in Sheepshead Bay. Or, no?

RAZVI: No, we moved into Avenue I and McDonald Avenue. Which is now known, I guess, as Borough Park. So we stayed there for about a year. And then we moved to Sheepshead Bay.

STRONG: And so most of your childhood then was in --

RAZVI: In Sheepshead Bay.

STRONG: So tell me about that. What was the home like? What was the neighborhood like? Who were your friends?

RAZVI: So, the neighborhood was mixed. I had a lot of African American friends, I had Albanian friends, I had Russian friends. I even had a Jewish friend. I still remember his name. Howie Goldman. Yes. So I had multiple types of friends. The things that I remember most about it is, you always had to defend yourself in the projects, and you always had to prove yourself. And I had to, yes, honest to say, I had fights, you know?

And being a new kid on the block, in the neighborhood, so yes, I did have to show my -- show myself, and defend myself.

STRONG: Who were some of your closest friends and allies then?

RAZVI: So at that time, my friends were Ibrahim, Abie, and another one was Howie Goldman. Another one is Reynold Myers. Good guys. Grew up with them. Especially through the high school ages.

STRONG: All the way through high school?

RAZVI: Yeah.

STRONG: So that, I mean over those years, that becomes like family almost, right?

RAZVI: Really close. I mean, and really got a chance to understand how others also have their situations, and you know, how we were in our situations.

STRONG: So tell me about visiting each other's families, and each other's homes, and getting to see how life was different in those spaces.

RAZVI: I didn't too much of that -- do too much of that, we only hung out a lot more. So visiting each other's families, the only person I visited within the family area would be Ibrahim Olevic, Abie. And we visited his home, and he would come into my home, you know. And you know, we're still friends until this day. And, but that's the most important friendship I think I can think of.

STRONG: Do you have a specific story you want to share about something you guys did together?

RAZVI: Oh my God [laughter]. So, we were average American kids. We hung out, we partied, we got into mischief. One of the specific things I could mention, is you know, drove around, we -- after going a night on the town, we traveled in the evenings and -- but we hung out. We were just American young kids. We really always had a good time, and relaxed, but that's what we did. I don't know how to get into specifics yet.

STRONG: Well if any particular memories come into mind, let me know.

RAZVI: Yeah. There's many, but I'm trying to make sure, because he has kids, and I got kids, and I got grandkids, so.

STRONG: So no embarrassing stories.

RAZVI: [laughter] I don't want none of those stories to be out. My grandkids --

STRONG: [laughter].

RAZVI: Be like Dad, Grandpa, you used to do that? I don't know if I want to talk about that just yet.

STRONG: [laughter] Fair enough. Tell me about school. What were the dynamics like at school? And memorable teachers, educational moments, things like that.

RAZVI: Oh. So schools was good. I really loved Sheepshead Bay. Junior high school also. That's actually, IS 14. And PS 194 was my elementary school. So IS 14 really gave me a little bit more changes in my -- how could I say? -- my perspective -- IS 14 gave me changes which I viewed for myself in different ways, because that's where I started to sometimes call myself Moe, not Mohammad. It was like a cool thing, all right, you know what? Call me Mohammad, or Moe, it doesn't matter. But Moe just like, fell in. And it was like, just a -- I was more, more American in IS 14 than I was in my elementary school.

And that's where I started playing handball. And I loved the sport, and you know, I just continued all the way into high school, and then I joined the handball team, which I really liked a lot. And, but I learned. I learned of things, other things. When I say other things I mean, you know, how to interact with others, more importantly, because I had my friends. One of my Russian friends, was Alex. And he's still, we're still friends. Another African American friend, his name is Clayton. We're still friends. We're still here and there we talk to each other. I actually brought my friends to meet with Commissioner Kelly, I remember. I actually have that picture in my office somewhere. I'm going to find that. But that's what I did. I mean, I continued with some of these friends and because of what relationships we had, what I learned, that's what I did.

STRONG: Talk to me about the Moe transition a little bit. What do you mean by more American? And --

RAZVI: So, when I was in, at that moment, when I was in -- I think it was my math teacher, I was in a math class or something, and you know, the teacher said, "Mohammad Razvi," and they said, "Oh, how about Moe?" And I said, "Yeah, that's fine." To me, it didn't make a difference, but then everyone started calling me Moe at that junior high school. And you know, whoever my friends were, they knew me as Moe. It was okay. To me, I didn't see any difference. However, it just was like, you know, just like a nickname, from Williams to Bill, or from Michael to Mike.

STRONG: Elizabeth to Liz.

RAZVI: Elizabeth to Liz. There you go.

STRONG: So it -- you know, my experience of nicknames is that it came with sort of a social shift, or an identity experiment, which is why I ask about it. Also because you said something about being more American than you had previously.

RAZVI: Yes.

STRONG: So tell me what does that mean in your mind, what more American is.

RAZVI: So when I, more American, the way I'm looking at it, is because I had more grasp of the language. Because in elementary, I was still picking up. I was still catching up. So when I was in junior high, I was like, in it. I had everything; I was good. You know, I knew, and I was able to articulate my arguments, or articulate my conversations perfectly. But in elementary, you know, I mean that was a little bit of a difficult time for me.

STRONG: Got it. Another thing you mentioned that stood out to me is learning to deal with difference. People who were different from you. Can you give me an example of a specific story where -- ?

RAZVI: Oh, Howie Goldman. So Howie Goldman invites me to his bar mitzvah. And I take the invitation card, and I show it to my mom. I said, "Mom, you know, this friend of mine, he's invited me," and she sees that it's a bar mitzvah, it's a Jewish community member, and she says, "Are you sure you want to go there?" I'm like, "Yeah, he's my friend, he's my friend." Mom was like thinking, and thinking. She goes, "Okay, go." And

then when I talked to Howie, I said, "You know, my mom was like, kind of like, peculiar, why I would want to go to a Jewish bar mitzvah." And I told her it's my friend. And he goes, "Moe, you know what? Similarly when I was writing out, when I told my dad your name, Mohammad Razvi, to write an invitation card to my friend Mohammad, he asked me the same thing, 'You sure he wants to come? You sure he's going to come?'" And I didn't know back then there was -- you know, to me, he's my friend. So that story stuck with me, and when I went to the bar mitzvah, it was so awesome that, you know, I was like "Oh my God, look at this, you know, he's becoming a," how could I say, "a teen." And you know, the way they celebrated it and everything. It was in a ballroom, out in -- by Avenue U. A huge ballroom, and it was just amazing. I thought it was wonderful. I told my mom, that's great what they did, it was awesome. And like a birthday party.

But that stuck with me, only because when I became an adult, and I started building these relationships between the Jewish and Muslim community, then I start to realize, I'm like, "Oh my God, there's so much dynamics that has to put in place," and that's why my mom was asking me, that's why his dad was asking him, "Is he really going to come? Does he really want to come?" And do I really want to go? And I never thought of it until when I started doing this community service work. It never occurred to me.

[coughs]

STRONG: Wow. Tell me a little bit about your family's religious education, your faith communities, things like that, growing up.

RAZVI: So, growing up -- so when we first came here, there were really no halal meat stores. So one of the things we as Muslims have to adhere towards is purchasing halal meats and halal food. However, at that time, we asked a, my dad asked one of the imams, and he said, "No, you can have kosher at the moment if halal is not available, especially if you're living in the States. And if there is availability, then you don't do kosher, you do halal meats." So that's something that I picked up.

And my religious aspect, you know, it's not like we were orthodox Muslims. However, we were practicing Muslims. My mom prayed. My dad prayed. We went to the mosque. We went to the mosque in Queens, because that was the only place that we had at that time. And then, later on, we found the mosque here on Coney Island Avenue, where my office is right next to, then we started going to this mosque. And you know, participating. And I learned my Koranic activities at this mosque. My kids learned here. And that's what happened. I mean, that's where we were. We practiced, but not orthodox, not fully. I would say wherever we had time, we would. That's what we did.

STRONG: So, as you grew up, and you know, became a young man, an adult, how did your relationship with your religion change a little bit? Or how is it different for your own family?

RAZVI: Ah. So, the religious aspect, so I say right out -- I will say it right out that I am not an orthodox practicing Muslim. I am very moderate. I do pray in the morning; I don't pray five times a day. When I was growing up, I really -- occasionally I will pray. I will not pray daily. And that's something I had to -- I guess, I had to develop on my own. My mom and my dad went, they put me through Islamic teachings; I went there. I do know about the religion, I do know what I'm supposed to do, what I'm not supposed to do. But they brought us in a way of not emphasizing that, in a strict way, that this is what you have to do. You know what I mean? They gave me the opportunity to make my own decisions.

And that's what I've been giving to my daughters, and my sons. Giving them that opportunity to make their own decisions. For example, one of my daughters, she wears the scarf, the hijab. The other daughter does not. My youngest daughter she wears it. One of my sons, he prays. The other one, sometimes. I give them the opportunity to develop and understand each other, of what they feel. And that's what I've been doing.

STRONG: Thank you. I also wanted to ask you about your parents. Who were they like as people? What was -- ?

RAZVI: So my parents were very open-minded. First of all, my mom -- [coughs] my mom, who was a practicing nurse, who had come over to the States -- who was actually the reason why we all came. Because she got her visa, and then it expanded towards the family. So, because of my mom, who worked in the nursing home, assisting others, looking for that American dream. My dad, who worked at a pizza shop, learned how to make a beautiful pie, purchased that pizza shop, then purchased another pizza shop, already had a mindset of, you know, hey, this is the American dream, this is how we can do it. And he really worked with everyone. Any person who needed help, he's the first one there. He's the first one trying to help the people.

And when we came over, that was the time, I think a year later, my dad purchased the first Muslim grocery store for Pakistanis, right near the mosque that we were visiting on Coney Island Avenue. And it's known as Punjab Grocery. And it was the mosque, and Punjab Grocery Store, my dad's store. That's all it was in this neighborhood. [laughter] And my dad always, I remember, until today, any person who was Pakistani came to this country that ran into my dad, all of the sudden he became my uncle, and he's sharing the room with me. And my dad always helped these people, and he continued. And that's something that resonated with me, I guess. And you know, but that's what my parents were. They were helping others, no matter what. And they always did that.

STRONG: I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought. But tell me more about Punjab Grocery, your dad's store. Because you worked there a little bit, right?

RAZVI: Yes. So, in my career paths, I was a stock boy, cashier, and a butcher in that grocery store. I still have the cuts on my fingers to show where I got stitches -- on the bandsaw, when I was cutting the meat one day.

STRONG: I see.

RAZVI: Anyway, my dad started this grocery store, and you know, God willing, you know, he wished for the best, and it did do great. I helped my dad. My other brothers also

chipped in. But I was the oldest one of five boys. So it was more incumbent upon me to be at the forefront, and you know, do everything, as the oldest son. So I did that. I mean, and I really, really worked hard with him. And I still remember, I used to cut the meat, pick up the meat, I used to clean up the place, mop the place, you know? Doing everything, because I wanted my dad to take it easy. He, you know, he did a lot, and I always continued to help him.

But as I'm doing that, I also see my dad helping people who did not get their paychecks yet. And they were requesting, "Can I take some food? I haven't received my paycheck yet." And my dad was like, "No problem." And he still has that book, till today. He started helping others continuously, and I seen that. A person who comes into the store who's a new immigrant, "I'm looking for a job. Is there any job available? Can you help me?" My dad used to take their names and number down, and then if someone else, who actually had a job to offer, he would connect them. A person who's looking to stay, you know, finding a room, or finding an apartment, my dad used to help. Then people who had issues in the public schools with their children, trying to get them registered for public schools, who just came into the country, my dad used to assist them. My dad used to help these people.

I mean, and this is one of those theses I'm going to do for my doctorate. Where the ethnic, mom and pop stores, are the actual first social service agencies for these community members, the new immigrants. Yes. Those are the places, these mom and pop businesses, are the ones that people turn to first, and those social service providers, well those business -- small mom and pop business owners, are the social service providers for those communities. Many people don't realize that, but it is a fact.

And I know I will prove it one of these days, when I get a chance, I'm going to do this.

STRONG: Just go and survey all of these stores, and see what they --

RAZVI: Absolutely.

STRONG: Well tell me, what are the key elements of -- have some water, because it's right here. [laughter]

RAZVI: Yeah, it's just -- I know I'm like -- so sorry, yeah.

STRONG: Don't worry about it too much. The most important thing is that you're comfortable.

RAZVI: Okay.

STRONG: What are the elements of successful social service that you saw on the ground in this grocery store?

RAZVI: Oh my God, the most important thing is trust. I want you to put everything to one side, all the services, and anything, one side, and put trust into one side. In any of these enclaves, any of these ethnic communities, no one will go to someone and say, "I don't have money for food, can you give me food?" They will feel ashamed. They will not tell you that until they trust you. My dad, in -- how can I say it? My dad explained to us, if you don't help others, then what will God look at you and say, "What did you do?" You cannot be a person who does not help others. It is in our Prophet's teachings that you always have to help your neighbor. And anyone who needs help.

And that's what's -- my dad, my parents, taught us. And that's what I've been doing. And that's what my teaching to my kids is also, that they always have to look out for the other people. Because if you do not do that, then when God -- when you pass away, and God asks you, what have you done, you can always say, I've done this for myself, I've done, but then God will ask you, "What have you done for mankind? What have you done for others?" And that's something that resonates.

And our last name, Mohammad Razvi, is actually -- the Razvi last name, is also connected. We're a descendent from the Prophet's bloodline. Which is Imam Reza, which is, his burial site is in Iran. So, it's a bloodline that continues. And that is

something that we are always taught, that we have to -- and we do. And it's just in our heart to do that.

STRONG: How do you build trust? What does that look like, or what did it look like when you saw your father doing it?

RAZVI: So my dad -- when a person comes to him, and asked him that "I don't have money today," quietly, he will tell them, "Whatever you need, you can take, it's okay, and give it to me when you got it." That built the trust slowly by slowly. The person then realized they can trust him with other issues. And because of that trust -- and this is the secret to my success, or this is the secret to anyone's success -- because of that trust, when I opened up another store across the street, which was about books, 99 cent store, and Islamic books, because of that trust, community members came to that store also, and said this is a great store. Because of that trust, when I opened up Punjab Sweets, which was a restaurant, I was very successful, to have that restaurant run. Because of that trust, people came to me after 9/11, and my parent, my father, for help. Because they knew our family would not discuss a person's situation within the community to another person's situation.

And that's what happened. And it just continued. And I mean, even till today, people ask me, you know, why do people come to you? Why do 15,000 people come to you every year now for help? It's because that trust that we have within the community. People know, community knows, that it is very confidential here, even if it's -- like you don't just go to someone and say, "My brother's arrested because of terrorism, how can you help me? What do I do?" You go to someone who you trust. You don't go, ladies don't go to someone and say, "I'm a victim of domestic violence, my husband did this, this, what do I do?" Unless she trusts you. And that's what they do, they trust us. And that's what we do. Help them.

STRONG: So it builds on something as small as a neighborhood grocery, into now --

RAZVI: A 20,000 square foot community center, which has a senior center, a universal pre-K program, it has immigration services, and other benefit services from the city. And we are a main hub for this Muslim community. And others. And it's throughout the city. It's not just in Brooklyn.

STRONG: I want to get back to how you built all this in a little minute, but first, while we're still in the part of your life where you're relatively young, tell me about going back to visit Pakistan after high school, meeting your wife. Tell me that story.

RAZVI: So, after high school, I had the opportunity, my mom was like, "Oh, you know, you guys haven't visited Pakistan, let's go." And I'm thinking, as a kid just came out of high school, and I'm like oh man, I'm free, I can do other things. And I'm like okay mom, let's go. So, we all go. And lo and behold, I see my wife to be, who I haven't seen for the past whatever, 12 years or something. And you know, she like, "You know, you used to beat me up, and you know, you used to do this," and I'm like, "Oh my God." [laughter] No, and I didn't remember it. But she remembered, because she got beat up. So, these are the little things that I was like okay. And then I was like, to my mom, I'm like, "You know," my mom's like if you ever think about it, you know, this is a wonderful girl, this is a wonderful. I said, "Listen Mom, okay I'll think about it, you know?" But all of the sudden, one thing leads to another, I'm like, "Mom she's perfect, she's a beautiful person, and I really like her." I talked to her, she -- you know, "Is there something, you know, maybe there's some way to do any other introduction, or something more?" And one thing leads to another, and my mom's like, "Her parents have passed away, her grandma's the only person here, and her brothers and sisters." And in our culture, if you have a talk, something of a serious manner about marriage, it would be at least you have to do it -- you know, have a marriage, you can't just, because the grandma wants to see her to be wed in front of her eyes, you know, God forbid something happens to her.

So I said, "Okay Mom I think I'm very comfortable with her, and I think she -- you know, just ask her, is she okay, you know." So as the discussions happened, we talked,

me and my wife to be, I talked with her, I relaxed, I said this is, "I'm coming from America, and so forth, and so on. And I'm sorry I beat you up when you were younger." That was the first thing I had to say it's like, and that was it. One thing leads to another, all the sudden a date was set, and we got married. And it's been great ever since.

STRONG: Could you tell me the stories from 12 years prior, when you guys were little kids?

RAZVI: I, well you know, she told me like, you know, "You used to run after me, and you know, beat me up, and then go hide," and I was like, "I'm so - " I didn't remember any of that, but that's what she -- I was like, oh man, "I am so sorry. I'm so sorry." That's all I could -- remember, I just kept sorrying. [laughter]

STRONG: Man, little kids are terrible at flirting, what can I say?

RAZVI: Yeah.

STRONG: [laughter] So, what was your wedding like? You had it there in Pakistan?

RAZVI: Oh, so when I had it in Pakistan, I was like, I want a white horse. So I got a white horse to go pick up my wife. It was wonderful. I loved it. And in Pakistan, because it's such a close -- you could say the neighborhood knew us, so it was not just like a small wedding, it was like, huge! I mean hundreds of people were there. I'm like wow. And I didn't, you know, I was like, do I know them? I don't know all of them. But everybody was part of it. It was great. It was wonderful. I came with a white horse picked her up, and you know, then we got into a car, and then we drove off, and you know, did the whole ritual with the imam, and everything, but it was wonderful. It is, truly it was wonderful.

STRONG: So she had been living in Pakistan the whole time?

RAZVI: She had been living in Pakistan all that time. She was not here.

STRONG: So, what was her transition to the U.S. like?

RAZVI: So basically, I mean, when -- it took about a year, I think, for her to come here. I sponsored her with my dad. So, when she got here, it was immediately -- she and I actually started college together. So, I was going with her to the college TCI, Technical Career Institute. So we used to go together to college, and back and forth, and we used

to work together. And it was great. And that was the way we did it, you know? We just, always together. And ever since then. But it was, I know it was a shock for her also. But because I was there with her all the time, it was okay.

STRONG: Sort of explaining the public transit system, and Brooklyn, and --

RAZVI: Everything, from public transit system, to the beautician, the hair salons, to shopping, everything.

STRONG: Those must have been really fun conversations.

RAZVI: It was very -- well not, well, it was the first time I actually went to a beauty salon. I had no idea, you know? [laughter] I'm bringing my wife, like, you know? But I learned too.

STRONG: You learned too. What were you guys in school for?

RAZVI: So I was going for an engineering degree. She was going for administrative assistant degree. Yeah, for, I'm trying to remember. I think it's something to do with medical billing or something at that time. And we continued then, you know, she was pregnant, we had our first child, Aasma. And it was difficult to go back. I finished off my degree. And that was that. And I was trying to look for a job. Couldn't find one. So I opened up a construction company.

STRONG: With your family, or just general?

RAZVI: No, basically with my brother, and a friend. And that's what I did, I opened up a construction company.

STRONG: Tell me about being a parent for the first time, how did that change your life?

RAZVI: Oh my God, that changed everything, all I could think about is what I have to get for my daughter, whatever I never had, because I grew up in the projects. I wanted to make sure she gets everything, at least. You know? She gets a bike. She gets this, she gets the toys, she needs everything, and whatever I can provide, I will get. Actually, that's probably why I was so ambitious in doing multiple businesses. So I started the construction company, I was doing construction jobs. I was helping my dad with the

grocery store. I opened up another store. I opened up the restaurant, and I was doing all these -- and some real estate. That's what I did.

STRONG: So, it started with the bookstore, after the construction company.

RAZVI: Yes.

STRONG: Then the restaurant.

RAZVI: Then the restaurant. And during that time I also had, with the family, helped to purchase other properties.

STRONG: That's the real estate part?

RAZVI: That's the real estate part.

STRONG: Interesting. And what was your wife doing at this time? Was she in the home at that point, did she finish her degree?

RAZVI: She was in the home. No, she was in the home, she was taking care of them, well I had another kid, then I had another kid, and I had four kids.

STRONG: Just one after the --

RAZVI: I just had, you know -- I love my wife.

STRONG: [laughter] Tell me a little bit about your kids' education. Where did they go, and what interested them?

RAZVI: So my kids -- so one of the real estate investments that I did, I really liked this school, it's called PS 199. I loved the fact that it was a uniform for the school. And I wanted my kids to go there, so I purchased a building near there, and moved into that apartment building. And that's where my kids went. PS 199. They did great. I was happy. But 9/11 happened. I got worried. Even some of the teachers they said some things for my kids. I took my kids right out of the school, and put them into private school.

STRONG: What did the teachers say?

RAZVI: Well, let's put it this way. Some of the -- without mentioning names, some of the teachers like "Why would someone from your religion do this?" Like, as if the kids were

the ones to be blamed. It really did not give a good impression. And I got more worried for the kids.

My daughter, older daughter, she was at Seth Low at that time, and she was pushed down by a kid, and her scarf was pulled off, and she was cursed at. And when I brought it to the attention to the dean of that school, in Seth Low, the dean made it feel like it was no big deal. I'm like, "Are you kidding me? What do you mean, it's not a big deal that some kid cursed my daughter and told her to go back to her country, and pushed her down the stairs, and pulled off her scarf?" It's same as if someone pulled off a shirt off a girl. That's the same feeling for a girl who wears a scarf. The teacher -- the dean, or the principal didn't pay attention. I said, you know what, I took my kids out. I was not going to take a chance.

STRONG: All of them?

RAZVI: All my kids, I put them into private school, in Razi School. That's what I did.

STRONG: How did you hear from your kids about what was going on at school?

RAZVI: Well basically, my kids actually didn't open up to me and tell me that. Because they knew I would make a big deal about it. I learned it through this survey that, when I did this survey for children, and community -- hate crime surveys. That's when I learned, this is what was going on with the kids. And I was just in shock. And one of the -- and some of the surveys was from my kids.

STRONG: Holy cow.

RAZVI: I had no idea.

STRONG: So tell me more about this survey, this was right after 2001?

RAZVI: So this was after 2001. When I opened up the organization, I was assisting community members, and all the things that I was hearing, helping them. And with the Human Rights Commission, and at that time Mayor Bloomberg, I had a discussion, and I was talking to them, and all the community leaders got together, and we were part of that survey. It's a "Discrimination Against Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians in

New York City Since 9/11.” We were also part of that, and we actually had the largest amount of surveys conducted. Because we outreached tremendously. And this became a -- 27-page report? I think it was 27 pages. Yeah, this became a 27-page, 27, 28, 28-page report, where it described the discrimination that happened with children, with adults. And the largest amount of discrimination happened with Pakistanis.

STRONG: Oh, would you look at that, 17%, Indian 12%, Bangladeshi 10%, Sri Lankan less than 1%.

RAZVI: And if you add in all the South Asians, because of the color of our skin, the Pakistani, Indian, and Bangladesh was almost, I would say, 50% who were discriminated against, compared to the other groups who actually were the ones who actually did the attack were part of their country.

STRONG: So, it looks here under Arab, it says Yemeni, 13%, Egyptian 9%, Palestinian 6%.

RAZVI: So if you add that, it was -- and we were the ones, because it was easy to, I guess, say oh yeah, he must be a Muslim, or he might be, you know.

STRONG: That's so interesting.

RAZVI: And this is what we were discussing, and we were like oh my God. And this is the book, right in front of you, with hundreds of cases.

STRONG: So these are the actual responses here that we're looking at?

RAZVI: These are actually the responses, yeah. So in the survey -- here, let me read you one of the surveys.

STRONG: Okay. Is that okay?

RAZVI: Yeah, yeah.

STRONG: Okay.

RAZVI: Absolutely, there's no names.

STRONG: All right.

RAZVI: So, one of the surveys is a 13-year-old female, she's been here for seven years in the U.S., she came from Pakistan, she's Muslim. Discrimination happened. "They told me to go back to where I came from, and said that 'I hope you die.'" Could you imagine

someone saying that to a 13-year-old, an adult? Did you report it? "No." Why not? "I don't tattletale." Have things changed after 9/11? Did that affect your life in any way? "Yes. It makes me sad to be blamed for something I didn't do." And you can go on, and on, and on, and this is what's happened to the kids, and this is what I was looking at. And I was like, oh my God.

STRONG: Yeah, 12-year-old, 13-year-old.

RAZVI: Yeah.

STRONG: So you read through these, and found your own daughter's responses?

RAZVI: Yeah, when I was talking to her, I was like -- you know, it was in the school or something, and I'm like, "Did you know this happened to your school?" "That's my survey, Dad."

STRONG: [laughter] Oh my God.

RAZVI: Could you imagine the look on my face? I'm like, oh my God. That's what happened.

STRONG: Okay. So now, I'm, I want to ask about building trust with your own kids. Because there were reasons they didn't tell you.

RAZVI: Yeah. They were afraid.

STRONG: And then you found out. And so, how did the two of you work together to find a solution that worked for both of you?

RAZVI: So the most important thing was, I explained to her, "I know you thought that I was going to make a big deal, but if you don't tell me, I can't take any steps." And then, she started to understand. So ever since then, I mean, with all my kids, so I told them, whatever happens, you just let me know.

For example, my, one of my kids got into an accident. You know? And you know, if I didn't have these conversations with them, they wouldn't tell me. Or if he, if he, you know -- how could I say? -- if he gets a ticket. And so ever since then, especially with my oldest daughter she tells me everything, and I'm trying to always, "Okay, this is how we're going to deal with it." Because she was under the impression that I would

have a huge rally, or have a protest. And I'm like, "Look, that's not how things are always done. Even though some others do that way. But, there are other ways to do it, to make sure --"

I mean, only -- I was fortunate that I was able to help my children, from public school to Islamic school, or private school, because I could afford it. However, the kids who are not, the parents are not able to do that, what happens with those kids? And that's why I was emphasizing on pushing the report, and working with the administration. And with Mayor Bloomberg, emphasize suggestions -- and it came with the Human Rights Commission -- which were implemented and talked about. Even until today, I am working on doing presentations about hate crimes with NYPD hate crimes task force unit, and FBI hate crimes task force unit. And that's important for the community members to be involved, and to understand where to report.

STRONG: What were some of the suggestions that were given in this early report?

Especially for public schools, for children.

RAZVI: So, in -- let's see. Let's go with -- let's see. For, first of all, for law enforcement, many suggestions were made that community members from law enforcement agencies who are hired should not only be just police officers, they should also be captains and chiefs also. They would be given that opportunity to be, you know, to be able to also proceed. And within the school, and education discrimination services, we were suggesting that there should be seminars to educate the community, because they were reluctant on reporting the incidents. If -- in the survey, it shows 80%, I think it was, or 83% did not seek help.

STRONG: Wow, that's really telling.

RAZVI: And that's why we emphasize on starting to do these -- we started doing these town halls, and meetings, of what's discrimination, what's a hate crime, and where do you report it, and why you have to report it. And more emphasis was also now -- because in schools -- to do presentations. I mean, right now, we are doing know your rights

presentations in public schools, which didn't happen before. Working with the mayor's office, with Bill de Blasio's office now, currently, we are working tremendously with the mayor's office to do these presentations about know your rights. I think we've done maybe about 40 presentations already.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: And if you look on my chart here, the spike of hate crimes after the election. These clusters are pinpointed in red to show how many hate crimes were happening in what clusters, in the five boroughs. And we're documenting it. And we're actually working with the Human Rights Commission right now to conduct a survey. But not only just for Muslims, but also for the Jewish community, the Latino community, and the African American community. Because at this time, the hate crimes are happening with anyone other.

And we're also pinpointing it on my map in the states. So this is the map of the United States, and it shows the hate crimes that are happening in those red markings. So, the funny thing is, anything that's in the West Coast, it's apparently more violent.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: A person's either beaten up, shot at, or bloodied during the hate crime incident. And anything that's in the East Coast, it's verbal, and so forth, and so on. Like for example here, this teen, this student, look at this. This is one of those things which, really, I just cannot believe it. So, a teacher gives an award to a 13-year-old little girl, "Most likely to become a terrorist."

STRONG: Jesus.

RAZVI: Could you imagine that? A teacher is doing this. In Texas, look at this. It's sickening.

STRONG: Yeah, there's a picture of it right there --

RAZVI: There's a picture of the award.

STRONG: -- and it looks like a certificate, there's the girl's name right on it. "Seventh grade, 2017/2018."

RAZVI: A teacher rips off a hijab of a girl. A teacher. I mean, it's mind boggling. You know? And I'm thinking, I'm like, oh my God. Yeah, look at the picture of the young lady. I mean to me, she looks like African American.

STRONG: "Most likely to blend in with White people" award was given to this child.

RAZVI: Look at this. So that's what we're doing. And because of lessons learned, I know it needs to be documented, and that's what I'm doing. I learned. And I'm continuous on it, you know?

STRONG: Yeah. Just to describe for the recording, you have maps up on the wall, some of New York, one of the country, and in addition to little pinpoints where these incidents took place, you also have pinned up photocopies of the news stories that covered them. You know, photographs of the people. And it looks like sort of Midtown, Lower Manhattan, has a lot, and there's quite a few in Brooklyn, as well.

RAZVI: In Brooklyn. And there must be more that I haven't -- you know what I mean? This is only the ones that I'm -- these are only the ones that are coming to me, or to Facebook, email, or Twitter. And you know, that I see. There could be much more which I haven't seen. You know, in the Jewish community, ADL [Anti-Defamation League] reports White supremacist murders has doubled.

STRONG: Since 2016?

RAZVI: Yeah, 2017, yes.

STRONG: Twenty-seventeen. Holy cow.

RAZVI: So that's what's happening. And --

STRONG: Yeah. And you said you're developing a survey for this now?

RAZVI: Yes, we're doing the survey as we speak, with the Human Rights Commission of New York City. And it should be completed soon. And then there's going to be a report. The other thing, one of the most important things that happened, is getting the community together during these times, it's essential. And it's working out. You know, New Yorkers are coming together. You know, and that's great. And that's what we need.

STRONG: I want to ask you, before 9/11, this community, this local community is budding. You have a mosque, you have a grocery, then you have a bookstore. Tell me about the development of this part of Coney Island Avenue, and what it grew into, and what you saw.

RAZVI: So, prior to 9/11, every person, even the yellow cab driver, the car service persons, were doing great. This little neighborhood expanded. And every other person you will see, they were trying to open up a new business. But after 9/11, people got scared. Community members got scared. They actually fled. Because there were so many roundups were happening, just because of a person's name. People were afraid. And it actually, there was an exodus that happened.

When we surveyed during that time, we found out that over 20,000 Pakistanis and other Muslims left Brooklyn. And they migrated to where? Canada, and other countries. And under the reason -- the reason that was given was, "We're fleeing America." The freedom of the world, and we're being persecuted. And it was just unbelievable.

I know -- even until today, if you go to Canada, and Toronto, you will see a bustling Little Pakistan in Toronto. And I remember when I went to visit there, the hairstylist who was next to the grocery store in my neighborhood, he migrated there, and he actually has his own store, his own hairstylist store, his own house, and he said, "I'm living the American dream in Canada." And I was like, oh my God. He's like, "Yes, I'm living the American dream in Canada. I was so afraid after 9/11, what was happening in the neighborhood, that I just left."

STRONG: There were two big things I recall, and there may be others. One you mentioned was the roundups, you're referring to mass arrests. There was also a registration in 2002. So, give me some details about how the community experienced these two things, maybe talk about the policing a little bit first.

RAZVI: Okay. So let me get the media stuff, sorry.

STRONG: No, it's all right.

RAZVI: I still keep Bill Gates.

STRONG: [laughter] Yes, I see that. Right on the cover of your binder.

RAZVI: Yeah, because -- all right. So. I'm going to pull over for -- okay. Okay, [inaudible]. All right. So, after the attacks -- I'm looking for that one particular story, which is pertaining towards registration. Because we did a whole video. A whole video and everything. Give me a second. Special registration, registration, here we go.

Okay. So during that time, in 2001, it's this one. Special registration, 25 countries. Times. I just want to get the date right. [inaudible] All right, so during the time of special registration, this is what was happening. This was one of our clients. Any person who was Pakistani, they were in a Catch-22 if they were a visitor into the United States. They were damned if they didn't register, and they were damned if they did. This particular student registered, he had a visa, he was going to school, when he registered, he was detained for almost, I think, 24 hours. He wasn't allowed to get anything to eat, and then he was informed that he has to leave the country. He's like, "But my visa says I'm allowed to stay, and I'm allowed to go to school here." But yet, they were being put into deportation proceedings. And this is what happened to so many at that time. This is what scared the community. This is what scared everyone and anyone who was here. Twenty-five countries were put onto that, and Pakistan was one of those countries.

STRONG: Put on the list of countries --

RAZVI: On the list.

STRONG: -- people had to register if they were from.

RAZVI: Had to register if they were from there.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: Other things that happened in the community, I will show you. Individuals who were trying to get, who were trying to become citizens of the United States, and who went through the process, were being denied citizenship. Because they were saying that "Oh, you need to go through a background check." And the background -- it takes you usually in the immigration process, to naturalize, close to four to five years you have to be a green card holder after becoming a green card holder, then you apply for becoming a citizen. So now, what happened was, individuals were putting to two or three years for background check. Which means you can't become a citizen after five years. You're going to become a citizen maybe after eight years. And people couldn't vote, people couldn't advance in their careers. They couldn't do anything.

And this is, we found out, because we -- the *Daily News* aired the story that there were over 2.7 million names of applicants into the FBI for additional background checks, causing a backlog. We worked with our Congresswoman, Yvette Clarke, at that time, and she emphasized -- and then all of the sudden, they started to move, and you know, many applications were starting to be reviewed. Otherwise, it would never have happened.

STRONG: And this story came out in 2006.

RAZVI: Yeah.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: And try to scan it and get it to you. I can get you all this information. More than this, we also found out, people who registered, who complied, were being put into deportation proceedings, and about 83,000 individuals registered with the FBI and INS under the special registration program. Not one individual was even alleged to have any types of link for terrorism. However, they put 13,000 individuals into deportation proceedings. And the reasons were being very -- how could I say it? The reasons were very simple. "Oh, 10 years ago, you had moved to Brooklyn, to Queens, and you didn't inform us. We're going to deport you." Those were the reasons being used at that time.

STRONG: Practically cooked up.

RAZVI: Well, it's not cooked up; it's actually -- it is a guideline in the book for immigration protocol, but you know, this was something that was never practiced. You know? Never emphasized. So, and then all of the sudden we're hearing that Guatemalans were being deported. Jamaicans were being deported. And I'm like, oh my God, and they were using the same rhetoric, just to deport those individuals.

Here's a story in the *Village Voice* where a person was being deported, and he was in detention. His name is Tauqir Zafar. He was about to have a wedding, and he went to visit his family and come back, and they started putting him into deportation proceedings. We intervened, I intervened, and helped, and assisted them. And you know, lo and behold -- it took some time, but then they finally released him. Until today, he comes and visits me, and tells me, "Now I have kids, and living my American dream, thank you so much." Those are the things that I live for.

STRONG: Did he make it to his wedding?

RAZVI: He made it to his wedding. I mean, that was the thing. I mean that's why I emphasized, like oh my God, how could you? This is not --

Here's another case. This is the Shahid Ali Khan's case. This person, the father, who also registered, he was apprehended, put into deportation proceedings. His child, who's a quadriplegic, and also has to get a tube, a feeding tube in his stomach, was put into deportation proceedings. This aired -- I aired it. I contacted the USCIS, and they looked at the case, and thank God, then they released him May 11th, 2005.

STRONG: Two thousand and five. Wow.

RAZVI: He was able to reunite with his family. And his case was the one that just recently came up, that was aired in the *New Yorker* magazine.

STRONG: And you told me before the recording how it all came out.

RAZVI: Yes. And I was so happy, he came to me, you know, two days ago, he goes, "Moe, I got this, Mr. Razvi, look, I got this, I got this, they're letting me stay."

STRONG: Permanently?

RAZVI: And I was so happy. No, he -- the order of stay is in effect, and they're not just, you know, they're not going to put him into deportation proceedings at the moment.

STRONG: Great. And he -- his family has been in the country now for how long?

RAZVI: It's got to be over 20-something years.

STRONG: Yeah, I believe it.

RAZVI: Yeah. So, I mean I can go on and on, multiple stories, you name it.

STRONG: Well tell me about the first ones you remember, before you knew how to make these calls, and get media involved. Tell me about some of your first interventions.

RAZVI: Okay, so this is what happened. After 9/11, very basically, the office I opened up, Council of Pakistan Organization, which was back then and now, Council Of Peoples Organization, people used to come into my office and say, "My husband's arrested, my son's arrested, my cousin's arrested, what do I do?" And some people came to my office, "These are the FBI card left in my office. I don't know what to do; I'm afraid they're going to deport me, or they're going to do this." I started making phone calls. If a person was missing, I started calling county jails. Because that's where they were being held. I was calling multiple jails, and I still have the list, of trying to figure out where they were being held, and if they were being held, then try to get them pro bono attorneys.

I held the largest legal clinics for the community. I had over 1,000 people just come in, in days after days. Just to get legal services. I was working very closely, even then, with Donna Lieberman of NYCLU, Udi Ofer, and others to assist these constituents. I learned that their -- free legal representation is possible through Legal Aid. Until today, I'm holding free legal clinics, and immigration services. As I was learning, I started to implement those programs. And now, if a person is arrested, I need to only make one

phone call to find out where he is, if that agency has them. And provide them with assistance.

This is what I learned, this is what I do now. But I'm also teaching it to others. I'm making sure that other community members also are aware, that I'm not the only one. The most important thing that we can do is teach others, so they can help others. I can't help everyone. Because not everyone knows me.

STRONG: So, before -- when this was just going to be a fabric store, before you knew about the Council of Peoples Organization, or the Council of Pakistan Organization, tell me about some of those first conversations, when people were asking you "What do we do? This is happening. What is happening?"

RAZVI: So, when a parent would come in and say "My son has been picked up, and we don't know where he is, what do I do?" I sat there, and I asked them, okay, "Do you recall if he was involved with something? Do you recall why they would suspect --?" For example, one of the cases -- oh, even the parents -- well let me backtrack.

All right, so one of the cases I want to talk to you about is, here, this FBI case. I don't want to mention the name, but this particular individual, Mr. A., he came to me crying, sat in front of my office, and he said, "I need help, I need help, please, I need help." I said, "Okay, what happened, what happened?" He goes, "It's been four days, I've been sleeping in my car." I go, "Why, what do you mean?" He goes, "There was a card in my doorstep, in my apartment, and I'm afraid to go." I said, "Okay," I went there, and I picked up the card. The card says -- it's from a federal agent, and all it says, right here, "Please call me ASAP, I need to ask you some questions. Thank you." I called up the agent, I said, "How can I help you? Mr. A. does not speak English." "No, no, I think he could speak English." I said, "You have to understand," to the agent, "many Pakistani community members do speak a little English, but when you use 'affiliation,' when you use terms like 'apprehension,' or larger terms, they will not understand, and they can

incorrectly answer that question. Is it possible for me to be there to translate, as a community organizer, so then the person can come forward?" He goes, "Okay, no problem."

The agents came, the individual came, Mr. A., and I sat down. And all in all, it turns out, Mr. A. and his friends went to visit Niagara Falls. They live in New York, they went to Niagara Falls, and they took some pictures of themselves. A police officer in Niagara Falls noticed that these were Middle Eastern looking men taking pictures of Niagara Falls, and one of those pictures was too close to a courthouse. He jotted down the name -- not the name, the license plate, and he put it through protocol. That triggered the FBI agency to come to visit.

And the agent asked me, "Is it possible to get a copy of these pictures?" I said, "Absolutely." I asked Mr. A., I said, "Can you bring your camera to show them?" They can look at the pictures. The agent shook my hand, said, "Thank you so much," because this particular case could have been one of those cases that's being sought after because it's four Middle Eastern men, and a police officer mentioned that they're taking too many pictures close to the office courthouse.

And that's when I realized so many issues are happening, because they're wasting their time. And this young man was so afraid, he slept in his car for four days, afraid to go home. These are the cases that were happening. These are the individuals, this is the particular stories of what was going on. During -- after that, the federal agency requested me to come, and please participate in the citizen -- FBI citizens academy program. That's where I was able to make now one phone call, and if a person is being held by them, I can locate them immediately.

STRONG: How were the phone calls going initially? Were people taking your calls? Were they interested in speaking with you?

RAZVI: So, the most important thing, when I was calling up the county jails in New Jersey, Hudson County, Pennsylvania, even the New York offices, the detention centers, whenever I mentioned, "This is Mohammad Razvi," there would be a brick wall built in front of me that I had to cross. And they said, "Mohammad who? Give me your date of birth, your Social Security number," and then they would consider talking to me. That's when I realized I had to use my nickname again. Now in professional. So I started calling myself Moe Razvi. It actually stated on my business cards, "Moe Razvi." So whenever I called, "This is Moe Razvi, I'm calling about Mr. A., B., and C.," there would be no brick wall that I would cross over. I was just getting -- I was getting difficulty in getting answers for people, because my name was Mohammad Razvi. And if you Google me as Mohammad Razvi, you'll see there's less things that come up -- there are more things that come up as Moe Razvi.

STRONG: Do you want to answer this?

RAZVI: Yes.

STRONG: Hang on.

RAZVI: Yes, come in.

[Interview interrupted.]

STRONG: Okay. It's back on. Go ahead.

RAZVI: Yeah. So as I learned of the agencies, I remember one case. It was with the Secret Service. This one particular individual came to my office crying, crying so bad. He said, "Moe, please help me. Moe, please help me." I said, "Okay, sit down. What happened?" He said, "Basically, I was," he was a yellow cab driver, he was driving his cab, and at that time, a young lady entered his cab, and she said, "Oh, what do you think of Bush?" And the cab driver stated, "Oh, he's a bad guy if I had a gun, I'd probably shoot him." Because of that statement, the young lady reported it. And the Secret Service was at his door. They knocked on the door, they came to him, they said, "Did you say this and

this?" He goes, "No, no, no, not like this. No, no, no, no." They said, "Okay, we want you to sign this piece of paper, that you didn't state this, or state this statement." He signs the piece of paper, the agents now tell him, "Now you have to come to our office, and take a lie detector test." And this individual went to other attorneys, the attorney wants \$10,000 in cash to have a conversation. And I'm sitting there, listening to this guy crying, he goes, "I don't know what to do. I don't, you know, I don't know what they're going to do. I don't know what they're going to do."

I made phone calls, contacted Legal Aid. And contacted other attorneys. Finally, I contacted also the Secret Service agent. The Secret Service agent goes to me, "What's your name?" I said, "Moe Razvi." "No, what's your name?" I said, "My full name is Mohammad Razvi." "Mohammad, huh? What's your Social Security number? What's your date of birth? Where do you live? When did you come here?" I gave him the information. "And how do you know this individual?" I said, "I run a community center, and he came and I'm trying to assist him. Is it possible for me to get him a pro bono attorney, so you can have the conversation with him?" "Yeah, sure, sure. We don't mind that." I contacted, finally got someone from Legal Aid to represent him. I had Legal Aid talk to the agents on the phone. And it was, time was set for them to meet the next day, in the afternoon. The funny thing was, before the afternoon came next day, INS, at that time, went in and picked him up on immigration charges.

So even with representation at that time, I sat there, I'm like oh my God, for these members, this is what was going on. I just sat there, I scratched my head, I said oh my God, this can't be. Later, agents who were looking for John Doe started picking up Jane Doe. These are the conversations I started having when I went through the citizens academy program with the FBI. I brought these issues right to the table. I said, when you -- one of the issues, I said, "When you knock on the door, and a young lady says, 'Give me a minute,' it's not that she's hiding, she has to wear a scarf before she can

come in front of a male agent. We need to understand that. Your community -- your agents need to understand the community." They brought it back, they changed protocol. I was so happy. The agency started to leave their cards and information when they picked up someone. To me, that was a win situation. Just for the fact the person has information if their loved one's being picked up. And this is what was going on now.

STRONG: So when was the citizens academy? Remind me.

RAZVI: [coughs] I graduated in 2000 -- oh my God. I think it was 2003 or 2004.

STRONG: All I have here is early 2000s, something like that. [laughter]

RAZVI: I have the -- I'll tell you the exact date. Okay. So it was in September 10th, 2003, to November 2003. Yeah, 2003.

STRONG: So you were invited to attend? Tell me about that.

RAZVI: I was requested. They came, they said, "Moe," Okay, so the way this happened, this was so funny. They came to me, into my office, the little office I had, they said, "Mr. Razvi --" and this was one of the times I think a story aired in the *Washington Post*, because I was arguing with these federal agents, and these business cards like you wouldn't believe. And I'm trying to remember, his name was Michael, I think. At that time, when he wrote the story. So the agency came to me, and they said, "Mr. Razvi, we'd like to request you to participate in this special program." And I'm being very skeptical, like I'm like "Uh." "No, no, it's a citizens FBI academy program." I already had gone through NYPD citizens academy program. Okay. So then I understood, I said okay. I know something similar to the NYPD. Okay, I will go. And that's when I decided to go.

STRONG: So tell me, what are these citizen academy programs like? What's the goal, what do you learn?

RAZVI: So what I learned, which I wanted to do. Like, another stack of FBI cards. Hold on. Right on the back of all these stacks of cards. This is the other stack [laughter]. So, coming back. So in the citizens academy program, basically you are -- they interact

with agents, and agency -- we get to interact with agents, and agencies -- what is it called? Procedures, policy and procedures. So I was able to work with, or talk to like, the training unit. I was able to speak with the special agent in charge, and talk to him about the frustrations and issues that I was having within the community. I was able to talk to the civil rights division commission that they had. These are the things happening. Other agents within the agency.

And when I came across something that was really troubling, I told them. I explained to them, I said, "It's not good." You know, the fact these things are happening. So it was actually getting to the top, and talking to the top people, so then they can tell their agents.

More over, when I got a chance to meet Janice Fedarcy, who was the first -- I think she was the first, I think she was the first ADIC [Assistant Director in Charge] in New York. Wonderful person. Wonderful, oh, I can't even explain to you how wonderful she was. She was the reason why we were able to initiate the first FBI Muslim Youth Career Day. Which is ongoing now, and has expanded to over 1,000 kids and 25 schools and Muslim agencies. And because of her, we also were able to start the Muslim Advisory Group, I should say the Muslim Advisory Board to the FBI. And that's what we were able to start. And we continue doing that.

STRONG: That was the one in 2015, Muslim Leaders Council, with New York FBI?

RAZVI: Yes, yes.

STRONG: Okay, so talk to me about those early conversations, how did you decide that this was needed, and what did you negotiate your role would be, and who did you want to get involved?

RAZVI: So, the most important thing is, I explained to FBI and other agencies that one of the most important things is, we are here as immigrants trying to live the American dream. Everyone is here to live that American dream. The community members that have

come left everything behind, they're seeking a better life for their family and their kids. It's not that one particular community, it's all the community members. It's not just one Muslim group, it's all Muslim groups. It's not just the Pakistani Muslim, it's all Muslims. Because I was working with diverse Muslim community leaders, I requested them -- it would be wonderful, because I am advocating on behalf of these Muslim leaders, I want them to be at the table. My role is not just to be the liaison, but for other leaders to also be the liaison. That's what I wanted. And that's what I emphasized. And they finally said, "Okay, we'll do this." And as this developed -- hit pause?

[Interview interrupted.]

RAZVI: All right. So as this developed, especially during the time of that news story that broke out regarding surveillance of Muslim communities.

STRONG: The 2011 AP story?

RAZVI: When I had a chance to sit down with the commissioner, and bring my Muslim -- FBI Muslim Advisory Board to the commissioner of NYPD, Commissioner Kelly, I emphasized, this is something we're doing with the FBI. And it is something that you should do with the NYPD. And that's when the discussion happened. Now, there's a Muslim advisory group to the NYPD.

STRONG: And what is their role?

RAZVI: Their role is also the same -- similar. And concern that's happening with the Muslim community, with the police department, to bring to the attention, to the commissioner, to the head of the agency. So then, they can see how to correct it. And that's what was the concerns.

STRONG: So, your goal at this time is mostly to have the inside connection, so you can help mediate solutions? Your role -- or your goal is more to kind of figure out how to change the policing directly? Or both?

RAZVI: Well, my role --

STRONG: What did you have in mind when you established this?

RAZVI: When I established -- honestly, I was learning. And I was learning that many Muslim leaders are not aware of the city, state, federal agencies, even how to work with the political, elected officials.

And I started the first Iftar dinners with other groups, in Brooklyn. Then I started in Queens. Then in Manhattan. Then in Bronx. And even, at that time, Staten Island. A Republican borough president. And then, very gracefully, I was working also with the, Mayor Bloomberg's office, to have the first Iftar dinners.

Because of those relationships, I was able to emphasize my objective, and even until today, is to empower the community and the community leaders. They may not all agree. And they don't agree with me either. I said, that's okay. That's the reality. However, I want you to be able to emphasize correctly what's the concerns of the communities that you're working with. The concerns of the Pakistani Muslim community can be similar or different of the concerns of the Arab Muslim community. And that's okay. Some of the leaders don't feel that way. They want to be the person in a head, and be just about them. It's unfortunate, but that's how it is. That's their prerogative. My objective was to build the relationships between different leaders, so they can all address the issues to their community.

STRONG: So what kind of -- you gave a few examples, but what kind of indications do you have the FBI, NYPD, are listening to these councils? In light of everything else that you've mentioned, you know, the surveillance, the registrations, the roundups, have you seen anything that indicates that your advice is having an impact?

RAZVI: Absolutely. One of the most important things that I see, I have seen -- one of the most important things that I have seen, is when individuals who are being questioned, they come back and they tell me that they were questioned, however, the way they were

questioned was more -- how can I say it? Not subtle, but it was more respectful.

Respectful. In other words, if a person's -- if there is a person -- let me restate it.

STRONG: Okay.

RAZVI: All right. So what I've seen. For example, if they're looking for a Jane Doe, they no longer pick up John Doe. And one of the most important things that I've noticed recently in, during the times of this, wait -- can we bring it over here?

STRONG: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RAZVI: Now I can show you over there. Let's just bring it in here, because I can't do it --

STRONG: Actually, you know what? It's picking up from here, so you can just --

RAZVI: It is?

STRONG: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RAZVI: Okay.

STRONG: You can show me.

RAZVI: So here, so I brought to the attention, to the FBI, that -- is, there are going to be roundups? People are concerned, because of the election and what's happening. And here is my FBI agency, federal, FBI contact. So, received -- his name is Kevin Manning, and Kevin Manning is giving me -- FBI meeting, Muslim Youth -- national -- This is going to be important for you to see. This is the biggest thing I loved.

New director of FBI. Emergency meeting with the leadership. Okay? Before Christmas. That's the one I'm looking for. Christmas.

STRONG: The emergency meeting took place in 2017, 2016?

RAZVI: This one happened 2018.

STRONG: Twenty-eighteen.

RAZVI: And also 2017, before the incident -- oh, and right after the incident. Usual press conference -- oh my God, where am I? Hold on. (inaudible). Okay. We'll -- okay. So there was an attack in Times Square -- not in Times Square, in the --

STRONG: West Side Highway?

RAZVI: West Side Highway, with the Uzbek guy. So I explained to them, we service many Uzbeks, how can we help? They held an emergency meeting with me, before Christmas. And sitting down with Uzbek leaders. That never happened before. During this time, with the elections -- this never happened before, meeting with Manning -- give me one second, and meeting, checking in. I got to show -- because this was such a huge thing for the community. They just couldn't believe it. And I printed everything. Manning -- Statement issued by the FBI. Where do I have it? Okay. It's over here.

STRONG: So this was specifically in response to people were concerned that there were going to be registrations and roundups again?

RAZVI: Roundups. So what the FBI said to me -- Trump. I'm so sorry, give me a second, I've got to find it, this is --

STRONG: Listen, I'll pause while you look, and you just let me know when you have it.

RAZVI: Yeah, I have it.

[Interview interrupted.]

RAZVI: So this is one of the biggest things that I've seen that's happened. This is an email from FBI, directly to me, we had a meeting on -- an emergency meeting on Thursday, at 10:00 in the morning. Thursday evening, 10:00 p.m., 10:00 15 seconds p.m., within 12 hours, they issued a statement, "Moe, here's the statement from the FBI." Now, "FBI places tremendous value in relationships we have with all communities we serve. While the FBI has jurisdiction over civil rights, hate crimes, and broad national security matters, it's authorities do not exceed into immigration matters." Before they did. They said, "We're not going to touch anyone, we're not going to deport anyone." "More importantly, accordingly, the current discussions related to travel and border security around policy enforcement, and matters that are outside of our purview of the FBI. We believe it's critical to our mission to have an ongoing two-way dialogue." This wouldn't have happened in 12 hours if I didn't have this contact in concentration with

them. After that meeting, this was the most important thing, I printed it, I gave it to every community member, it was featured in the news, and it was just wonderful.

People were like, so relaxed.

STRONG: Yeah.

RAZVI: Because they were afraid roundups were going to happen.

STRONG: Yeah.

RAZVI: So I -- but that was the thing. And this, this is what's -- this is the change. For the fact that they're listening, understanding, and the community's working together with law enforcement. Hey, if there's a bad person, go get them. We'll help you get them. When they're looking for a bad person, I send it through our emails, and everybody disseminates the information. That's what happens.

STRONG: So if they have a specific suspect they're trying to find?

RAZVI: Absolutely. The guy in New Jersey, same thing. We disseminated the information, and the community members disseminated the information. But that's what we're doing.

STRONG: Tell me about -- you mentioned interrogations have changed, public statements and cooperation have changed, networks have changed. I want to get a sense of, you know, in 2001, those initial stages, say you know, the detention center right over here in Brooklyn, where so many people ended up.

RAZVI: Yes.

STRONG: What were the circumstances there like? How were people being treated? What were you hearing?

RAZVI: Oh man, they were bad. So, it was really bad. Really bad. I mean, I'll be very clear. Here's a report from Department of Justice in 2003, of all the atrocities that were being committed. And it states, "September 11 detainees, a review of the treatment of aliens held on immigration charges in connection with investigation of September 11 attacks." And it says, for every -- at the front, United States Department of Justice, Office of the Inspector General. We were hearing -- and even as I visited jails,

individuals who were being detained on immigration charges, they were given red jackets, like the color of this binder, and red tags like the color of that tag, of one individual, and in the back of the jackets, it was written "INS." And they were put into county jails, where individuals who are criminals, murderers, rapists, whatever you want, who were -- committed horrific crimes, that's where they were put in also, into those situations, in those types of jails.

STRONG: Just mixed in with the general population?

RAZVI: Mixed in. So, you can only imagine inmates in the general population are seeing attacks that are happening on 9/11, with these buildings, with the Twin Towers being brought down, and then these individuals wearing red jackets, who are INS or immigration, being investigated. These individuals said, "Whatever you want me to sign, I will sign. I'm guilty; let me leave." They were crying, they were in tears.

I remember till today, the detention center in Brooklyn, the pastor of that detention center came to me in the grocery store, and said, "You know, there's a -- I know there's a religious holiday coming up for the Muslims. We would like to get some stuff. And you know, I don't know what to give to them -- because we have so many people who are being detained, and at least give them a little bit of hope to celebrate about their religion." I still remember ordering those sweets for that pastor, he came and picked them up, and gave to those kids -- gave to those inmates.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: And I'm sitting there, I'm like, oh my God. And that's what was happening. And when they came out with their own report, with these pictures of the atrocities that they had -- that they were committing, it only proved the fact that that's what was happening.

STRONG: So it wasn't just other inmates attacking men with red jackets?

RAZVI: No, it was also the administrations, the, you know, the -- what did they call them? The, oh my God, the officers --

STRONG: Corrections officers?

RAZVI: -- inside, the corrections officers. It was everything. Because it was like let's just be done. Anyone who's involved in immigration because they might be a terrorist. And this is 200 pages report, 194 pages, 196, report. And I kept it. I printed, at that time. I still remember, I said I got to keep this. But that's what was happening.

STRONG: How many people from this community do you think ended up in that detention center?

RAZVI: Well not just this detention -- in general, I think there was over 500 individuals who were picked up within this community.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: I think, you know, rounded up.

STRONG: And on immigration only? On suspicion based on their name?

RAZVI: No, anything. Based -- it was not just immigration, it was any type of suspicion, it was anything else.

STRONG: Did you learn later through your contacts what the reasoning was behind that? Or were they just trying to round up as many people as they could?

RAZVI: So basically, each agency -- and I'm very blunt about this -- each agency, whether it was the FBI, INS, at that time, or even Secret Service, was passing the buck. Nobody was taking blame of the fact that -- how could a group of individuals, 11 individuals, do such horrific damage to the United States, in homeland, and the intelligence agency did not pick up on it?

That's unbelievable. To me, that's unacceptable. We are, our intelligence is second to none. Being that said, when INS agents were told by their superiors to go and find individuals who had violated, or the FBI agents, or the Secret Service, whoever it was going out, each agency was trying to prove that they're on top of it. So if they went for Jane Doe, and Jane Doe wasn't there, they picked up John Doe, because John Doe didn't tell INS that they had moved 10 years ago. They'll pick him up on that tab. If

Jane Doe isn't there, and John Doe's there, and John Doe does not have his immigration papers on him or something.

And this is what happened. Every person was being arrested, then brought back to their superiors. "Oh, did you get a bad person? You know, through the database name checks." "Yeah, we got somebody." "But was he related to the attacks?" "No, no, but you know, I found out that 10 years ago, he had moved and he didn't tell us. So we're going to arrest him and deport him." That's what was going on. That's what was going on. And it's unfortunate.

And I'll be the first -- and I'll be blunt stating about this. Other agencies who were being infused into the JTTF, it's called, Joint Terrorist Task Force, were individuals who do not have college degrees. What do you mean? Well, this is what I mean. Federal agents are required to have a college degree, then you become FBI agents. Back in the days, when I was growing up, when I was in high school, in the projects, you didn't need a college degree to become an NYPD police officer. That has changed. A high school diploma was sufficient. So I'll be very clear. Many individuals who became into the Joint Terrorist Task Force, and all these things that were happening, were also individuals who did not have that academic level of degrees. But because of the time that they spent, because they are wonderful detectives and so forth, they were put in.

However, in these types of situations, you have to separate your personal views and beliefs, and you have to go through the facts and the steps that you have to take. I learned, federal agents did do that. However, even sometimes they did not follow the procedures. That's a fact. It's okay. We're all human; we all make mistakes. But then, other agents, they went above and beyond. And that was the sad part. I mean, but it is what it is.

STRONG: So, at this time, you're not just responding by making phone calls and working one on one. You're also reaching out to press to get coverage, you're holding rallies, other people are taking legal action, working with the NYCLU. Talk to me about how these different tactics interact, how you used them in one situation or another.

RAZVI: So, the most important thing -- and this is what I tried to explain to everyone, including leaders in my community. We have to sit at the table in order to make changes. We can rally, we can be defensive, we can protest, we can do writings, but we have to sit at the table and try to figure out how do we work together. And this is what I was able to do. And I'm still continuing learning how to do it.

See now, with the federal agents, doing basically -- for new federal agents, we come in, and we also talk about cultural competency for Muslim community. Which is great. And I want those agents to ask us questions. You know, why does a Muslim, one Muslim have a dog, and another Muslim is running away from a dog? There's reasons behind that. And this is the reasons. For example, if a person is about to go for prayer, he will stay away from a dog, because dog is considered unclean. If you touch a dog, that means you're going to have to take a shower, then if it touches your clothes, you have to change your clothes, and you can't really go to the prayer, into the mosque. However, there are Muslims who are vets, who are veterinarians, who are always working with dogs. But that's okay. And there are Muslims who actually have dogs as pets; that's okay. He's not, or she's not practicing religion at that moment, or that's why they have it, it's okay.

And these are the things we're trying to explain to them. And it's important to build that relationship and understanding, so they can correctly view. It's not that the person's extremist; it's not that the person is -- you know, or all of a sudden he has a beard, he's just trying to, you know, it's holy days of Ramadan, and the guy wants to feel

a little bit religious. It's not that all of a sudden he has different views. [coughs] And these are the aspects, and these are the things that we had discussions on.

And it's not only Pakistani imams that come to teach with me, it's Albanian Muslims, it's African American Muslim, it's Yemeni Muslim, it's Palestinian Muslim. So I have a diverse community group that comes to teach these new agents.

STRONG: So it's new agents that you're teaching, the recruits who come in?

RAZVI: Yes. And they also have some of the previous agents who want to participate and understand, if they're working on these types of cases.

STRONG: So talk to me about other ways of getting at the table. I know you said some of the suggestions were to make advancement and promotions for people in law enforcement of Muslim backgrounds easier. But you're also working on the recruitment pipeline side. Tell me about establishing these youth career days.

RAZVI: So one of the most important things is these youth career days that we hold. We start with the children who are in elementary, so they actually have a different view. What do I mean by that? For example, when the 9/11 attacks had happened, many Muslim youth saw law enforcement arrest their friends, loved ones, parents' friends, cousins, and when they seen that, it gave a bad impression. Yes, law enforcement was trying to do its duty at that moment, however, because the children, it stays in their memory, that's what they did. This is what they were seeing. It gives a very negative perspective.

We are changing that. We're building that understanding. More importantly, we're explaining to the youth that they can also be part of the system. They can also be a hero. Be an NYPD police officer. Be a fire department personnel. Be an FBI agent. Be a Homeland Security agent. Be a Secret Service person. You can also be part of the system. Building that bridge, and eliminating that gap. Other and us, or them and me. And that's the way to move forward.

And lo and behold, we are seeing many, many youth individuals who are participating. Now, we're understanding there's over 1,000 NYPD police officers. I was so happy to hear that. There are hundreds of Homeland Security officers, and FBI agents now. I think last year, or the year before that, we actually had a Pakistani female FBI officer on the stage. And she told all the young girls that they can be also part of the team. Part of the family. You know, let's work together. And who better to explain about the cultural and religious aspects than a person from that community? Who's better than that? There's no one -- they would do that.

STRONG: Especially if they have the opportunity to reach leadership.

RAZVI: Absolutely.

STRONG: So, when you were first envisioning these career days, what were the concerns in the community? Because the trust had been -- the trust wasn't there.

RAZVI: So, let's put it this way. Within the community, I had the full trust. Within community leaders, they felt different.

STRONG: Well you had trust, but law enforcement didn't. So how did you bridge that?

RAZVI: So law enforcement -- well I was the -- how could I say it? So in a way, COPO and I am a gatekeeper. I'm -- no, in a way, COPO is a gatekeeper. Individuals come to COPO who are perhaps undocumented, who have not -- who have questions, and they want just answers, and we help with that, because of that trust factor. When we introduced this program, we partnered up with many schools, mosques, and many of them started to understand "yeah, this is the right path." And I remember the first time we did it, we only had five groups with us. Because we had that trust within that community, we were able to take it to one level. And then we took it to the next level. With the law enforcement, because we started to develop the law enforcement Muslim Advisory Council to FBI. And it built that trust, because there were agents who were sitting there and answering their questions, and building that trust.

However, some of the groups -- and actually, some individuals -- did not want that to happen. It was unfortunate. Because we were here, building this community, and bringing the community together with agencies, so they can also be part of the system. And yet these other individuals had their own agenda, because it wasn't the community's agenda.

STRONG: What was the concern? What did they think would happen?

RAZVI: They're feeling that "oh yeah, these are going to be recruits for spies." And I explained to them, that is far -- I don't understand, what do you think, what are they going to be spying on? What do you mean? And it was sad, because they felt that they should be in charge of this whole program. And I said, that's not the way it works. You have to be at the table, work with the agencies, and work with the community. But some particular individuals felt it differently. Now, we have over 25 community groups with us, and those individuals who were -- didn't want to be part of it now want to be part of it.

STRONG: Now the concerns about spying stands out to me, because there was spying, there was surveillance, that had fearful impacts on the community, similar to what you described from registration, from roundups. So, how do you help law enforcement get past these mistakes?

RAZVI: So the important thing is, I brought the leaders together, and I had a conversation with them about the surveillance, and all this spy stuff. I asked them. And they were very candid in explaining to me, "Mohammad, if there's a bad person coming into the mosque, we don't see -- or we don't know who's a bad person. If the agencies, law enforcement agency, feel that that's a bad person, then they should come in, and look at that person. They should investigate him." Because mosques do not screen people who are coming to the mosque. Most importantly, every mosque leader that I spoke with, they said, "We want a police officer, or a police vehicle, in front of the mosque. So then we can pray in peace, and they can help protect us. And if there's a bad person who wants to do something bad, I'm not sure he's going to do anything bad in front of a

police officer, or the police vehicle. It would be very difficult for a person to do something." This is everyone explaining this to me. And to the police commissioner at that time.

And when we sat down with the police commissioner at that time, with the advisory group, we emphasized that there used to be -- there should be, there should be an NYPD police advisory group, and that's where it started.

STRONG: So there's an advisory group that they requested. It strikes me though that a uniformed police officer, a police cruiser, out in front of a mosque, is a very different thing than an untrained, paid undercover coming in, and indiscriminately taking down people's phone numbers and names, and license plate numbers. These are not the same.

RAZVI: It's not the same, and it's not possible for a police officer, or police department, to do that. There's over 800,000 Muslims and growing. There's no way five individuals who were part of that task force, or eight individuals, can surveil 800,000 people. That's unreal. That was one of the biggest things, it was like, be realistic. If there is any surveillance, it's done because of something that they heard, or they've seen. And they were following those leads. But that's okay.

STRONG: So, it's okay if they're following a lead? It's not okay to do it indiscriminately?

RAZVI: Following a lead. Yeah, of course. I mean, that's what we were finding out, and that's what we sat down with the imams, with the leadership, and we asked them. I said, you know, and this was very -- at that time, believe it or not, I was in Russia. I was in Russia on the phone with the commissioner, and trying to figure this out. I'm like, okay, how do we do this? And I started making phone calls to the leader-- I said, is there a problem? Is this, this? Because I was in touch with --

Let's put it this way. Very clearly, there are community members in our -- there are community members and leaders who want that 15 minutes of fame. And they take

things the way they felt. And it's okay they do that way; that's their prerogative. I'm looking at it in a different perspective. I look at it, we have to sit at the table and really find out what's going on. That's why I brought the Muslim, FBI Muslim Advisory Council that I have, to the NYPD, to meet with the commissioner, for them to hear, not just from one person, but from the community group. And that's where things developed. That's where they said "okay, we should have an advisory council." I think that's great. I think it should.

STRONG: I don't disagree about the advisory council. But it sounds like you're saying you think the reporting which revealed that non-officers surveilling communities indiscriminately, that that wasn't taking place? That instead they were --

RAZVI: I don't think so.

STRONG: -- only following up on leads?

RAZVI: I mean, even -- that's -- when we sat down with the commissioner, he said it very clearly, this is what we were doing, and this is how we were doing it. The community leaders were there who asked the questions, who had mosques, who were leaders of mosques. And that's what they did. And I said okay. I mean, because I don't run a mosque. And if there was a -- I don't run a mosque, but I know the mosque next to me, I know there's a police officer and a police vehicle every Friday. So if it was an issue, it wasn't an issue here. And every mosque and every Muslim leader requests the police officers to come in front of the mosque, or in the mosque, because they want to be able to provide -- you know, do the religious services.

STRONG: The uniformed police officers, they request them?

RAZVI: Yes. They do that.

STRONG: Interesting. So he assured you in those meetings that there was no surveillance taking place without a lead?

RAZVI: Without -- not a lead, without any, you know, without -- what is the? -- Handschu guidelines. I think it was called Handschu guidelines.

STRONG: Yeah, there was a Handschu case --

RAZVI: The Handschu case, and there were guidelines.

STRONG: -- and there was supposed to be oversight. And he assured you the oversight was taking place?

RAZVI: That was it. That was the --

STRONG: That's so interesting.

RAZVI: And somebody was able to -- he said, "You know, even a small unit of eight people cannot surveil 800,000 people." That's just unheard of. That's not going to happen.

STRONG: Interesting. So what did you think of the AP story, and the documents that they put out? Did you look at them?

RAZVI: I looked at them -- I mean that's one of the reasons why I brought it -- I had a meeting with the commissioner at that time, and I brought the leaders, and I said, "Guys, here, you guys should talk." I actually also brought it to the attention with the FBI, and they said, "Well that's a different department, that's different -- and you know, even though we work together, sometimes we have our own ways of doing things." I said, "Okay." Because I was working directly with federal law enforcement more.

STRONG: So, relatively recently, after the Raza case, which became part of the Handschu -- this is *Raza v. the City of New York*.

RAZVI: I didn't -- I don't know about that.

STRONG: Okay. But that's fine. The Handschu guidelines have been strengthened since that time, just very recently. Have there been any conversations among members of the FBI or NYPD that you know of about those new guidelines, or anything like --?

RAZVI: I don't know about those new guidelines.

STRONG: Okay, cool. I was curious.

RAZVI: I have no -- [laughter] I got enough things. I got so many things, I haven't -- no.

STRONG: Okay, all right. So, lets move on then. How has -- oh, we didn't even talk about Hurricane Sandy in 2012. How are you doing on time? Should we make another -- ?

RAZVI: No, I'm okay.

STRONG: You're sure?

RAZVI: Yeah, it's four o'clock.

STRONG: Let's talk about Hurricane Sandy response.

RAZVI: Okay. So, we were -- actually -- I'm just looking for a report behind you.

STRONG: Let me know if you need me to move. [laughter]

RAZVI: So at that time, we were -- Hurricane Sandy. Okay.

STRONG: Another big binder, says "Hurricane Sandy Training Material."

RAZVI: And Hurricane Sandy Immigration Outreach Initiative. So, Hurricane Sandy had hit, and I was -- where was I? I was in Atlanta with my daughter, who was getting married. Right. And then I came back. When I came back the next morning, when I opened up the office, I had seniors who had a little pouch, and both of the -- the couple standing there in tears "We lost everything, we have nowhere to go, please help us." And I'm like, oh my God. So, I asked them, did you go to a shelter, did you go anywhere? They go, "No."

So, I found out where was the shelter. The closest shelter was being FDR Roosevelt High School, near our office. So, I started busing the seniors to the shelter. And I said, "You have to go, and you have to let them know what are the problems, what's happening." As I was doing this, another couple came. Another couple came. Another person came. I'm like, busing people to the shelter now.

And it just turned out that so many people were affected that did not seek the services, because it wasn't in their language, or they weren't outreached. And it was like, oh my God. I'm like, we need to figure this out, how do I do this? So I started talking to the mayor's office. As I started talking to the mayor's office, I said, this is what's happening, they said, "Okay, we're going to need your help, and we need you to do outreach."

So I worked with FEMA, and the mayor's office, and especially the commissioner, Fatima Shama, for the immigrant -- mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs. And we

started doing the outreach. We were a small organization, compared to anyone. And in, during this time, it turns out COPO was one of the two largest organizations that did the maximum amount of outreach to the community.

STRONG: Wow.

RAZVI: And this is where we were outreaching it.

STRONG: So there's a map of Brooklyn here, with these little red areas that were affected by the hurricane.

RAZVI: Right, they were affected.

STRONG: And so, you're going down into, looks like --

RAZVI: This is like, Sheepshead Bay area, and also, I would say, Coney Island area. So we were one of the lead organizers of two groups that actually --

STRONG: Directly south of where you guys are.

RAZVI: Yes, exactly.

STRONG: Yeah.

RAZVI: And I'm sitting there, I'm like oh my God. One thing leads to another. So this was -- I received a small grant of \$1,000 from Citizens Committee of New York City. That \$1,000, I brought it to the mayor's office, I said, "This is what we're doing." They gave us 25,000. The \$25,000 became another 25,000, with the Korean American Foundation, community -- Korean American Community Foundation. It became \$50,000. We took that, I went to where, United Way. Was it United Way? I'm so sorry. I went to United Way. They gave us \$100,000. It became \$200,000. I took that, I went to Catholic Charities with FEMA, they gave me \$700,000. With \$700,000, now it's up to almost a million. I went to another organization to reach out to -- it's called the Unmet Needs Roundtable, with Red Cross, with the Salvation Army, with other groups. And it turns out, we raised about \$3.5 million to help support and directly help the community, victims that were affected by Hurricane Sandy. We started with a volunteer effort, it turned out to be a program, and we were just helping everyone and anyone. That's what happened.

STRONG: So help takes the form of what? Services, supplies, rebuilding, cleanup, what?

RAZVI: So help was -- it started with, believe it or not, with assisting community members first to engage with the shelters, so they can get assistance. Then it turned out to provide them furniture. We literally, I went to Craigslist, looking for people who were donating free furniture, picking it up with my workers, and dropping it off. With the mayor's office, we started with -- it was mattresses, brand new mattresses. I'm talking about my whole backyard was full of mattresses. I have pictures. You would be like, what?

Baby Buggy -- oh my God, such an amazing organization. God bless them. Baby Buggy, which is led by this wonderful comedian, Jerry Seinfeld, his wife, I learned later. They donated so many strollers and baby products, Pampers, you wouldn't believe, my whole office was filled with Pampers galore. So we were giving that, distributing that. Then, for rebuilding efforts, with Salvation Army, Red Cross, and other agencies, so much. We were able to work with them to help people to rebuild. I mean, I'm talking about like \$50,000 to rebuild their basements, or their homes, to \$120,000. My groups were given awards for doing wonderful work, and so on, and so on. It just continued.

And it went on until, I think until 2015, I think, or '16. And we advocated and helped so many members, who were just amazed. We were just the -- members of the Jehovah's Witness church that's right behind our office, a team of them came, helping us. And it was just so heartfelt, the way they were helping and assisting the community members, and reaching to the community to give them assistance. It was just so great.

STRONG: So, there's multiple reasons why people may not have had access to the general support, in general. One is that they may not be -- speak the language, they may not know. Another is that maybe people were undocumented, and they were concerned?

RAZVI: They are, they were. They are. And that's why we're a gatekeeper.

STRONG: So how did you address that? How did you get around those concerns?

RAZVI: The most important thing is, very clearly we explained to FEMA, "Put your badges away," -- because all of them had these badges that said "Homeland Security." And sit down at a one on one level with these constituents. And we held the informational sessions with FEMA in our office. Every week, every week we just held them. And we outreached to the community, and they came, and they came. Every person who we needed help.

Tzu Chi Foundation. Oh, such a superb organization. They assisted, distributed almost about \$60,000 in cash to these hurricane victims. The hurricane -- well, we got to call them Hurricane Sandy survivors. Not victims, they were survivors. They really did awesome. I mean, one story after another, how many -

Oh, the best was when I was -- so I was going, where was I? I was visiting a mosque in Brighton Beach, that was one of the areas we helped. And I went to a Dunkin Donuts to get a cup of coffee. The person behind my goes, "COPO, COPO, COPO!" I'm like, "Okay."

STRONG: Yes? [laughter]

RAZVI: And it turns out, it was one of these Spanish young ladies who we assisted. And she goes, "You helped me, you helped my family." And I just sat there, and the representative of the borough president -- his name was Pastor Gilford Monroe -- was next to me. I was like, "Gilford you got to take a picture." I didn't -- you know what I mean? And he's like, "This is something you can't just make up." And lo and behold, she was like, in tears, she was so glad to see me. I'm like, "Thank you so much, I'm so glad we were able to help." And these are the things that click, and I love. This is what I live for.

STRONG: So, give me an example -- you know, people who may have been displaced, where are they now?

RAZVI: So many individuals, many individuals who were displaced at that time, because they had leases on their -- on what is it called? On their apartments, but they needed to move out so the construction can happen, and then they can move back in. So this is what we were working on at first. And that happened a tremendous -- and many seniors, believe it or not, they just couldn't do anything. They owned the home, but they didn't have the money, the resources, to put in to get the places fixed. So that's where we were helping. And this is what happened. And we just assisted, we were able to get the grants, we were able to help them, and give them the resources. Get them the construction company to help them, get them the time that they needed to move to a -- what is it called? A hotel, so they can get the construction done, then they can move back in. They can get new furniture -- that's what we did. We ordered everything. Whatever they needed, we were able to do that.

STRONG: You've been so generous with your time and your stories. I'm trying to come up with a good way to conclude. I think I want to ask about how this community that you've been a part of for so long, just on these few blocks of Coney Island, has changed. Where is it now, and where is it growing to?

RAZVI: Well, the most important thing is this. What I've learned, this community, at the moment, is growing, and it is going to always be international. When I say that, literally, B-68, Coney Island Avenue bus, you can go from -- all the way from Little Russia in Brighton Beach, stop over to Little China, which is on Avenue U now. Go further, and you'll be in Little Israel, which is on Avenue J. In between there, after that, you come to Little Pakistan, where we are, go further down, you'll be in Little Mexico, then you'll be in Little Caribbean Islands, and Little Bangladesh. And you don't even need a visa. You can see the people, the food, the culture, the, you know, the celebrations that they do. And within this one community strip. And now, we have, we're servicing the largest Uzbek population.

And it's just, you know -- my office, we speak, like I was saying, 12 different languages. And we're servicing over 15,000 people. We are now the first halal senior center, funded by the city of New York. We are going to be the first halal Meals on Wheels. We are going to be the first interest-free loan service for the community. We're going to be doing that. And you know, it's a never ending story. And I'm just trying to figure out what's the best thing, and how to make it better. It's one step at a time, incremental, achievable, and sustainable.

STRONG: Do you think the community's come back since the exodus in the early 2000s?

RAZVI: Well that community -- the community members who had left, they haven't come back. However, the new community members who are coming in, we're explaining to them to make sure that their I's are dotted, their T's are crossed, especially on their immigration work. We have the largest enrollment for ESL classes, citizenship classes. And because we provide the free service to become a citizen, the N-400 applications -- it is just overwhelming. I mean, over 1,000 people annually are going to be coming to us, just to get their citizenship applications done.

STRONG: You mentioned, you know, some of these rising hate crimes, that there's a lot of concern, but there's also, you know, travel bans, and you know, immigration laws are changing all the time, and this dizzying array. Do you think people will start to leave again, or do you think that the infrastructure to support them is here now?

RAZVI: So this is the most important thing that you're mentioning, because our objective is to make sure the community are aware of their rights. And empowered enough to understand that they don't need to run. They need to stay. And they can stay. That's why now, we have the free attorney available all the time. That's why we have all these services, because we are in a different position than back in 2002, when I first opened up the office. If there's something that's needed, we're able to implement and request. And more importantly, city, state, and federal agencies are less reluctant, and they are more helpful now. The mayor's office, from de Blasio's office, from the governor's office, and even to the federal agencies, they're able to assist for the community.

STRONG: What have you learned through this work, that you would want to pass onto someone else? What are the essential details to building trust, and providing service?

RAZVI: Most important thing, the trust is something that you need to start small, and then continue. And make sure your staff understands how you build this. And that's what I emphasize to my staff. And I tell my staff, if there's a -- and I tell my staff, if there's a situation that you do not understand, please ask me. My door's always open. And I emphasize to them, for them to always remember, you're here to help others. But if there's a situation that you are aware of, and you don't know what to do, you need to ask and find out. Otherwise, you won't be able to help and it won't be good.

STRONG: This makes me wonder about the process of building your staff here. Because at one point, it was just you, people coming to your family because they knew you, and then your family members that you were roping in, I presume, then volunteers.

RAZVI: Absolutely.

STRONG: How did you [laughter] -- how did you build a staff? Who did you find to do this work?

RAZVI: So, one of the first things I did was -- my first staff, I hired an Indian. Not only an Indian, a Hindu. I wanted the community to know that other people care. Then I hired a Jew. Then I hired a Buddhist. Then I hired a Christian. I made sure my staff was diverse. Because I did not want the Pakistani community at that time to feel that the only people who care about them is just the Pakistanis. No. They seen an Indian, they seen a Hindu, they seen a Jewish person, they seen a Christian person, they seen a Buddhist caring for the community, helping them. It made them feel part of this society. It changed the viewpoint.

Right now, my attorney, he is with the Gay Men's Health Crisis -- volunteer attorney, also we have. Which is a different perspective, and we make sure they understand that. That diversity. My staff speaks 12 languages. That's a huge diversity itself. My volunteers are from Africa, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Russia -- I'm trying to remember.

Palestine. Egypt. I mean, I look for that diversity, because that's what's going to make the change in the community members that yeah, everyone is part of this group. And it's working well. I hope it continues.

STRONG: What do you think is the future of this organization? I imagine at some point you'll want to retire, or? [laughter]

RAZVI: [coughs] Actually, this is my retirement [laughter]. I was supposed to, before I opened this organization -- before I opened this organization, I was actually, my goal was to retire at the age of 35. And I was doing well, and I think I could have done it. I keep Bill Gates *Daily News* headline, "Time to Log Off."

STRONG: "Microsoft Boss Quitting to Run Charity." [laughter]

RAZVI: Yeah, to keep me, keep reminding me, you know? I'm already doing it. And I continued. I mean, like I told you, I never thought I would have the chance to meet the Pope. And to let my landlord, who's a wonderful, wonderful Christian, to see, "Hey look," and bring him, and invite him. You know? "Hey, the Pope is here in town, would you like to go see him?" To me, that's priceless.

When law enforcement agency invites me to Washington D.C. and says, I can't believe what you've done. The person who viewed me at that time, Mr. Mueller "What are you doing here?" And that's back in 2003, after I graduated from the FBI academy. And now inviting me back in two-thousand -- I think it was -- '13, and giving me an award that you've done -- you know, I can't believe how much you've done for the community. To me, that's priceless.

To be nominated, to be part of the 9/11 tribute center, that just brings tears to my eyes every time I think about it -- that a person like me, who grew up in the projects, and you know, after the horrific attacks of 9/11, being requested to be one of eight stories to be talked about in the 9/11 tribute center. You know, that just breaks -- you know, it just -- I'm just like, sitting there crying every time I think about it.

My kids are all graduates of Pace University right now. It's an American dream for me, that my kids -- I went to college, yes, it's a two-year college. I had to go back for Brooklyn College, I graduated. And now my kids are graduating from Pace University? I'm so happy. You know? One, she's becoming a doctorate in psychology. The other one is master's in education. Another one is becoming a medical doctor; he's trying. Third one is becoming a business major. And I'm happy. I got three grandkids. [laughter] Yeah, it's truly an American dream coming true.

STRONG: There's so much we didn't talk about. But we've been talking for a long time, and I feel as though we should come to some kind of conclusion. Is there anything in particular of the things we didn't get to that you would really like to talk about on the record? Is there anything I should have asked you?

RAZVI: Well, look, the most important thing is, we are all here to live that American dream. Whether our grandparents came first, or great-grandparents, or great-great-great-great-great-grandparents. We are all immigrants. And we're trying to live that American dream. We need to figure out how to assist one another to live that dream.

Maybe my dream was to get my children to graduate from a great college. Another person's dream is to become a citizen. Another person's dream is to become financially secure. Another person's, to be -- maybe his American dream is to practice his religion freely. That's what makes us Americans. That's what makes this America, not pointing at each other, blaming each other. We need to figure this out. This is something I think we need to embrace.

And I don't like it when people say, "Tolerance." It's not about tolerance. It's about respect. It's about understanding. I don't want you to tolerate my religion, or me. I want you to respect me, and understand me, so I will respect and understand you. That's how it is.

And children are not born to hate. Hate is something that's comes through your dinner tables when you're sitting down, having dinner, and you're saying something which the children pick up on. That's something we have to stop at the dinner table as families. The values of American -- or America, it's the diversity that it has, and the best qualities of each of these diversities coming together. You know, not pinpointing each other, and blaming each other. That's not what it's about. That's the wrong message.

STRONG: Well thank you so much for all the time you took to show me these things, and tell me these stories. I really look forward to being in touch, as we finish this up and get it ready for the public.

RAZVI: Good.

STRONG: And you know, if there's anything else you think of, let me know.

RAZVI: Thanks so much. I just don't know where else to start.

STRONG: [laughter].

RAZVI: You know, I'm just trying.

STRONG: Yeah.