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 - Bader, Zeinab, Oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, March 23, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.11; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Oral History Interview with Zeinab Herz Bader

Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.11

Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on March 23, 2018

at the Arab American Association of New York, Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

LIZ STRONG: Today is Friday. It's March, what, 23rd? My name is Liz Strong. I'm here with Zeinab Bader. This is for the Brooklyn Historical Society's *Muslims in Brooklyn Project*. So, Zeinab, please just tell me where and when were you born?

ZEINAB BADER: Okay, my name's Zeinab Herz Bader. My family name before I married, Herz, H-E-R-Z. And my last name after marriage, it became Bader. I born in Tyre in South Lebanon, [date redacted for privacy] 1956, for a family of 13 children.

STRONG: Tell me about your siblings --

BADER: Okay.

STRONG: -- and your life growing up.

BADER: My mother, she have 13 children. She had 10 alive and three pass away at early age. My mother, she have six -- seven girls and six boys. We are a, like, middle-class family in that time. And we was happy family until the death of my older sister when she was having a baby. For medical malpractice, she died. Like, they did mistake in her, and she died at age 24. She left two girls, one boy. Then, my other brother, the oldest one -- during the war, he got very depressed and emotional. It was really severe emotional mental health. And he commit suicide in January 1980. Before that, my brother, who was 18, in 1976, he died during the war. This is what make my brother very depressed. And he couldn't handle the death of his younger brother and his older sister. He became suicidal, and he left at early age, at 24. So, my mother lost the -- her oldest daughter, her oldest son, and fifth child in the family.

I went to high school in Tyre, and then in 1973, we moved to Beirut, Lebanon, to the capital. But we kept our house in the South Lebanon. After we moved, like, just only few month, and the civil war start in Beirut and everywhere. It was ugly war. So many

young people died. So many families. It was very, very ugly and, like, disturbing in all aspects -- impact my family and many families in Lebanon. And then, in 1975, I met my husband for a few days. And we fall in love. He's Palestinian. I'm Lebanese. And my family wouldn't accept that. Then, he went to Libya to work with Phillips [Petroleum] company in the computer and oil field, and that is -- and he surprised me. In 1976, he came back, and he asked for my hand. And under a lot of pressure, my father approved, okay? And then, he -- we had the choice to get married or he have to go finish his education in New York. Then I said no. He have to go finish his education. I wait for him. He supposed to stay, like, two years and come back.

And in that time, he stay three years. And when he come back, we have so many problems between the families because, you know, he broke his promise. He didn't come back in the right time. And we challenge both families and we get married in 1979. And, in that time, in 1980, I have my oldest daughter, my Celine [phonetic]. She born in [date redacted for privacy] 1980. And we came to America, both of us, in October 5th, 1980. Like, after [redacted for privacy], she born. And I start a new life. I lived at 315-232 West Street, Manhattan, for two years. And I was so scared to live in America. And the minute my husband meet me from the airport in that time, I look around, I felt everything is strange and everything is different. I started crying in the car, "I want to go back home." Just I was scared, you know? Just only me and him, and we have no family in New York.

But because I love him very much, I said, "You know what? I have to sacrifice and see. Maybe we can leave very soon." And then, after few months, I get pregnant with my second daughter, Maisa [phonetic]. She born in [date redacted for privacy] '81. And then, I have my third daughter. She born in [date redacted for privacy] 1983. And I lost hope to go back home. And then in 1985, we decided, both of us, we can go back home. And then, another war start, another in the area war start. Like, the war is stop and comes back. And then, everybody in Lebanon advise us to not come back, because

there is no life: no electricity, no water, no schools, no money, no food, nothing where you can live. Wherever you can live, there is a war. There is a killing. Like, everybody fighting each other, killing each other. Like a Muslim killing a Christian, Christian killing Muslim. Or, like, you know, some people had been killed for their religion, some people had been killed for their belief. Like, it was, like, a big mess, okay?

And then, we decided to stay. After we sold everything, then we decide to stay. And in 1987, I have my son, the only son I have, Tarik [phonetic]. He born in [date redacted for privacy] 1987. And in that time, we was living comfortable life. Like, we didn't make so much money, but we don't need anyone. And I have so many friends around me, like, you know, from different countries, Palestinian, Egyptian, Jordanian, Lebanese. But a few. It's not a lot. But it was fine. Like, you know, I felt satisfied that I kept my kids far away from war. And I give them a peaceful life away from killing and discrimination. And they not going to grow up with a country like the same people killing each other. And it was a lot of, like -- it was a lot of things against the Palestinian, too, okay? It was, like, political issues, and mother-father Palestinian, I don't want my kids to go through that, too. It's then we decided to stay.

In 1994, I have my fourth daughter, which is Daliah [phonetic]. She born in [date redacted for privacy] 1994. And the life went on until, before I have Daliah, my husband lost everything -- all his business, all his money. I didn't know what happened. And then, we have to start a new life. And my kids was going to Catholic school and I need them to continue their education. And I felt like, you know, this is the time I have to stand up and stand by my husband and my kids and start working with the [Family] Health Plus, it's Medicaid health insurance.

But before that, let me go back to 1983, after I have my daughter. My life was very comfortable and financially was very stable. And then, we start, with a few friends from different countries -- they introduce me to the Palestinian Women Association. And

the goal for this association for the Palestinian women -- they want to have schools to educate the Arabic children, to get together, like, you know, to be united, to know each other. Like, we started doing a lot of work. Like, we used to do, like, a culture day, a -- actually, it was like Palestinian culture day, but it was from all over. And we -- I remember we started the first Arabic school. It was at 59 Fort Hamilton Parkway. They choose me to be responsible for that school, because I was a teacher in my country for, like, three years. And they felt like, you know, I'm able, like, to teach the kids something. And we start, like, with 200 kids. We teach them the Arabic language, and the kids who doesn't know English, we -- it was a way to understand the English, too, because when you teach them Arabic, you can say it in English. It was both ways. And we used to teach them the dabka, a -- like, Lebanese dabka, because I didn't know the Palestinian dabka in that time. And it was really beautiful school, and it was -- it's a big motive for the community to come around and to send their kids.

STRONG: What was the name of the school?

BADER: There is no name for the school. Like, we don't decree yet a name. But it was under the Palestinian Women Association of New York. This is what it was. They used -- we used to have it free, actually. Like, the school provided it free, just we pay for the heat in the winter. And we pay for the cleaning. Like, everything was, like, little bit money. It's not a lot. And it was a free school. The volunteer who comes to teach and to watch the kids and to help -- everybody was volunteer and unpaid. Like, nobody got paid. And the school, it start -- like, it stayed until 1991. We -- I stop having a Arabic school. I stopped.

But the Arab -- but the Palestinian Women Association did a lot of work, not only in New York, but the New York chapter was the strongest one, maybe because we have so many Palestinian families and Arabic family. It was very strong, and there is the same - - the Palestinian Women Association was -- there is a chapter in Chicago, in St. Louis, in Ohio, in New Jersey. Like, it's -- it's like a few states. And we still have the convention, and all the Arabic women, not only Palestinian, come to that convention to celebrate and to meet each other. And we used to have, like, important people from

Arabic countries to come to speak and to constantly congratulate the women, especially when we have the women's day, like, you know, in March. Like, the convention mostly used to be in March.

And we met so many people. Like, you know, we met, like, housewives, doctors, professional -- professors. Like, you start seeing the Arabic women, what they do in this country, and each one of them have a role. But mostly, of them, ninety percent was a housewife. Like, very rare, the women who was working in that time. And then, I enjoy it a lot and I have that chance to visit many states and to meet many women in different -- even you are Palestinian, but every city -- like, the Palestinian from Jordan, from Palestine, or from Lebanon, from Syria, like, each -- this -- they are all of them Palestinian or Arabic. Or the Arabic women, too, is come, like, from Lebanon, from different countries. Like, you can see -- like, we speak the same language, but not all of us have the same culture. This is what I notice. And it's not the same education or ambition. Like, some women have the goal to take care of the women and educate them and make them strong, and to work. And some women, like, you know, accept to be a housewife, under the husband umbrella, and that's it. Like, you know, she have no other role more than to be a mother and housewife.

In 1991, I resign, okay? I felt my four kids, they need me more than anyone. And in that time, I didn't know what happened. I felt like I don't want to be in the Arab -- in the Palestinian Women Association. Something, like, happened. I cannot remember. Just I felt -- I said I don't want to be there. It's not like I don't believe in their work. It's just I felt, like, you know, maybe guilty. Like, you know, I have to give all my time to my kids, especially when I start feeling like the oldest one and the second one start a little bit failing -- behind their grades. I felt this is a big mission, I have to concentrate.

And I was -- I think I was doing very well with the kids. And, like, I used to take them to courses in Kingsborough [Community] College to do gymnastics, swimming, English,

math. Like, I was very into education for them. I felt this is very important. This is very important -- what they call it? I know the word, but I cannot remember. Like, this is very important situation, I can say. And I have to be Mr. and Mrs. Mom in that time, because my husband involved in work seven days. He leave in the morning, he come in the evening. I felt I have to take both roles in their life. It's like we involve in so many sports and practices. I did -- like, I felt I did everything what I know. What I know, what I learn in America. Like, you know, I want to be there.

And in the same time, I was seeing -- like, it's very rare, Arabic family who involved in their kids' life, in sports or education. Like, when I went to Kingsborough, we was the only Arabic family there. When I used to like to go watch the kids -- say, the soccer game or the basketball or anything, like, is -- there is not many, you know? I felt like, you know, I started, like, talking to the families, like, "You should involve your kids in this and in that." And some of them was involved, but I don't see it or I don't know about it. Like, it's very important to teach each other what's important to raise the kids.

And I have a friend named Zoher Abbasi [phonetic]. She played big role in my life. She came to this country very young, and she teach me so many things. She's the one who encourage me to, like, you know, about Kingsborough courses. She's the one who told me about it. It's not like I was, like, I'm the one, no, yeah. No, she was here before me, okay? She's the one who, like, teach me to do many things with my kids, and we used to do many things together for the kids. I learn from her. I owe her big time, actually.

And after the Arab association, the Palestinian Women Association, I resign, like -- I lived like a housewife. But still, I have so many friends, and then until 1994, when my husband lost his business, I felt I had to stand by my family. And I started looking for a job. One of my friends introduced me to Mary Kay Cosmetics. And then, I started working in the cosmetics. And I was really very good in it, and I start making good money, okay? And I start helping. But in '94, I just have my daughter, the fifth child. I

couldn't work. She was two years old when we have nothing. We have zero. Zero dollar, zero amount. Plus, we have responsibility overseas for my husband's family in that time. It was very stressful time. It was -- I was very stressed, really. It was a very difficult time.

And then, one day, I woke up and I said, listen, you are in America. You are not in your country where there's no chances, no jobs. Somebody's going to say, like, you know, "What's your family name? How much money you have?" No. America, you work hard, you get your way. You want to depend on someone and be lazy, you're going to go down. And my husband doesn't believe, like, you know, we have to go to -- through other systems, just we have to work. And I told my husband that the -- I'm going to have a job. It was through [NYU] Lutheran Medical Center in that time, as a representative associate for Medicaid and [inaudible 00:18:30]. It was that, [inaudible], for the illegal immigrant children who doesn't have a status of immigration, where they've been under age of 14, in that time, where they can get medical health insurance -- and through Lutheran and that's state-funded, okay. And because I know so many in the community and I was in the Palestinian Women Association and I was, like, you know, a -- the team lead for the women committee, like, I know everyone, because the women committee in that time -- I have to do, like, so many work with the women direct, you know?

That's why I felt I know so many people in the -- like, they can get the benefit from this insurance. And in that time, the immigration, like, if you have a green card less than five years, you're not able to get Medicaid or any health insurance. But when Lutheran create Health Plus in that time, it provide for the kids who have a -- even a green card, but less than five years, still they can get some kind called [inaudible]. It's like a limited insurance. I worked -- I start working in November 26, 1996, and I have my daughter. She's only two years old. It was very difficult for me and my husband and for

five kids. But this -- I determine it that I have to be successful and -- for a certain time until my husband -- business pick up.

We have a small business in that time together. I went to work, and he open his small business with a partner. And then, I put my daughter in the daycare. I don't want to tell you how much I cry when I drive her to the daycare. She cry, I cry. And I felt so guilty that I'm putting her with -- for me, it's a stranger. I didn't know who is these people. But for me, like, it was a torture inside me. But I have to sacrifice little bit.

And I start working in that company, and I became very successful. And they gave me the best employee for -- in all company, in all boroughs in 2001 and in 2002, in a row, the best employee. Like, productive, teamwork, whatever they want to name it. Like, you know, I was very successful, and I start making, like, good money, okay? Because, like, when -- like, they put your levels, you know?

I work in that company since '96, okay? And I was take care of my five kids, with the help of the three daughters, too. The most difficult part was, in my lunch hour, I have to order the lunch and go pick up my son from the school, from the St. Bernadette School. And to pick up my daughter -- she was in the pre-K. This was very hard. I pick them up, I give them the lunch, I take them inside, I close the door. He was only, like, 12. And my landlord, with his wife upstairs -- like, he's my landlord, he watched them for me, you know? I did that, like, almost for four years. And I go back to work.

And I kept going, working. Then, the kids start going high school, then they want to go to college. And I'm so proud of them, all of them. My oldest one, she graduate college. She get married in 2005. And my second daughter, it's -- she have a master's degree in psychology. And she's a guidance counselor at Fort Hamilton High School. My third one, she's working with non-profit organization for environment. She have a master's degree in public relations, and she's now doing her doctorate in education. My son, the

only one -- he didn't finish college, but thank god now he's attending college. My fifth one, my daughter, the youngest one, she's 22. She works and she goes to college. I want her to finish college and stop working, but she's stubborn. She doesn't want my help, which -- it's -- like, it bother me a lot. Like, I cannot control her. I want her to stop working and go full-time college, because her sisters finished college, some of them at the age 21, some of them at the age of 22. But she's stubborn. She still -- she want to work.

And what can I say? And then, September 11 came. And I remember my manager told me, "We can order a car service for you to go home, because maybe it's not safe." I tell her, "No, I have a car. I'm going to go home." But I've got to go pick up my son from that Xaverian High School. He was in the Xaverian High School. I went there and I ask for him to come, and I took him. He was so scared. Nobody knows what happen in that time yet. We're not sure what's going on. He felt like this is a war against America, against his country. He was so scared. Okay, I took them home, him and my daughter, and I remember I stuck -- like, two hours to pick up my daughter from the -- at that time, my daughter, she went to public school, the little one, because I couldn't afford to send her to Catholic school -- and her brother in the Xaverian, it's a Catholic school. Even the principal there, the Sister Claire, she told me, "You can have her at -- free." But I said, "No, I cannot accept that, because it's not one year. It's going to be for a -- long years."

September 11th, it changed many things in a lot of Muslim people's lives. I start seeing, like, a lot of hijabi -- women took their hijabs -- scared. Some of them wearing a hat some of them may stay home, they doesn't want to go out. Some of them stop sending their kids to school. Some of them -- was being harassed while they going to take their kids to school or coming from school. It was a big, big issue for the Muslim community. Even they believe they are not part of that terrorist -- this is what happen in September 11th, it's nothing to do with them, because all the terrorists who did that,

none of them [had] a green card or resident or American citizen. Like, they felt like, you know, this is against Islam and against the adopted country they have. This is what I heard from them, and this is how I felt myself, even. It was big impact on my son, because after, like, 15 days one time, he came -- like somebody harass him in the school, bother him. He come in crying, and I ask him what happened. He told me that, "Because of 'you're Muslim,' people did it to me." I said, "Tarik, these people -- it's nothing to do with Islam, and there is bad people in all religions. Like, you know, you cannot label Islam with these people." You know?

It was very hard to make him understand, because he grew up with his all-American friends. No Arabic, because Xaverian, it's mostly Italian. Like, he doesn't have Arabic friends, he doesn't have Muslim friends, and he felt isolated. He doesn't know nothing about his religion. He doesn't know why it happened, what it -- cause it. He was very young. He was only, like, 14 years old. And I can see him sometimes, he's crying and he doesn't want to go to school. But he was scared to say that. But he was watching news all the time.

And he started going in religion. He started, like, going to the mosque and praying. And after the war started, the Arabic state, lately -- one day, he stop going, and he -- I think something happened to him and he felt, like, you know, he doesn't want to be -- practicing Muslim, exactly. He want to be Muslim in his own -- like, you know, I don't know what he heard, what bother him in the -- it's not in the mosque what bother him. I think what he -- the video he saw from, like, killing other people, like the war and the ugly videos they have in the media impact him. I think he got scared from his religion. I know he's believer and he celebrate our holidays, and he fast Ramadan, okay? And I know he prays some Fridays. But he became -- is not like before. He's not like before.

After September 11th, we have Basemah [Atweh], my co-worker, and Dr. [Ahmad] Jaber, and Hicham El-Ahmati and -- what her name? -- Suhad Kazma, they decided to

do Arabic organization to serve the community, to help them to adjust with the tragedy, what happened. Because it's not [just] impact the American people. It impact the Muslim community, too. Like, they lived in fear and they lived -- they -- some of them, I tell you, maybe some of them lived in shame, too. Like, you know, like some people felt like they are guilty. Like, they felt like, you know, they are responsible because of their religion, which -- like, you know, it was really, like, a bad tragedy, impact in their life. And they did it, but I couldn't be, then, in the creator -- my name there, because I was working for this non-profit organization. You cannot be involved in this one as a representative to do insurance for some reason, maybe.

Okay, and we start the -- I start working with the Arab Association as a volunteer and as a board member and a -- an active volunteer and staff. Plus, too, I'm working with the Arab Associa-- with the health insurance, promote the health insurance for my community, helping these women, you know? And they -- we was -- like, attending so many event with the American coalition, who understand our situation, support us. I was going so many event -- many, many of them just to, like, to let them know we are here, we are Arab American, we are Muslim American. We are here to support our adopted country. We are, like, you know, willing to do everything to keep our families safe, to keep our community safe, our country safe. This is what happened.

And then, in 2005, we did the first Arabic Mother's Day. It's -- I helped to organize with the Linda Sarsour, with Dr. Jaber, with -- we have a few staff. I can't remember all the names. And it was very successful, and we saw so many women, like, you know, so happy. Like, you know, these women, it's -- like, a lot of them doesn't have families. Their husband at work, the kids in school. Like, we have to recognize these women here. And this is -- was the first one. And then, the following year, I decided to be a -- Mother's Day at the American calendar, not the Arabic calendar, because we're living here in America, okay? And we have to adjust to this society, okay? You have to be part of it, an active part. You cannot, like, you know, get your kids -- like, you know, this is

Mother's Day Arabic and this is American. No. We have to be in the same page. And then, I spoke to Dr. Jaber, and I told him I want to do American Mother's Day. I don't want to do the Arabic Mother's Day.

He told me it's not going to work. I said, "No, they have to [get] used to it, and we can do it." And I did it, and with the whole -- the first time, and it was very successful, very crowded. I have, like, 400 women, all women, they have dinner, they dance, they have so much fun. Like, they doesn't want to go. We did there, like, raffles, we give the woman a -- like, a cup say, "I love my Mom" from the Arab American Association donated for them. We -- Dr. Jaber give the -- each woman the flower when she come inside the hall. And all the women, like, they felt appreciated, all the mothers. And we talk a lot of subjects. Like, what's the Arab Association do? What it promote, what service we give, we do in Brooklyn, and what support they can give?

And then, after the Mother's Day, that day, after few Mother's Day -- like, you know, there is other organization -- no, the Arab American organization, they did the -- some kind of education about health education through Lutheran Medical Center, and we did it here, and it was very successful. And then, Lutheran did a workshop for breast cancer, and they did it here in Bay Ridge Manor. And the president of community outreach asked me if I can help, because I know a lot of women. I do mother's days, and I start reaching all these women. It was very successful workshop, and I think we -- maybe, we save so many lives, because we translated to Arabic. Like, you know, Lutheran is now -- it's NYU. They provide the translation, and it was very successful event.

And the following year, we did the -- about colonoscopy and the other health issues, about heart disease, what other -- we did the heart disease, we did the breast cancer, and we did the colonoscopy. And that's -- we did day workshop about mental health. We did the one workshop about ovarian cancer, you know? And because of this

workshop, actually, I realize -- let me jump this one -- and then, in Maimonides hospital, is -- did workshop, too, about the breast cancer, about the ovarian cancer. And I was, like, you know, volunteer to -- and it was assisting them to call women to speak to them, actually to control the whole -- because, you know, sometimes, women, they want to, like, you know, talk to each other. They want to ask -- like, you have to make sure everybody listening, everybody understanding if they have a question.

You know, the whole event was very successful for these women and mothers. And it's -- when the Arab Association start, you know, it's -- I use my experience from the Palestinian Women's Association. Like, you know, we start, like, a small group of kids to teach them English. The one who comes here, okay? Then we start the -- to do the citizenship, to teach the -- who would apply -- to encourage them to apply for citizenship and to vote. This is what's purpose.

Like Janele [Hyer-]Spencer, she was the councilwoman. She need the women's vote. And I felt women can be -- Arabic women, they can be more effective than men, because men go to seven o'clock -- to evening, to work. All -- mostly Arabic men work, like, 14 hours. Women home. They can go vote. And to vote, you have to be American citizen. We start encouraging the women, okay, to fight for American citizen, we have to teach them English, and then we have to teach them the exam for the American citizen. Like, all these projects -- start little by little. The association became very popular. Like, the association is start serving over -- the first year, we serve over, like, 3,000 people. And after that, we start serving, like, 5,000 people a year. Like, it's -- the number is going up, okay?

And then, we did the fundraising for Janele Spencer, and we have, like, 100 women, and these women, all of the housewives, and none of them working. And I remember in that time, I wasn't prepared, but we raised, like, \$6,000 for her. It was, wow! She was surprised. Like, this woman doesn't work. They donate their allowance to her, because

they felt this woman represented. And, plus, I make them feel like this is their hope. If they need anything, this is that community representative for you. You live here, okay? You want to protect yourself. You want to know your rights. There is -- someone have to represent you, okay? And it works -- and in that time, is Janele Spencer win. The second time we did, she didn't win. But the first time, at least, it win.

Then, we start seeing so many women coming for English classes, and so many women pass the exam test. And I see, sometimes, women coming -- just this week, coming to the person who teach her the lesson. "Oh, this is for you, because I pass my test. I'm American citizen now." And after that, they -- like, it didn't come in one shot. It came, like, year after year, and I start seeing a lot [of] women, because I involved with them daily, through my work, or through the event or through workshop. Like, we talk about it, too. And the -- most of them, they tell me, "Yes, I went to vote. I felt different. I felt I'm real American." That's great. You can be American and you can keep your culture. It's not -- this is a free country. Like, you can practice your own culture, your own freedom, okay? And you can be like everyone. Respect the law, respect your country, be faithful, okay? Be active member. Be active citizen, and you can make it in this country.

This is what I was -- like, being involved with mostly my work with women only. And we -- I felt like the poor women who have financially -- like, not stable -- it's the mostly women who -- was responding to us. And then, we start, like, you know, encouraging and making workshop in the association to make women more -- mostly involved in voting. This is -- it was a big success, big project for us.

And the Mother, the -- I'm going to talk something about the Mother's Day in America, American Mother's Day. It was -- every year, it was successful until the third one, I make it -- I heard about one of my friend -- but it's not, like, very close friends. I don't know if she want me to mention her name. I know she's proud of herself. I'm proud of her -- that she donated kidney for her sister-in-law, for her brother's wife. The wife, she

had five kids. She's in her late 30s, or early 40s. And I find out she went and she give her her kidney. I went and I visit her, okay, when she start recover. And I was so proud of her, and I make surprise for her in the third or fourth Mother's Day, I honor her. I honor that lady, and people, I told them, "You want to ask me what -- I honor this lady?" This lady, as American citizen, who lived in America, okay? And she came long way to donate. Like you know, some -- maybe some people feel, like, you know -- I don't want to go to meet God with -- missing something, you know? This lady went beyond, and she donate her kidney, okay? And we honor her.

And I honor -- like, if you -- we honor Linda Sarsour for her work for -- as a spokesperson and executive director for the Arab American Association. She played big, big role to encourage women, and to be present, and she's there for a lot of women, by the way. And I honor a few doctors who support the women, especially the Mother's Day, because without them, I couldn't make it, okay? Because it was, like, small, little donation to come to the Mother's Day, because we don't have money. I couldn't afford to make it free for everyone, okay? It was, like, very little, but we do a lot for them. Like, Dr. Eman Al-Janabi. She play big role. I have to remember who's the -- it's -- there is other doctors, but I cannot remember all of them. And then, the following year, was -- who we honor? I honor another person. She have ovarian cancer. This is what I was -- going. Like, you know, I want to bring attention -- not, like, this person, what they did exactly. This person did it for this patient or for this mother, okay? They did it, but it's, like, she did it for all the mothers here. Like, I want them to know the meaning, to give something -- you cannot buy it with money. This is what was my main purpose.

And then, the following year, I honor a young mother with the -- five kids, she have ovarian cancer. She was only 31st, and she have a child who's sick, who need the attention 24 hour in the same time. Her name Rania Dayekh [phonetic]. She diagnosis with the -- in 2004, with the ovarian cancer. I know her in the community, but she wasn't my friend -- or there is communication or visitation between us. But when I find

the -- as a board member of the Arab American Association, I went to visit her, okay? Even -- we don't have communication. And the -- actually, I was surprised and impressed how strong she is. And she was very -- believer, like, you know, she's going to make it and fight the cancer. She's a fighter. I honor her in the fifth -- of the Mother's Day in the fifth year. And I explain to everyone why we honor her, because she's brave -- and the encouragement she have and the family she have, and the support she have from her family and her husband and from the community, too, you know? I did that for her. I honored her and I brought a light for the ovarian cancer.

The last Mother's Day I did, Dr. Eman Al-Janabi sent me an email as she told me about young mother. She's under her thirties and she have three kids disabled. And they live in the fourth floor, and there is no elevator. And that young mother, always the smile doesn't leave her face. And she carry each child to the bus, every morning, one by one. Like, she go three times up and three times down to put her kids in the bus to go to the special school. This lady, I never met her until the day of the honoring, and she doesn't know, okay? And we honor that lady in the Mother's Day.

Mother's Day, it became, like, some kind of national day for the Arabic mothers here. And it was, like, people waiting for it. I receive a lot of emails and a lot of phones. And in 2015, when I diagnose with cancer, breast cancer, it's -- actually, I believe all the workshop we did, it save my life. And I went public with my breast cancer. And I cannot believe I find out, another -- two of my friends, when they heard about my breast cancer, they went to do sonogram, mammogram, and one of them, she find out that she have a breast cancer, too. Some people hide their disease. I don't know if they feel shame or they feel like people, they can look at them different. I couldn't understand the situation, because I have -- one my friends, she have a breast cancer before me, and she never mention it. She never -- she kept it secret. That's bother me now.

In 2015, I went for full mastectomy for breast cancer, and I believe that the workshop done by NYU Lutheran Medical Center and the Maimonides hospital, the workshop we did for all women, it saved my life. I skip one mammogram in 2014, I was so busy moving to a new house, busy at work. There's many things happened, and I didn't do my screening. Then, I went, in March 2015, I did my screening. I know it, it's when they started meeting -- and I know Maimonides have digital mammogram for breast cancer -- that this is a mammogram. This is not only the mammogram, no. This is above mammogram -- like, what can say it -- it's more accurate. When they told me I have to do that one, and I don't have authorization from my insurance, I know it, there is something wrong with my breast. I know it. I was strong. And then, they did biopsy, and then I decided to go full mastectomy, okay?

It was at the early stage, okay? And I stay six month home, and then I went to work. And everybody said, oh, my, she's lying. She need to win sympathy. Look how beautiful she look. They can see my smiling face, but nobody can know what inside me. I want to be strong for my daughters, for my son. I want to be strong for all the women who have breast cancer. I want them to know this is disease, you can fight it. This is disease, you don't have to be ashamed of it. It's not, like, you know, something you brought it to yourself or you done something wrong.

I went to work, first because I need my job. I need the health insurance, because I find out if I stay home, I'm, like, on disability, I'm not able to get medical insurance free. I have to buy it and I cannot afford to buy it either. Second one, I want all the women who have breast cancer -- don't sit home. Don't give up. Just go to work. Live your life as normal, okay? You live in a caring country, a caring system who can take care of you, who can help you. They can stand by you. I went to work, and I was very strong. And I was successful like usual, like nothing happened.

I'm not going to lie to you, sometimes I get scared, like it's going to come back. I think that's normal. I'm a human. I have feeling. I have my fear. I have my worries, okay? But that stay like, for a small, certain time, and goes away. Is -- I don't know. And then, some people calling me in the Mother's Day. I'm supposed to do that Mother's Day, and I didn't do it. And some people calling and complaining, "What happen?" And I couldn't answer anyone, because, you know, I was under -- intensive treatment, medical, emotional -- like, you know, I was going through a lot in that month, okay?

Then, I said -- I told everyone, "Next year, in 2016, I'm going to do Mother's Day, but it's going to be the last one to do." Because Mother's Day -- it's not like people come and see all the tables have flowers, the gift, and the DJ. No, it takes a lot, a lot of work. It takes -- like, I used to work -- start from January until the last day of the Mother's Day. The Arab Association used to help me a lot because I'm part of it. And my three daughters help me a lot. To set the flowers, sometimes you have to do the flowers home, to save money. And they helped me to back -- to do so-- sorry, so many things. And I 2016, I told them I want to do the last one, because I owe these women, to explain to them, maybe someone can take over. And they -- "Please, Mom, don't do it. Don't do it. It's exhausting!" Okay, because next day from the Mother's Day, I have no legs to stand. I cannot go out, because I stand, like, from seven o'clock until 11th, going around women -- like, you know, cheer them up, encourage them to dance, to talk to celebrate, to be happy. Like, you know, I do so many things, I will be the Mother's Day -- the real one, because I do it the night before the Mother's Day, okay? And I tell the ladies, the mothers, "Your husband's going to be the babysitter. No kids allowed, I'm sorry. Only you, you can come." Some of them tell me, "No, I have to bring my child!" I said, "It's not a child day. It's a Mother's Day. When we have a kid's day, you can bring them. Today, that's it." I make it clear. I was very strong and mean, they said. [laughter] But it was in order --

And in 2016, I did the Mother's Day, and it was very successful, really. It was, like, huge. All mothers from Queens, from New Jersey, from Staten Island, Brooklyn. It was amazing. All women came for that day. And I told them I'm so-- we did raffles, we did the sing, we dance, we did so many things, okay? And I told them, "I'm sorry, it's going to be the last one." It was the mark of 10 years, 10 years of Mother's Day, nonstop. And I didn't know -- after that, it's been since 2016. It's -- nobody did anything. They try, but I don't know what happen. Just -- I felt like, you know -- I'm sorry, like, you know, I -- and just I felt I'm tired and I deserve a break. This is -- I don't know if that's enough for you, and there's other things you want to ask me?

STRONG: I do. First of all, thank you for all your stories. I love listening to them. I'd like to go back and hear more details about some of the things that you mentioned. So, let's go back in time a little bit. Tell me about meeting your husband. How did you meet? What do you remember about that?

BADER: It's funny, I met him in his grandfather funeral. His grandfather was living in the third floor, I live in the fourth floor. And, as a tradition, neighbors, I have to go downstairs to ask him if they need help, if they need anything, okay? And I was helping with the -- his cousin. It's -- used to be my schoolmate. And I met her in the funeral, and we start talking, and then I went up the stairs to see her in that third or fourth day of the funeral, like it's already gone, but the -- people still coming. And I ask her if she need any help, and she told me, "Can you do Arabic coffee to help me?" Because they have to do a lot, you know? I start doing the Arabic coffee, and then this guy, he was staring at me, staring at me, and I said -- I felt, like, you know, scared. Why he staring at me?

And then, he came, he said, "Can I have some coffee?" I said, "Okay." I gave him the coffee. That's it. And then, after four days, I'm standing in my balcony with -- my family have a big balcony, and I'm sitting with my sister, like -- I'm standing in the -- around the balcony. And then, I see a gardenia flower throw to my balcony. And I look who

throw paper, but I look, it's the flower. I look -- like, he told me, "Can I talk to you?" I said, "No, you cannot talk to me." [laughter]

I know who he is. I saw him. I was so scared, you know? And plus because he's Palestinian, I'm Lebanese, I was scared to death to talk to him, because I know my father. And then, he's supposed to leave to Libya. He was working in the Phillips company, in the oil -- in the desert. And then, one day, I was going to my sister house, and this person waiting under the building, and he told me, "Zeinab, please, can I just -- I want to talk to you. One thing, one thing." I said, "What you want? I cannot talk to you. You know our culture. I cannot talk to you." I was scared from my father, to death. My father -- it's very -- it's, like, you know, it's not easy man. Even he have open mind, because always, if you love someone, you bring him home. You don't talk outside. This is his policy.

And then, he told me -- just he need to talk to me, to -- I said, "Okay, all right." I told my older sister, "This guy, he want to talk to me, want to talk to me." She said, "Okay, let's talk to him." And I went with my sister. I didn't go by myself. And then, my sister, she sit in a table, drinking coffee. I was sitting with him, another table. And I told him, "Listen, I'm a girl, okay, I don't go out with men. I don't let anyone hold my hand or kiss me or anything. You have to know, I have a strict father, and I'm very religious. I don't do that."

He told me, "Who told you I want to do that? I'm going to come ask for your hand tomorrow!" I said, "No, no, no, don't ask for my hand." He said, "You know, I'm supposed to leave to the airport. I delay my trip because I want to talk to you." I said, "Leave, leave, and we'll talk later." He left. And then, I start receiving letters from him from Libya, telling me how much he loves me. I wasn't sure I love him, you know? And then, I get surprise. One day, it was the end of April. My father came and he said, "There is a guy, Palestinian guy, ask for one of my daughters." My husband's so scared,

he couldn't mention my name. He's scared -- like, my father, he's going to know. And he was telling him, "Zeinab, Sada, Zeinab, Sada" [phonetic]. And then, my father decided he have to take Sada of my older sister. And then, he told my mother, "I think he want Sada but I don't know what to do, because he's Palestinian." And then, my mother, she said, "No, we don't want to give Palestinian -- no." And then, my father said, "No."

And then, he go with his father to bring all my old father's friends to go to his work. My father used to work with the French company for electric for Lebanese government. He used to be -- I don't know what they call it now. It's -- the job is not there. Like, he's the one who take care [of] the electricity. Like, he's the one who decide what time they have to turn it off in the community and what time they have to turn it up. Like, certain -- like, they teach him. He has to be -- do -- is a job, to turn it off, to turn it down, and it stayed there in case fire -- something happened. He used to work from seven to four or seven to three, or he can work from four to twelve or twelve to seven. Like, they give him three shift. Every time, they change it.

And everybody go to him, he's educated, he's having a computer. There's nobody study computer in Lebanon yet, he's going to go to America to finish his degree. Whatever, he's handsome, he's -- anyway, they say -- and he told them, "Okay, which one?" They told him me. Then he came here, asked me -- he said, "It's up to you." I couldn't have the encouragement to tell my father yes or no. Oh, before a second time -- I'm sorry, I went to -- I was working with my uncle, hair stylist in that time. And then, I go, I find him waiting near the elevator. And he right away -- hold me from me hand, put me in a car service, and he take me to talk, you know? I was shocked. Like, I froze. I don't know -- like, he have a car service waiting for him. And I said, "What you doing?" He said, "Just -- we have to talk." He stop near café, and he said, "I love you. I came -- I'm supposed to leave to America from there. If you don't want to marry me, I'm going to go straight to America. If you want to marry me, it's in your decision." I told him, "It's

up to my dad.” And he told me, “If your dad doesn’t” -- “He said no, I cannot say yes. He will kill me if I said yes. It have to be him.”

Anyway, in that time, the war, it was very tough, very hard. It became very, very aggressive. And the -- I start -- my father start hearing his nephew died, the other nephew killed, you know? Like, these people killed, it’s not the fighter. They are not part of the war, but they being killed because they are Muslim, some of them because in the wrong place. Like, everything is -- some of them in the bombing. And you know what? My father told my mother, “You know, if she agree, let her go. At least she leave this war,” because my sister died before. Not forgot, you know?

And after that, my brother died, before -- no, no, my brother died after I get engaged. And then, my father said yes, and I never said yes -- he have to say yes. And we get engaged. And he promised to come back in two years. He give me that choice. I’m not going to -- like, he told me he want us to get married. I went to Libya again. My contract, I can still renew it, “Oh, do you want me to go finish my” -- I said, “No, go finish your education. You come back in two years. He went, and it was the war. I can -- I receive two years, only two letters from him and no phone calls. And I kept my promise. And after two years, I start feeling cold feet from his family toward me. I felt there is something wrong. And my father, he told them, “Where is your son?” He said two years. Already, he doesn’t want him, you know?

But because of the war around -- I figured out later. It’s not like in the same time I figure because of the war. Later, I figure it out. And then, they tell him, “We don’t know nothing about my son.” And my father said, “If you don’t know nothing about your son, at least I know about my daughter. No marriage, no engagement.” I stay one year, we are hoping for him to come back because, you know, I’m a person, I keep my promise, and I have feeling for him, okay? And, plus, it was a dirty war. Like, every morning, I woke up, I have to read the newspaper about this neighbor, about this student, you

know? I was a teacher for two years, for a -- like, first grade and second grade, okay? Because I finish my high school, but it's not like here. It's above high school. It's -- they -- we -- there, we have baccalaureate. It's like two years college here, okay? I was a teacher. Like, every morning, I hear this father had died with five kids. Like, it was emotional.

And then, I have no time, and then my brother pass away that -- who's younger than me, one year or nine month. He died in the war. He died during the bombing, okay? And he was very young, very handsome. I felt so -- mourn, like, you know, and didn't -- my sister before. And then, my other brother get emotional about that his brother died and the way he died. And then, my brother, he was volunteer with Red Cross to pick up the victims. And he used to see people had been cut off, shot -- it's not by bombing, by other -- they used to cut people, do ugly things to the corpse, you know, corpse. There's many things, okay?

And one day, my brother came, and I felt he lost his mind. And we took him to many doctors, we treat him so many times. But when his brother had been killed in the war, it came -- the last straw in his life. My brother was very smart. He graduate electric technician. He -- I remember, he create for us the first, like, what they call it? Electric heater. He did it from -- he start doing it at home, you know? And he -- and then, when - and he did something, and when there's no electricity, we can do battery to it. But it didn't -- be very successful, because one day, the battery had been burned and bomb, but he was trying.

And he couldn't take it, and after -- then, okay, this is my brother. Okay, then my husband, when he find out, after a few months, I'm going to get -- marry another person, suddenly, he came with no warning, and he told me I have to choose. He doesn't hold me responsible for anything, because it was three years. And, see, I don't know. I chose my husband. I chose him. And then, we get married. And then, after I

marry, like, six month, my oldest brother commit suicide, at the age of 24. It's not only my brother. Like, my cousins died during the war. So many people. My aunt's husband. So many. So many people died. It was very ugly war. So, this is what -- this is about my husband.

STRONG: So, he went back to the United States after you got married?

BADER: Yeah, he -- I get pregnant right away after we marry in July 19. I find out in end of September I pregnant, and it was very ugly pregnancy. I was vomiting all the time. I cannot eat, I -- and then, my mother said, "No, you cannot take her with you, because I have to take care of my daughter." Especially my sister pass away while she's pregnant. She was scared. And he left me behind for one year. It was like -- very hard year. I have the baby without him, like he wasn't there. It was very difficult pregnancy, delivery, everything. And then, he finish my green card. And then, I came in October 4, 1980 to Kennedy Airport.

I came and I made it in the -- you're not going to believe it. When I was in junior high school, I was reading, in history, about Columbus discovering America. One night -- I still remember it -- I have a dream I was in America, and I was seeing the red Indian, and it's like a movie. You know, maybe because I was reading -- and when I woke up, I said, "How it looks, America?" And I used to watch all the American -- like, there is many -- it was, like, "Mission Impossible", like Batman, Superman. Like, there's many things. And [there] was a -- something in the adventure in the space, that's in the '60s. I used to watch it in -- like, you know, we -- it was very popular there. We used to watch all the American movies in the [theater]. Like, we used go sit -- a lot of -- like, I don't know. Like, at first, in that morning, like, really, I'm -- one day I'm going to be in America. And I was scared from that dream.

And look what -- I make it as -- they said American Dream? I think I represent American dream, because I built a family and I built a future, and the -- I have good kids, thanks God. They finish education, they live in peace. Like, you know, we avoid

war, we avoid the -- so many tragedy in my country, like, you know -- like, it's -- really, I appreciate the cul-- this is -- some people will say, "America, my second country." But I will say it's my first country because I came young, very young, and I lived a war in my country. Like, I felt -- later --

When I felt this is my real country, this is my first country -- in 1999. When I went to Lebanon to visit, there is a few things -- happen, the -- I don't want to remember it. I felt like I'm a stranger in my country. I felt people had changed, their mentality, their honesty, their lifestyle. I felt completely I'm not one of them. And I cried in the airport so hard. Like, I really cried when I left Beirut. I felt like, you know -- I felt sad, because I felt like I don't belong there anymore. It was very sad day. It's not happy day. It was very sad day.

And the -- I didn't go since, say, 1999 until 2007, I went another trip for vacation with my daughter only. But I tell you, I feel like this is my country, and if I die, I told my kids I want them to bury me -- I know the place, like, in New Jersey for Muslim community. I just -- I have nobody in my -- in Lebanon. I have a few cousins, aunts, uncles, big family. But they -- I felt they are my family, but I felt the real family, it's here, my friends, which, say, I've been with them for 37 years. My kids, who lived here, it's -- you can say I lived the American dream, and I feel I made it, even -- I'm not rich, I don't make so much money, but there is -- other things. I made it in my life and my kids' life. It worth millions of dollars, and -- a lot.

STRONG: I'd also like to learn a little bit about your parents. Tell me about who your father and mother were.

BADER: Yeah, my father, he's involved in political for so many years. He's a public figure. He, in his young age, he was a boxer. My father didn't finish his school. He stay in school until maybe third grade. Third. It's not fifth, not sixth. Third. I remember him, he used to speak little bit of French, and the -- I know he know how to write, to read. I know he can read better than his writing. He was involved in the political life in

Lebanon -- because it was, like, a culture thing. Like, you know, like this family belong to this governor. This village belong to this senator. It's, like, a claim, you know? And my father, he used to play big role, because he's been famous for -- he's brave, he's educated. He's well-spoken. Like, he speak very well. He have charisma. He can be very funny, and he can be very scary in the same time. He raised 13 children without help from his family, without anyone. He have a good job. He was working in a -- electric company for the -- owned by French company, but it's for the Lebanese, because when I used to see his pay stub, it was in French, I remember. And he raise -- he sent all of us to private school. He believe in education a lot.

He was very religious, but not conservative. He wasn't. Like, he doesn't push me to pray or to do anything, but at age 13, he want me to wear the scarf like my other sisters. I have, like, three sisters above me, and the three sisters put a scarf -- but it's not like hijab right now. It's like a small piece, like -- just like that. And I went to school, and all the girls, there is only one person and me have a scarf. And I start putting the scarf in my pocket. And when I come home, I put it. And then, one day, he caught me and he told me, "You can lie to me, but how you can lie to God? Like, you know, you don't respect me, but" -- anyway, he slapped me in my face and I went home, crying. And then, my second sister came and she told him, "Dad, there is no one now wearing scarf and hijab in their hair. Plus, you know, this is not that important issue. Like, when we get married, if he want us, we wear it. If -- but nobody wearing it. We look strange, we look different. And what's the purpose if we put it in front of you and behind you -- you're going to look bad in front of people." And he said, "Okay, you can take it off, but you're not allowed to wear [inaudible 1:12:09], all that stuff.

I remember one day, I have a dress, I make it very short, and I went to get my result for the Brevet. The Brevet, it's like -- it's -- what they call it here? It's like eighth grade, but we don't do it in the school. We have to do it in the government school. We go to do the test, so if I pass, I can go to high school. And I went there and I was wearing that -- I

still remember the blue dress, with the black shoes. And it was up. And then, when I came back, I forgot my ID in the building of the government to get my result. I was so happy that I passed that I took the paper and I left my ID there. When I came, the army stop me and they told me, "Where is your ID?" I said, "Oh, I have my grade, but I forget it there." They stop me, they put me in the corner. I was only 14 years old. And then, they -- I told them, "Do you know who I am? This is my father." And they start talking, "Oh, my God, that's her father." And someone go call my father, and he come to pick me up. And when I saw him, I start ripping my dress and putting it down. I start ripping, you know, around here, [the hem,] to make it -- and he look at me -- "Okay, when we go home." He took me home and he didn't tell me anything because he [knew] I was so scared to death when they stop me. He told "My daughter, if I see her again wearing a short dress, I'm going to make her wearing pants under it." And it was the last time. I never did it. This is my father.

My mother, she was the oldest daughter for her father. She came from different country, from different village. And in the villages, if -- his father met my mother in Syria while visiting some saint, some religious figure grave or something, or I don't know what they call it. It's a religious center, okay? They go there, like, you know, and he like my mother. She was very beautiful girl, really. She's my mother, she's very pretty. And he, like, had to -- they became friends, and he introduce his son to my mother and her family. But he's a stranger. Her village very strict. It doesn't like the girls go out, marry out someone.

And to marry my mother, when he comes, what they have to do? In -- there is a big yard in the middle of the village where they do the wedding. Like, they do dabka, they dance, you believe it? And then, her cousin, he have to throw a big rock. It have a wood hand, okay? He have my father carry it up. Then, he allowed to marry my mother. And my father was strong. The minute he arrive that village, right away, her cousins, all the people who ask for her hand and she doesn't want them, they came around my father

and they throw the big rock. And my father carry it up and down, and he put it, and he continue his way. And he marry my mother.

Poor my mother. She lost three young children, you know? I -- she never complain. Always she was sad, but she never -- like, you know, address it or talk about it. And when I have my kids in America, when I get married to my husband, I told him I don't want to have kids, in the beginning. And he told me, "Why?" I don't want to tell him. And then -- that's, like, before we get married. Like, if -- few weeks, we start talking about building a family. I said, "I don't want any kids. I don't want any kids." And he said, "Okay." Like, you know? And when I get pregnant, I don't know, just -- you know, I was, again -- like, I never have experience before. And the -- I was very sad in the beginning, you know? Because always, I was scared, like, if I have kids, they're going to die the same way my brother -- my two brother and my sister died. It was a big impact in my life and my brother and sister life.

We are very close brother and sister until now, because after the three died, when we meet all of us together, you're not going to believe it what each one of us was thinking. Each one of us were thinking, "Who's going to be next? Who's going to die?" And it impact the whole -- all of us, like, became very attached to each other -- that one day, we talk about it. And it was, like, you know, it impact me. Like, I was very attached to my daughters and my kids. Like, in my daughter wedding, almost I collapse. I was very sad. Like, mothers have to be happy, dancing. No. I was very stressed, like, because my daughter has -- she's going to be somewhere else. This is when the tragedy hits you sometimes. It impact the rest of your life.

STRONG: Tell me about who your older sister was. Before she died, what was she like?

BADER: My oldest sister, I wish I have a picture to show it to you. She was 18 when she got married. She was very beautiful girl. She had this long, long red hair. She had this blue eyes, like a sky. She was the most beautiful girl in the area. It's not in -- because I lived in Tyre. That's my sister. There is no one in Earth in that area, didn't come to ask for

her hand. My father always felt there is nobody deserve her. He want her to marry someone -- is the same believer from his political party. Until he find the someone, and his father -- you know how the district attorney of New York, his father was the former - - the district attorney of Tyre, his father. And he was the same belief, political party of, like, my father.

And one day, my sister, she was going to learn how to -- it's like a center to teach you how to do craft, something, because she finishes school only until fifth grade. In that time, my mother need her to help her. This is how it is. And she became big. And, you know, always the oldest one have to pay the price. And her husband saw her, and my father sitting, drinking coffee with her. And he told him, "Who's that idiot let his daughter walk like this? This is the most beautiful girl I ever saw." "That's her father, stupid." And my father slap him and told him, "That's my daughter." And then, anyway, to make the story short, he ask for her hand. She -- in the beginning, she doesn't want him, okay? I believe maybe she have feeling for someone, he ask for her hand before, okay? And it didn't work out, and she wasn't, like, ready. But my father said, "No, you cannot marry him." And she marry him, and she fall in love with him after that. And he was very rich. He take care of her very well. She have the first son. He pass away in 1991 at the age 24, like his mom. Car accident in Paris.

And she have two daughters and one son, and her fourth child, she have miscarriage and they give her some kind of medication which make her bleed in her bed without knowing, like just make her sleep. And when she woke up, she was finished. And I went to visit her, to help her with the kids. And when I went to her house, I find the kids home alone and her bed full of blood. I call my parents. I went to her husband -- the factory, and the guy who's there, he told me he took his wife to the hospital. I went back, take care of the kids, take them to their grandmother, from the father's side. I took a cab to the hospital and then, I told you, my father has to stay in Tyre. I find, like, over 1,000 people in front of my family house. I know that she died before I went inside and

I saw her dead, at the age of 24. She was my best friend. She's older than me, but always I was her favorite as a child. Like, you know, she used to tell me everything bothering her.

Like, there is a sister -- two sisters between me and her. She was the oldest, and we have the second and the third one, and we have my brother who died. I was the fifth one. And I don't know, something strange -- like, you know, because maybe I was very, like -- I love her so much. Like, I go after I finish school. She was doing, like, laundry. She do something, I help her. When she want to go out with her husband, I take care of the kids. I love them so much. I was very close to the kids. And she used to tell me everything. She doesn't tell my mother when she have a fight with her husband. She used to tell me. I don't know, I think I grow up before my age in that time, because she used to tell me everything. And really, it's -- look, she died in 1975. It's been 40 years, and -- 43, and it's still, until now -- I remember everything about her. Until now, I love her. I love her kids. And I never forget her anniversary: February 3rd, 1975. I never, never forget her. She died.

And after that, the war start, you know? After she died, like, the whole world fall down. And then, in the March or April, I don't remember, the civil war, the first sign start in '75, and it was very ugly war. And then, after that, the war start, and just start seeing a lot of people died. And then, the following year, I told you, my brother pass away. And after four years, my other -- like, you know, my teenage -- or my life, it was really very sad and very -- tragedy. But, you know what? But I think, like, the life I built with my kids gave me a lot and give me so much. It's not to forget what happened to me in my country, but to make me more stronger and to see the future here. That's how I felt.

STRONG: Tell me, then, more about raising your kids and getting to know them and teaching them.

BADER: My kids, okay, it's -- I lived in Manhattan for two years, okay? And then, the -- it's -- there is no Arabic families around, and only one friend, and only my sister and my

brother was there before me, before I go. And then, the following year, I got to bring -- in '81, I have my daughter, Maisa. And then, the people downstairs start complaining about my kids. Like, they go around and they make complain, okay? And in the beginning, they thought I'm Russian, 'cause I'm blonde. I used to have blonde hair, long one. And one time, they speak to me Russian, I told them, "I'm not Russian. I'm Arabic." Honest to God, I tell you the truth. They signed a petition against me and against my husband, [laughter] because my kids make -- because if I was Russian or maybe not Arabic, maybe they will accept me.

They sign a petition against me to remove me from the building because my kids make so much noise. Because, you know, it was wood, and I bought a walker for the baby one, okay? I -- like, in '80, I have the oldest one. In September, I have in '81. It's how -- it's even less one year. Like, the other one was one year and four month. And, like, two babies I have. And, you know, they were now -- and she want to walk, she want to play, you know? They sign the petition, and in '82, I move to Ocean Parkway, and the -- I move to a nice building and there is a friend of my husband there. And then, after, like, two years, there is more Arabic family -- came to that area, which I was happy. And then, I find in the neighborhood there's a few Arabic families knows my husband. And it have a swimming pool, backyard. I felt happy. I was very happy in that house, really.

And then, my husband, they open business and he was good. And then, the -- then, after a few month, in '82, I find out I am pregnant with my third one. You know, [laughter] I don't know, my pregnancy is very difficult. I get sick. But you have to know, like, we came from country -- there is no education about sex, about birth control, about anything, you know? And there is no man before your husband, you didn't know nothing. Like, you know, like, you stay married for couple years, but is still you are blind. You don't know a lot. I got pregnant, okay. I get sick a lot. And then, I have my daughter, the third one. And in that same year, I became involved with the Palestinian Women Association, as schools, as in the committee. I was like a member in the

committee, one of them, until '86 or until '85-'86, I became very active lead. I was the president of the women committee. Like, it's the Palestinian Women Association, but we have committees. There is the women committee. It's, like, we do things with the women, what about -- I start involve -- okay?

And then, my kids went the -- I remember I sent my oldest one to Charlie Brown Daycare, and I used to speak, like, English, you know that broken English? It's like a British accent, because this is how we learn over there. And in that, the principle there, she's very nice, she's Russian. She told me, "Why you speak English to your daughter? Speak to her your own language. When she grow up, she can have a second language. Look, I speak French, I speak Italian, I speak Spanish, I speak Yiddish, I speak Russian, I speak English. I have six language." And I told her, "How she's going to learn English?" She told me, "Don't worry, she's going to learn. But keep your language." It's the best advice she gave to me. And I start speaking to them only Arabic at home. And all of them speaks Arabic. Thanks God, they know the language.

And then, it's like we start, like, you know, social life, knowing a lot of people through the Palestinian Women Association. We have the -- like, visit each other. We do breakfast, we do meeting, we do this, we do that, you know? And my kids start going to public school, okay? And it was hard for me, because I didn't know the language. Don't forget, like, you know, in my country, we used -- they just say English and French together. And it was impact, because you don't concentrate in this -- you have to do in two, and it was, like, difficult. And I remember one day, it was Election Day, and because I didn't read the newspaper, I don't hear the news, I didn't know nothing. My husband left to work early. I took my two daughters to -- one of them, it -- was in kindergarten, one of them in first grade. I took them to the school, public school. I put them there and I start walking.

Before I got -- the main street, it's like a -- four lanes up and four lanes in Ocean Parkway. I hear kids saying, "Mommy!" Like this. [laughter] "Oh my God, that's my kids!" I run. They crying, I started crying. "What happened?" They told me there is no school. I said, "No, there is school, what you talking about?" I went back to school, she told me, the lady, "Today Election Day." And I have a phobia, that's it. I'm not ever -- I'm kind of go -- every time, I take my kids to school. I will wait and I will wait until -- make sure they are in. And then, I find out -- this is how I find out that public school have Election Day. And after that, I start reading the newspapers. [laughter] I start reading then -- first the *Daily News*, and after that, I start reading the *New York Post*.

And then, through the Palestinian Woman Association, I met -- that's my friend, Zoher Abbasi. She had big impact in me, to teach me many things. She's the one -- like, she's telling me, like, you know, the kids have to sleep in certain time. They have to watch certain movies, shows. You have to teach them this. I -- she take her kids to the library, I start taking my kids to the library. Then, I find out she take her kids to have swimming classes. I said, "Oh, we have a swimming pool." Then, I ask the lifeguard to teach my kids separate, and I pay for him for the four of them. Like, \$25 it was. It's not a lot for three kids in that time. And they learn how to swim.

And then, we start going together to [Six Flags] Great Adventure, Sesame [Place], and I take them all this stuff, and some of my friends say -- like, I go with her or I -- someone have a car. I wasn't driving still in that time. And some of my friends, they said, "Oh, how you find out? How you go?" "My friend, she tell me, we go." It's -- a lot of them, they was feeling like -- it's not jealous. Like, left -- they cannot take their kids. Maybe lack of money, maybe lack of time, I don't know. I was, like, doing what this girl doing.

And then, in 1987, my husband surprise me with a car. And he said, "You going to start driving," because I used to walk in the snow to take the kids to school. And I was

pregnant with my fourth child, and I slipped in the snow, boom, like this. And then, my husband got scared and he said, "No, it's better she drive." And then, he brought me a car and he told me, "Listen, I'm going to put it in the gas station, five blocks away from our house. If you learn, it's going to be your car. If you don't learn, I'm going to give it to someone else." Okay, I start learning. [laughter] And then, I learn -- I pass the test, okay, and I started to -- more active taking my kids everywhere, doing a lot of stuff with them. Like, we've been together everywhere together. Wherever I go, my kids with me, and I wasn't working.

And I start sewing dresses for them. Like, in Easter, I know a lot of Muslim people doesn't celebrate, but I have Christian friends in the building, like three of them or four. I have no Muslim friends in my building. And my kids were seeing these kids celebrating Christmas, Easter. I felt it's not my kids' fault, born Muslim, and in a country, where they celebrate these beautiful holidays. And then, I start sewing dresses in Easter for my daughters, the same color -- three of them. I sew it, I have pictures. I can show it to you another time. I take them to King Plaza, I remember to have picture with the bunny. I sew for them the dresses for Christmas, and I take them to have pictures with Baba Noel, with the -- what they call it, Baba Noel? Santa Claus. Santa Claus. I was going to forget. Yeah, and I used to do, like, eggs, put it in the flowers. I have the plants hiding here and there. I put money, I put chocolate.

And Christmas, I -- like, you know, the spring is coming. What I go -- I go buy whatever they need, and a toy. Like, most -- I buy clothes for them. Like, socks, whatever, and I put them in a big box. Each one of them have a box and a toy, okay? And in a -- Christmas morning, okay, they was happy, "Santa Claus brought us gifts." I want them to feel normal, like the other kids. I don't want the to feel -- have been left back because of their religion and because they are -- and they're not [in] the country their parent came from. They was very happy. I see how happy they are. I kept doing it until 2004, until they start getting married. Still, in my house, always [have] a Christmas tree. I

don't care what people say. My mother told me it's nothing wrong to do Christmas tree. Nothing wrong to celebrate, because you living in this country.

My mother very, very religious, but my mother, she want me to be happy and she want my kids to have it -- because we have no -- like, our families comes and goes. Like, in our holidays, it doesn't exist. Nobody recognize my -- Eid al-Fitr or Eid al-Adha. Nobody knows, okay? And I don't have a family to celebrate with them. I was doing that for my kids when they grew up, okay? And the -- it was a beautiful life. It's -- I can say the most beautiful life, I have it in America when I wasn't working. I was a full housewife and a full mother. A mother fully. Like, it was the best years of my life. Like, doesn't matter how many years I'm going to live. That age, it was precious and it was amazing and precious and important, and still important. And I wish my daughters never work and take care of the kids, too. They -- I know people can say how I work for 22 years and I have this mentality. Maybe I have different mentality from other people, but I believe -- this is my belief. Everybody free in their belief. I'm in free country, okay? I believe if I'm financially set, my kids -- my time to stay while it makes -- it worth millions. It's not the money -- I'm going to bring it.

But I have a situation. I couldn't choose. Either my daughters, at age 14, they have to go work in McDonald or I am the mother of five to go start working and provide what they need. And I know it, in that time, if they start working, maybe they can end up with no education, just -- they were used to the money in their hands, and it -- they not going to make it to high school. I choose -- I work. Still, I have so many memories and pictures and videos. Like, I used to do birthday for each one of them. Their father was very generous with my daughters. He never said no to them for anything I want to buy to bring. Sometimes he, like, you know, like have to -- he needs something -- he -- no, he rather his daughters have it, and his son. I used to invite all friends from all kind -- like, you know, all their friends from the Catholic school and all the friends from the Arabic society, the Arabic community used to come. We -- I remember mostly their friends

were Italian and we did the Arabic amuses, they laugh, they have fun, they start dancing. "Teach me how I dance," they said. Like, they have so much fun, we did so many parties.

And we went -- in the -- and I used to take them camping. When we have the Palestinian Women Association, we -- the Palestinian Women Association used to do camping, like, in the end of August, in the Memorial Day. I remember we used to pack our stuff and take our kids, and we go to the Poconos or to the mountain and we stay -- like, we used to go maybe Thursday night or Friday night, and we come back Sunday night, something -- or more, and make excuse to have a lot of fun. A lot of families coming from New Jersey, Queens, Bronx, and we meet, all of us, in that mountain, and we do barbecue. It was activity.

Like, you know, it's -- my kids have a lot of fun in young age. But is -- but sometimes, I feel like they missing something. I wish I know what it is. I know they want me to retire then stay home, take care of myself. But now it's hard. It's hard. It's not going to happen right away. My daughters -- was, and my son, it was the strength who gave me life. They was, like, everything in my life, and always I was scared, like, if something happened to them, I'm not going to stay alive one second. I -- this was the biggest fear of my life, like, God forbid, to lose one of them, because I lost three of my family in a row. Like, this was a nightmare for me. I'm, like all mothers -- love her kids. She want the best for them, take care of them, support them, stand by them, watch them grow up. Go to pre-K, to go to high school, finish college.

And I want you to know, I attend the PTA for all my five kids, after work, before I work, always, I did. I was there for them. And they -- and I appreciate all the people who support me with all my decision, who assist me with my kids, my family -- my husband play big role. He such a kind, nice man. Affection, loving, caring. He give us -- like, he sacrifice all his life only for his kids. And I never, never heard -- if I want to buy

anything for my kids or to bring -- or to do any education sessions, he never said no. Always he was very generous. Like, private tutoring, the activity, soccer, basketball, swimming, gymnastic, English -- everything. I know some people say, "Oh, that's his job." It's not -- it's like that -- is the job or is the duty. But somebody go beyond his duty, it should be appreciate -- I recognize his work as a father. He was always there for my family, for me, for my kids.

STRONG: Tell me a little about when you came to the U.S. and you were starting your own family, how practicing your religion changed.

BADER: Okay. When I came, I told you there's no Muslim around me. There is a -- it's -- I'm living in a Christian country. It's -- I was feeling that religion, as you see, celebrating the Christmas, the Easter with my kids, okay? All occasions, the Fourth of July, Memorial, all occasions. I feel it -- the need -- I need -- and my kids need. My life, it changed. In 1987, my whole family came. Like, my brother, my sister.

I forget to tell you. I have a sister who's married, and she have three boys and one girl, and my other sister, she's married with the three boys and one girl. They are sisters and brothers married. I have another sister who live in Michigan. She have four girls, one boy, and one of her daughters, she's eye doctor at age of 28. She's in Michigan. I have my younger sister. She have the twins, boy and girl, and another boy. She's a housewife. I have my brother, he have three boys, who -- they live in Ohio. One of them is studying to be a doctor. My other brother, he live in Miami, in Florida. He have two daughters. One of them is came -- he's divorced, but now he's remarried to the mother of the kids again. My -- one of my brother marry to a Spanish lady. He have a son named Ali [phonetic] with her. He's happily married. And I have a sister back home. She's a grandmother. She's a housewife. And I have a brother who serve in the Army, and he's retired, and he have seven kids. He raise all his kids by himself, lonely, far away from us, because all of us -- half of us came in the early '80s, and the rest came after '87.

I have a big family now, living in Brooklyn. We been -- how many sisters? We been four sisters with our kids, okay? And three brothers, and my mother and my father came to America in 198-- my father visit America before, but he couldn't leave because of his job. He retired in early '80s, okay? He came, stayed, like, one year, and sometimes -- but he couldn't live here. He felt he belonged to Lebanon, you know, where he's from. Like, his life. My mother stay and goes and come back to see her kids.

And when my whole family came and reunited, now the religion became a -- present in our life. First with the kids, they start fasting. You're talking about 1987. The oldest one, she was seven. We start fasting, you can say, at '89, '89 or '90. In '89, she was nine years old. They want to fast, because they saw my family fasting, and they have the attention, like, every day one, invite us for, [inaudible 1:44:48] breakfast. For -- we call it a breakfast, okay? And we -- every week, we make big, big one for the whole family, you know? It was amazing. Plus, our friends.

And my friends, not my family, my friends too, when they find out -- like, because I'm not wearing scarf, I'm not -- doesn't show I'm religious, they are so proud that I make my kids fast. It's not I make them or I force them, they want to fast. And my kids was fasting and they go to Catholic school, and the principal of the Catholic school, she congratulate them and she was so proud of them. This is a big impact in my kids. Like, they felt there is no difference between the Christian and Muslim. And half of their friends until now, they are Christian and they celebrate with them at Christmas. Like, they buy them gift and they -- for each other.

Then, they started fasting, they love it, okay? There is no practice, really. I was fasting with them. I start fasting before '87. I -- no, I start fasting in '87, okay. And when I -- after I have my son, I start fasting in that -- years. Let me remember, '86, I don't fast. I was pregnant. Yes, I start fasting in Ramadan, '87, and my kids start fasting in '89 or '90, I can't say. And we start celebrating Ramadan, celebrating the holiday. How? Like, with

all that -- Muslim women, like, through the association, we used to do party for them. And then, we start taking our kids to McDonald, to Coney Island rides. And then, we take them to the one near Bay Parkway. I don't know if you know -- it -- that is near -- there is one in Bay Parkway, too. It's small, like, rides for the kids. We take them there. All of us, we take all our kids, we buy them ticket. It was empty. Nobody there. Like, it's full of our kids. And every year, we take them to -- mostly to Coney Island, to have rides, or we take them to movies, and then we go to restaurant to have dinner. It became bigger. Like, it start -- older sister, with the kids, with the husband, all of us, we go have a dinner, which it -- or lunch.

This is -- we -- how we start celebrating, and -- but we -- like, we are not conservative, like, you know? We do what we have to do, but we don't go extra, okay? And my son, he became religious, I told you, after September 11. And then, after a few years, he doesn't want to be, like, religious. He love his religion. He fast, okay. He pray when he want, but he doesn't want to go to mosque, he doesn't want to be, like, you know -- I don't know, maybe it was the right thing he did, because, you know, it's sometimes, when you put too much religion in some kids, they lose it, okay? Like, radical Christian, radical Muslim, radical Jews, radical whatever. Like, you know, I was happy that he stay far away from these radical people. It was very important and very scary. But thank God, he was smart enough.

Some people tell me, "Oh, because your son went to Catholic school." It's not because of that, because my son, he study the Torah, and the Bible, and the Qu'ran. And one day, he came and he told my husband, "I find out all religions similar. Is the same thing, only different --" This is how smart he is. "A few issues, but the main thing is the same. But each religion took something and avoid something." That's what his opinion, you know? And he said, "I want to be Muslim, but I'm going to be, like, you know, the Muslim who's not, like, you know, crazy Muslim or bad Muslim. I want to be my own. I don't want nobody to judge me, okay? I want to live my life. When the time comes, I

will be very religious. God will tell me when I be religious.” Which is a good thing, thanks God, you know? He still have his faith, at least, you know?

So, this is how it is. But I have, like -- you know, my daughters, they are religious more than me, though always they tell me they want me to wear the scarf. They doesn't wear scarf, my daughters. They said because I don't wear it, they -- doesn't want to embarrass me that I don't wear the scarf. But they pray. They pray five times. Sometimes, they want to teach me how to pray. They keep pressuring me, like, you know, I skip the prayers, you know? It's -- they feel like this is very sin. Like, they -- I don't know, I think they are religious in their own way. I know people, sometimes they will judge them because, like, they worry, like, any girl, like, that doesn't wear a scarf, they are modern in their clothes -- they feel God only can judge them. And they do their duty. They told me we pray, we fast, we don't go sin. We don't do bad stuff. We follow our religion. But this is the outside. They believe there is many people worry everything, but they are evil inside. This is how they think. And I think they are right.

It's not the scarf, it's the sign of your faith. No. Maybe it promote your faith, but it's not the sign, because I don't know what's under the scarf. I have to know and feel what you have in your heart. If I don't hurt anyone, I don't steal, I don't kill, I don't do infidelity, I don't do sinner -- I don't do so many things. I know inside I'm a good person, I'm a good Muslim, I'm a good human being, I'm a good citizen. Okay, I don't need the permission for a human being like me to tell me if I'm a good person or I'm a bad person. It's not their place to judge me and to tell me. This is what I tell my kids all the time. What's inside me, it belong to me and to my God. He's the only who can judge me. No one else. That's how I practice my religion.

STRONG: Thank you for telling me. The other thing I wanted to ask you is how did you first become involved with the Palestinian Women's Association? How did you learn about them? How were they founded?

BADER: Yeah, it was -- you know, my husband is Palestinian, okay? And we have a friend who's not Palestinian. Lebanese. His wife Colombian, and she was part of the Palestinian Women Association. And then, he introduce me to one of the Palestinian Women Association -- it wasn't Palestinian Women Association -- yes, they was working in it, okay. And they told that lady that there is a mother or a wife or the wife of one of their friends. She's from Lebanon. She speaks very well Arabic, okay? And we felt like she's a -- very open mind. And she came from Lebanon. She must -- like, you know, active, she lost something. Especially came from a civil war, do you know? They feel there is many things to do -

Oh, I tell you how it happen. I went to -- there is administration in Washington for -- against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, 1982. This is how I met that girl, okay? We was in Washington. And she talked to me, and then I find out she knows my husband in the administration there. And they said, "Oh, we want to do something for the Palestinian Women Association to organize women, to do this and to do that, educate them." Like, they do courses to educate you. Like, they -- like, you know, like, they want you to learn a lot. They want you to go to school. They want you to build a future, to not be just a housewife.

The main thing, the Palestinian Women Association, they want you to come out as a free women, okay? As a Muslim or Arabic free women, to come to the society to work, to speak, to be involved. They want you to be strong, okay? They want you to be active person in this country. Like, you know, to serve your community, to help each other. Like, something like that. It's -- this is how it happens, and she came and she met with me. And we would start talking, and she ask me about the civil war, how I feel, what happen and everything. Because my father was, like, you know, political man and very educated. You -

My father, by the way, he pray all his time and he was very religious, but he have open mind.

You're not going to believe it, he read for Stalin, he read Lenin book. He read four books for the communist. He read the Qu'ran every night. He read so many books for other political people, you know? And he read history. And in the end, he came -- like, you know, he want to be with the -- his God and to be really true Muslim, and he practices religion day and night. And he never, ever, like, you know, one day left without the praying. This is -- but what he gain, like, he get educated, you understand?

And then, anyway, she told me, "We want to do something in New York. We have this we do. What you want to do?" She said, "We can do parties, we can do culture day, we can do a dabka, we want to teach the kids Arabic language so they can know what their mother tell them." And because, you know, the kids starts -- like, born here, they speak English, they cannot understand the mother -- what is saying. And then, we want the women left to understand the culture here. They like to be active, to come out, to be brave, to go to school.

They been, like, encouraging so much, like, to go to school. I remember when I have my fourth child, my son, they told me you have to take you, too, because you must go to college now. You cannot keep just having kids, like a cat. I get mad. That's what they told me. Like I'm a cat, okay. They want women to work, to be someone, you know? A lot of women made it. They are professor in colleges, they became -- one of them became ambassador for the Palestinian in Holland, one of them, yes. Is a lot of them -- like, active in certain way.

I became involved with them because I have no family, I have no Arabic people, nothing. I want something to work with me and work with them to identify my identity, to find what kind of life I'm living here, where I'm standing. I need the -- someone to care about me. You remember, I have no family. I want someone to know who I am. I want my kids to grow up with the same culture, at least. This is, like -- it became very

motiv-- and I have fun, like, you know, to travel twice a year for conventions and festival. Like, I felt I'm important person. Like, you know, I'm going for a convention to meet all these educated women. They have jobs, they are -- like, finish colleges. They are professor, they are -- like, they came. Like, you know, I felt it's a challenge, and in the same time, is opportunity for me to find out who I am, with who I'm living, who's these people, you know?

STRONG: So, you were so active in women's health, ultimately. Is that something that you sought out on purpose? Or something that just -- you fell into because that was the job you could find? How were you drawn to women's health work?

BADER: Okay. Through my job -- was working with the health insurance, with Lutheran, and this field. That's -- with this field, you can meet a lot of women suffering from many things, and they are not educated. They -- doesn't know -- like, you know, I remember when I start with the association here, it's -- there is a certain time, especially after September 11th, and a lot of issues. I get depressed. I start seeing a psychiatrist to [cope] with my life -- there is many changes happened, okay? Like, I start working, mother of five, and there is the pressure of the work, the pressure of my kids, and go -- I start seeing psychiatrist. It's a friend of mine. And she was volunteering in the Arab Association. Her name, Dr. Zoha Frauit [phonetic]. She's a Palestinian Christian from Lebanon, and her husband is from -- he's German. Or it's not German exactly. From Austria. Not Australia, Austria, okay?

And I start seeing her, okay? And I start improving. She give me the encouragement to stand up, to take care of my kids. She find solution for me, because I used to do my laundry until two o'clock in the morning. And next day, in my day off, I cannot stand up. Or next day, I have to do something for my kids. She told me, "Okay, why you didn't let someone do your laundry? You working. Let -- pay for it." And I said, "Oh, wow, that's great." I -- it's a -- like, big responsibility, I move it. You know, this is a -- and then, through my job, I start seeing, like, women come to me crying. She's depressed because she's far away from her family, or her husband never being home, or she have to take

care of the kids. She doesn't speak the language, she go to school, her son got in trouble, there is no one to assist her and all this stuff. Like, we started finding some volunteer, go with the mothers to the school to translate for her and to stand by her. And then, there is, like, certain women, they tell me, like, she's depressed and ba-ba-ba.

Okay, "First, okay, you can see Dr. Zoha, you can come." "No, no, people going to say I'm crazy." I said, "If I go there, too, am I crazy?" They tell me no, you are not. I said, "I see her every week. Look at me. I'm better than before." And she told me, "They not going to say -- okay, I don't want nobody to see me." I said, "You come, you sit. I'm going to call you and then you go to her. Nobody knows you come to see her." And little by little, I start seeing so many women until Dr. Zoha couldn't handle it anymore. She was seeing over 12 people a day, okay? This is -- came from my job, who put me very close to my community.

Then, one day, I have another lady, she came to me and she told me she seeing something in her breast, and it's very painful. And I figure it right away, it must be something. I wasn't aware about the breast cancer and symptoms of it. And then, I told her -- okay, she have no insurance, and then I call one of the doctors, which -- I know him. I told him, "I want you to see this lady, to do favor for me," okay? I sent her, and they find out that she have -- he told her he have to do this, he sent her to Lutheran Medical Center. She pay little bit. Anyway, they find out she have cancer, early stage, and she get treatment. After that, I don't see her, honest to God. After what happen, something happen. She moved, she went back, I don't know.

And then, for the breast cancer, one day, there is a client of mine. She have five or -- five kids. This lady, she used to harass me to renew her kids two month ahead of time. They have no document here. All her kids illegal, she's illegal. It's -- I was surprised. This lady, she harass me ahead of time. I have people before her, you know? And she was doing this for five years. One time, she didn't show up. I call her, and nobody

answer. And then, I give the last day of the insurance -- I call her house. Didn't -- her son answer the phone. I said, "Hi, why your mother -- where is your mother?" He told me, "My mother in the hospital." I said, "What happened to her?" He told me she have breast cancer. She had no family. She had the kids and the husband left her, marry a second wife in Queens. She's living in a small house, I still remember, at 60[th Street] between Seventh and Eighth Avenue, okay.

I said, "Okay, when your mother coming out?" He told me, "Maybe in two days." I said, "Okay. Tell your mother I'm going to come to see her next Friday." "Okay." He said, "Okay." Then, I go to Costco, across the street. I bought flowers, and I prepare all the papers, and I went to her house. She was smiling. She welcome me, like, you know, she want to give me coffee, drink. I said, "No, no, please. It's just -- I want to sit with you a few minutes, okay?" And they -- when I saw her, how she decorate her bedroom, it's, like, full of flowers, beautiful colors. Like, you know, the cover of the bed -- like, she create everything by her hand. Like, she did so many things. Her house, it clean, spotless. She's very sick. She have no family, okay? And I told her, "How you doing?" She told me, "I'm good," ba-ba-ba.

Anyway, I did the insurance, I kiss her goodbye, and then I left. Okay, and I give her my phone number, and I give her son my phone number, and I told him, "If you need anything, give me a call." And then, six month pass. And then, her son call me and he told me that he turn 19, he no longer eligible for illegal immigrant, eligible for insurance when he get to 19. He call me and he told me that he's no longer -- have insurance. He went to the doctor, ba-ba-ba. I said, "Who are you?" He told me, "You are the lady" ba-ba-ba. "Okay, well, how is your mom?" He told me, "My mother pass away three months ago."

Impact me. I cried for -- even -- I met her as a person once. As a client, I met her every year once. And then, I tell you, I felt so bad. And I called the father, okay? I took that

phone number, and I told him, "Do you need anything for your kids," ba-ba-ba. He told me -- in that time, I didn't know that he's not with the wife. He tell me, "No, just I need insurance for my son," ba-ba-ba, whatever. "Can you please, every year, you can help my kids to renew whatever." I start -- every year, I call him, and I renew the insurance. From this way, okay, then doctor, then, the -- they start then having a program after they did a big survey in the community, they want to do a workshop. It looks like Lutheran have a fund for certain something by the state or by law, I didn't know. They have to do educational workshop, or they want to promote the -- something in their hospital so the community come to -- involve.

And they did the first one, the breast cancer. I ask them for a breast cancer. I met with them. I said, "I think we need this one." We did the breast cancer, I think, twice -- workshop, okay? And it was very successful. And the -- we did one mental health. It was really good. And one, as I told before, for heart disease, and one for colonoscopy. And there is one for -- I cannot remember the name, for the people who have -- like, you know, they have a stroke. I don't know what they call it in English. I know, but I forgot.

STRONG: What's the word in -- ?

BADER: In Arabic?

STRONG: Yeah.

BADER: It's, like -- it's -- you're not going to know it. It's [speaks Arabic]. Like, you know the vein, when they open it to put [speaks Arabic] or something in the vein so the blood can go to the heart and come back?

STRONG: I'll look it up.

BADER: It's something like -- they did one, and Maimonides did the same thing. Both of them start competition, and both of them, I was -- assist them to bring women, okay, and encourage women, and it's -- I translate, like, maybe twice. But always, they bring the professional people to translate. Sometimes, I have to translate in the corner if they miss the translation, something like that. The women was very happy, very proud. They are, like -- you know, they felt, like, you know, there is a value for these mothers

and their health. It was very successful. And after that, I don't know, they stopped -- I think there is no more fund, or maybe they reach the goal. I have no idea. This is how I became involved.

STRONG: Another thing that you told me you worked so hard on was registering women to vote. And so, I notice in your own story, you told me there was a day you didn't even know what Election Day was. So, how did you learn to vote, and what does that mean to you?

BADER: Oh, yeah, okay. It's -- I told you, when my kids was young, I -- is -- I don't know about vote. I never heard what it is, plus I didn't know the language. I didn't know public school open for voting, okay? How I started, through the Arab American -- the first time I vote in my life, when I became American citizen in 1991, I was so proud of myself. And it's -- the school, it's a few blocks away from my house in Dyker Heights. I used to live in Dyker Heights.

Okay, and then I like Bill [William] Clinton okay? And then, I want to go vote for Bill Clinton. I went there, and I vote for him, okay? Just -- I was a new American citizen, I want to practice my right. I want to see how -- people voting. I vote every year. And then, [when] September 11 came, you know, I felt like the power of communities, it change how you serve your community and your country, how you practice your rights. I cannot go ask the governor or the councilwoman, okay, like, you know, to take -- like, you know, few things happen to the Muslim community, like, attack, kill, the torture, throw things, like it's -- okay. I cannot go ask the councilwomen or councilman or governor or senator, you know, why that's happening to me and I'm not doing anything to my country. And I felt like Muslim people became, increasing, a lot, a lot, but they're doing nothing about themselves.

Okay, and then, I started, like, hearing from my American friends. They coming here, and they told me, "We know you know a lot of women. You work with this, you do that, you know? We need you to support this official." It's not only for me -- for all the board

member of the Arab American Association. This is how it start. I said, "How we can support them?" "We need you -- the people to go to vote." I said, "Okay." When I start asking women, go vote, she tell me she's not citizen. Then, I start filling forms for voting people, as a volunteer. In my own time, I come here, okay, and I ask women from outside to come in, and I -- one time, I put a table outside for the Arab Association. I sit over there and I start -- "Are you citizen?" "No." "Okay. You're not citizen here. You can -- assist you too. How many years -- ?" -- I start to, like, you know, encourage them. I give them the phone number of the association to come to have English classes, okay?

And then, I start targeting the women who citizen. And then, I did my own research, because through my job, I stay -- in the map, when I start doing my work, I have to target the Arabic language to my job. Then, I look to the map and I start seeing it through my job, where the Arabic people live. I find out big percentage in 11209, 11220, and some in 11232. And then, I find out some in 11238, 35, and then some in 11204. Like, I figure it out, in the Brooklyn is -- north, we are Brooklyn north, the Brooklyn south are from other side -- that we have big [population] of Muslim people and Arab people. And then, the people who come to do insurance with me, almost I start knowing everyone. The -- if this family, she have eight kids, from the eight kids, all of them American. And from the eight kids, I have four over eighteen, and the mother, the father, this is six voting in this house. This is how I start working. And in this house, we have seven voting. In this house, I have three. Oh, but in two years, I'm going to have more in this house. I start visiting.

Plus, you have to know, the whole Arabic community, the women think I'm their best friend. They are my friend. But they think because I make them feel that. Through my health insurance, I was very welcoming them. I was very close to them. Like, if something get -- tragedy happen, the first one to go to the funeral and the first one to visit them when they are sick. Like, you know, I was always there, even if I know them

twice -- like, I saw them twice -- I'm there for them, okay? Everyone start feeling like, you know, I'm their best friend. I start -- if I cannot visit the closer friends, I visit the closer friends -- I start -- every time they -- I see them in the street, in the shopping store, in the mall, "Listen, there is a voting coming in September. If you want to change your life -- I know you cannot change your life, but you can change your kids or your grandkids. Look at me. I couldn't do a lot of things for my daughters, but I can do for my grandkids."

And I was telling them this story. I repeat it for each family. There is an old man, he's in late nineties. He was a [planting] -- a date tree. You know that date tree? You know what it is?

STRONG: The date, yeah.

BADER: The date, okay. This date tree, it need 15 years to carry fruit. He was in planting the date tree. Date, right? It's not data. Date, because I use data a lot at work. Date.

STRONG: I understand either way.

BADER: No, no, but I have to mention it right way. Date --

STRONG: Date.

BADER: -- tree.

STRONG: Yeah.

BADER: Date tree. And he told him, "You are very close to the grave. You are 90. And, look, you planning to plant that date tree. It need 15 years to eat, but you're going to be dead." The old man told him, "Our grandparents plant the date tree. We ate. We can plant the date tree so the next generation to eat."

But in Arabic, it became more convincing, okay? But I'm translating, you know? And when I tell them that, they look at me, they said, "Absolutely right." I said, "It's not enough to say right. I want to see you, all of you, in voting, okay?"

And start a -- it's, like, you know, I did two workshops by myself, volunteering. Like, I come here, okay? Or sometimes, after work, I finish here at 5:30. I tell the women to come after 5:30, okay? Some women came already did insurance, then come back at six o'clock, and we sit and explain to them -- and I fill papers. And then, the Arab Association, they give me a lot of forms. In that time, I start filling for them. I remember one day, I fill 100 form in that day, okay?

And I explain to them how much important for you to vote. If you want to change something, you have to do something. If you cannot do something, there is -- nothing is going to change. Never depend -- you say, like, you know, let the other do it. Because if we say that, there is no future, no technology, no life, because a lot of people sacrifice time, life to invent and create good future for others. These people didn't say, 'Oh, let other one do it. It's not me. We cannot do that.'"

And I start seeing a lot of women voting, and they are happy. And it's big percentage of the voters is Arab -- is the women. It's not the men. It's the women. If it was the election, voting, Friday, I bet you every man in the mosque is going to go vote. But mostly, the mentality is not yet -- like, you know, can I leave my job just to go vote? Because, mostly, Arabic men self-employed. Mostly, Arabic men middle-class, okay? Most of them, they own stores or they own business, okay? They doesn't know the value that -- to leave your store, or after work to go vote. It's not yet. It's still the money and the store, their business, is still more [valuable], okay? They didn't reach this one.

And one time, one of my Jewish friends, she's Russian, she took a day off -- can I tell you how I became more involved? Because I learn from my friends. She took a day off, and I miss her, because we are very close. We work together in the health insurance. And I told her, "What happen? Are you sick?" She told me, "No, Zeinab," in this Russian way. "I was doing volunteering!" "Volunteer where?" In the -- you know home - the home -- nursing home. I said, "What do you do there?" She told me, "I was taking

the old women to vote.” I said, “Why?” She said, “This councilman, the Russian community want him to win. So, we volunteered that they bring access buses, and we take them, and each one of us is the -- responsible about these women and men to vote.” Look, it’s not -- look, they took so much -- like, you know, to take even disabled, elderly women -- just to make things -- happened and vote. Okay, I felt we have to do the same thing.

Okay, I did some -- I didn’t do a lot, a lot, what I was ambitious about. But I did little thing in my community. Like, I felt little difference. I’m not going to say big difference. I felt like I did some kind of difference in my role, and I know there is a lot of people more important than me. They did their role to impact the voting. It’s really very important in our life here.

STRONG: Thank you so much. We’ve been talking for a little over two hours. I’ve asked most of my questions. But is there anything I should have asked you that you really wanted to talk about or put on the record today?

BADER: I don’t know. I think we cover everything. I don’t know if I’m missing something. You can tell me.

STRONG: No, I think we covered everything. So, I guess we’ll end there. Thank you --

BADER: Okay.

STRONG: -- so, so much --

BADER: You’re welcome.

STRONG: -- for coming in, and --

BADER: Maybe I think -- maybe we -- you want to -- like, you know how I achieved my American dream? Maybe we have to mention, like, you know, the award I receive from the important people in America.

STRONG: That’s right!

BADER: I don’t know if that’s necessary or not. Like, as a Muslim -- Arabic women --

STRONG: Go ahead and tell me about it.

BADER: Okay. Like, you know, in 2009, the district attorney, Charles Hynes, was giving, like, you know, honor -- like, Brooklyn women. And in 2009, in March, he honor me with -- one of the 130 women, and mostly because somebody told him about my role in the voting and impact in the women. That is because this is what happened, and to bless for all my work volunteered with the Arab Association, and at -- why -- my work at the Health Plus as, like, you know, a -- application counselor who assists people and assists my community. It's -- I -- he give me that award. And they -- the Republican congress, they honor me through grants, a -- but I cannot remember the year. But I think it's not in 2009. I think it was 2011. I have the picture and the certificate. This is what happened. And I been honored so many times with my company, like, you know, as a good employee. I achieve so many goals -- and to assist my community. And I think with the -- all of that, I think, like, you know, as a Muslim, Arab woman who lived so many years in this country, raising her five kids, as a working mother in this country, I think I achieve the American dream. Like, was -- it's real. It's not a fate, but it's real dream. And I hope every women walk a step and achieve her dreams and to raise her kids in the good way.

STRONG: Of all the projects you've worked on, what do you think is a legacy in Brooklyn you are most proud of, be it health, education, voting?

BADER: I think the most one is working in the health insurance, because I did a lot, the -- it -- I cannot explain or talk, but I know a lot of people is going to talk about me in the future, like, the way I reached them through home visit, calling. Do all my best to keep that insurance, say, available for their families. This is one of the top. And the second one, it come the voting.

STRONG: All right, well thank you so much for this interview.

BADER: Thank you, Liz.

STRONG: I really loved talking with you.

BADER: Let me get you some water, okay?

STRONG: Okay, sure.

BADER: Okay.

STRONG: Thank you.

BADER: All right, you're welcome.