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Oral History Interview with Marion Sedorowitz  
Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.13  
Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on April 11, 2018  
at the Brooklyn Moslem Mosque in Williamsburg, Brooklyn

STRONG: All right. So, my name is Liz Strong. Today is April 11th, 2018. This is Oral History Interview for the Muslims in Brooklyn Public History Project at the Brooklyn Historical Society. Marion, just introduce yourself, and let me know when and where you were born.

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, okay. My name is Marion Sedorowitz. I was born in Bushwick General Hospital in 1954, and we lived in Brooklyn and then moved out to Long Island, so -- I'm not sure how much more you want from me.

STRONG: I -- I would love as many details as you're willing to share about your childhood. I am hearing a little bit of clicking though. I think it may be from your cell phone. Would you mind turning your cell phone off?

SEDOROWITZ: My cell phone?

STRONG: Yeah. Sometimes --

SEDOROWITZ: Wow, okay.

STRONG: -- it just being on makes a weird signal in the sensitive --

SEDOROWITZ: Okay.

STRONG: -- microphones.

SEDOROWITZ: Okay.

STRONG: Let's see if that fixes it. [pause] Okay. I think that's a little better. Sorry about that.

SEDOROWITZ: Is it? Oh, wow.

STRONG: Isn't that crazy?

SEDOROWITZ: Yeah.

STRONG: So, tell me what you remember about your -- your parents, your siblings. And don't worry about that checklist. I have notes in front of me, so we'll hit all the points.

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, okay.

STRONG: Just -- just whatever you remember about your family growing up.

SEBOROWITZ: Well, I have a -- a younger brother, three years younger than myself. And in 1960, we -- we were living in Brooklyn, but my parents had been building a house in Hauppauge and -- Long Island -- and they decided to move us out there, and we moved out. But most of my family, cousins, and friends, at that times, were in Brooklyn or in Middle Village, Queens.

So, it was a big transition for me personally, even though I was only going into the second grade. It felt like my world had turned around because I really loved being in Brooklyn. But my parents felt that they could give us a better life -- my brother and then myself -- so that we could -- the education in the schools -- in the public schools, at that time, they were, they felt, not helping us. And they couldn't really afford, you know, any kind of private school.

So, out in Long Island when we finally moved out there in the 19-- early 1960s, my brother was too young to go to school yet, but I went to school. And I found out that they were right because I was severely in mathematics, which I thought I was great at -- at the -- in second grade, I thought I was something else, was I was -- really didn't know anything. And they were a lot more advanced in second grade than I was in the public system in New York.

So, it took a lot of work, a little depression -- depressing for me. But finally, I began to enjoy that because we did have room to play around, grass instead of really just the sidewalks and the -- the train. We had the -- the L was right near the -- right down the block from us.

But I did miss all my family. But my parents tried their best. They -- we -- they had people down, our cousins down, or we would -- they would make sure we would go into Queens and into our mosque in Brooklyn to -- either for religious classes, or for the

holidays, or, you know, for any other occasion, social occasions, that we would always be a part of the -- the -- the Brooklyn Moslem Mosque. So, I thought that was pretty good, and I thought that was great.

I -- in where I was living, my brother, and I were the only Muslims in the school district. I mean the Hauppauge School District wasn't that big, at that time, so you know, you would know if there was somebody there who was a Muslim in your school. So it was good, but it was also, you know, bad as a child because you were picked out and determined that, you know, "Could you educate the rest of the class about what is being a Muslim about?" I wasn't a public speaker at that time, so -- or neither am I now, but the point of it is, is that I -- I got a little frustrated with that. But like, obviously, I grew out of that, and --

One of the biggest things I have to credit my -- my parents with was that they didn't shy from the fact that they were Muslim, even though that was -- even in the '60s, that wasn't the majority of people. And everybody was either Jewish or Christian, but they never shied from it, and so, I was brought up that way. So, I never felt that I had to worry about telling anybody that I was a Muslim.

And then there were some trying times during that time because of the -- the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, and how people saw the religion, and how it was presented. Even in the media then, how little it was as it is today, it was still presented not in a positive fashion. And especially in -- in -- in the metropolitan area, New York and Brooklyn. So, it -- it got a little frustrating at that time, but they still -- the organization still in the '60s was very strong here in Brooklyn. There were over 700 member families in the '60s, and the -- over the years, obviously, as people have become more educated, and also they moved out of the state and living all over the United States, that that membership got less and less over time. As well as -- as the educated children that were, I guess, the -- that were born in between the '40s and the '60s, they became more involved with the

activities other than the organization. And -- and eventually, they ended up marrying non-Muslim and were sort of raising families, and --

Although, I think in their hearts because of what I hear from them -- and I still keep in touch with a lot of people -- that they still remember the culture, the organization, the feeling of belonging to something, and the happy times. And also the food. You know, that's the biggest thing, they re-- They all -- they all start talking about the food of our -- or the Tatar food, the Polish food, the Russian food. And they, kind of, have smiles of talking about their mother or their grandmother and how they would make this and how -- how they enjoyed it, so --

There are still those things, and we do have a membership here that are very loyal. And they may not come here, but they are here in their spirits. They support the mosque, and maybe they're getting -- some of them are getting older. Well, I'm even getting a lot older than I thought I would be at this point, but -- you know. It's -- we're still pretty much dedicated.

Our mission in life, and even my mission in life, is to make sure that this organization is recognized for our ancestor's efforts to start something from nothing and create an organization that had a major group of people following it. And they were able to build a -- have a brick-and-mortar place in on Brooklyn -- in Brooklyn, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and also have a place for burial for people for their members. And so, that is a pretty big accomplishment. That's what my -- my intent is to make sure that they're remembered for all their efforts. And that's about it, I guess.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about your -- your own ancestry. You told me a little on the phone about your family history. What do you -- what do you know about that story?

SEBOROWITZ: Well, I know that my -- from listening to the stories from my parents. My mother, her story is a little bit shorter because I'm trying to still find out that information. So, she -- basically, her mother was -- this is her mother's second marriage,

and so she had children, I think two sons, from an earlier marriage. She was a widow and then -- and then she married my grandfather. They had three children, and -- and my grandmother died in childbirth with the third child. She died of that. The -- the -- the third child survived.

But because of that my -- my grandfather worked with the furriers within the furrier union, and so he didn't really -- in those days, the men never would even think about raising young children because my mother was the -- was the oldest and was three. So, they had to split the children up. And my mother and my uncle grew up in Connecticut -- in a farm up in Connecticut, and my -- my aunt grew up with a family in New Jersey. But it didn't mean that they were disconnected, but they just were separated because they needed to separate them at that time.

My father's side is a little bit more fleshed out because of his stories, and -- and it -- my father remembers things as a child because that's really his stories of when he was in -- well, it's now Belarus. It was a small town. But he really wasn't born in -- in Europe or in Belarus. He was born in Freehold, New Jersey. So, what happened is -- is along the way, they -- they -- because of the [Great] Depression and the things were not really good in the United States, his father decided to get a job in the railroad and would be away from home, and send his wife and the two sons to -- back to Belarus to the town. And that's how they existed for a long time, separate, and he would, I guess, send money.

And they had a farm, and my father talked about the -- the -- the -- the lamb, the -- the baby lambs, and he would talk about the chickens, and all of that there. My mother had the same experience, but it was in Connecticut with the -- all -- all the -- the farm animals. But they had to leave because of the impending of the war coming, World War II. And because his -- my father's brother was so much older than my father, maybe six or seven years older. I'm not really sure off the top of my head. But that basically because of the war, they were going to -- the Russian army was, kind of,

looking for young men to come and serve in the army there. And they -- since they were American citizens, they returned back.

But I always enjoyed listening to my father's stories. Some of them -- he was still traumatically affected by them, too, and -- and some of them were very happy stories. That's, kind of, the history of where they came from.

STRONG: Give me an example of a story that -- that you remember or that sticks with you.

SEDOROWITZ: Well, I mean [laughter] the one that hits my mind, and it's a traumatic story but is -- it -- it's -- you know, well, he was trying to also teach us a lesson about animals. Because they were on a farm, their animals were not just their pets. They were food. But he didn't know that as a kid, okay. So, there, they had some sheep, and the -- one of the sheep, I guess, was slaughtered and he did not -- when he realized that, he did not want to eat lamb. And I remember my mother could not serve lamb in the house even after he was older, "No, that's okay. I don't want any lamb."

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: And that was very traumatic for him because -- but he always told us about, you know, in his mind, you-- "Your pets don't -- don't -- you know, don't treat them as, you know, that somebody very close to you." But I'm like, "No, Dad, that was because it was different times then." But that was, kind of, how he got what he got from that. So it's very, very funny. But my father was a very funny and kind man, quiet-spoken.

My mother was the -- I guess the do-- the doer, the organizer. And I think that's a lot because of she had to be an adult very early in life and take charge of things. So I guess it worked in their relationship. You know, you always need somebody that does things and organizes things, and then somebody that, you know, follows through. So, I think they had a good marriage. You know, they were very happy.

STRONG: What, ultimately, brought them here to be part of this -- this mosque and this community?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, the -- this mosque was started, like, in 1907. So, my parents were born in -- in -- they were both born in the United States, so they were born in 1918 and '19. So, they -- the mosque, they knew about the mosque, and the mosque was originally called the Lithuanian Tatar Society because -- even though town where my -- my father came from was very close to the border of now that's Lithuania and Belarus. But those borders changed all the time. So, one year they could be Lithuania, and another year they could be Polish, and then another year they could be Belarusian, or White Russians as my -- or my parents would call.

But they lived very close in different -- close towns, and we're finding that out because in September, we're going to do this Tatar heritage tour. And I'm -- I'm working with people that are fellow Tatars and also related to us. Their names are spelled a little different but they're -- you could absolutely know that that's our names. So, there are a lot of people there, and they're very excited, and we're very excited. I always wanted, because of the stories, to see the town, you know, where my father grew up.

My mother's family, I think, was basically from Kleck Novogrudek. We're going to go there too. But within a -- like 100 kilometer, right -- what's that 60-mile radius? That's where the towns where that they grew -- and they -- they -- the towns weren't just settled by Tatars. There were Christians and Jewish people, and everybody lived hand in hand. Nobody had an issue with anybody else, and so it -- the -- the villages worked. And -- and these towns, they still have a small amount of Tatar community, and there they have all -- all the denominations of Jewish, and Christian, and Muslims in those towns. So, it will be exciting to see that, you know? So, we're ex--

So, it was very easy for them to assimilate because the organization was here and established. They -- they were working from some other place because the building was, like, purchased in the 1920s. But I could see my father and mother were both very part of their youth organization at the time. I have a -- I was looking through some of

my stuff -- a -- well, I guess, it's a mimeograph? I'm not even sure what it is -- those. Remember those? I don't know. You probably don't remember. Mimeograph of newsletters that my -- my -- my mother was, apparently, the president of the youth organization, and so they did a little newsletter about their activities and everything. Because my parents, really, didn't get together until my mother was in her thirties, like early thirties. But most people, at that time, were already married. They were one of the last of their group to -- to get married.

So, she did a lot of things and traveled a lot, my mother. I suppose so, but I guess she got all of that out before she decided she had to get settled down and have kids, which is nice too. So, I guess, that was really how I know that they -- that was very important to them because I could see that. And also, how they made sure we understand the traditions of -- of the Tatars and the -- how it related to Islam. And also, my mother teaching me how to prepare all of these dishes as well. I'll have a little --?

STRONG: Oh, yeah.

SEDOROWITZ: I'm going to take a little sip.

STRONG: Any time. You notice that I'm sniffing, and drinking, and all these things as well, so don't even worry about it.

SEDOROWITZ: Okay. Because of my throat, wow.

STRONG: Let me know if you want to take a break or anything.

SEDOROWITZ: Yeah. Okay. Sure, sure.

STRONG: Tell me about some of the -- the education you got from your parents about these traditions or about Islam. Any specific memories that come to mind?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, we definitely -- one of the things is they made sure that we attended Friday-night classes where a group of -- of -- of other, mostly men I think were -- who were either imams or interested in the religion would teach us. So, it wasn't really a formal teacher, but they -- they knew the Qur'an, and they knew the Tatar way of their religion in terms of how we would practice, the holidays, the prayers.

One of the biggest difference is, you know, and -- and -- another Muslim, let's say, from the Middle East would say that we -- we're -- we practice different, way different than they practice. We're all -- we're Sunni. That's our sect, Sunni sect, and that's, like, the majority of Muslims are Sunni. But basically, we -- one of the biggest things is prayer five times. That's something that they did not practice there.

The history of the Tatars is that they really were from Mongolia, Turkey, and -- and Genghis Khan is a very important part of that. And he -- his brother was one that was doing -- with his group of Tatars, going and doing a lot of -- they were really warriors and they would -- they were going through Turkey, and that's where they picked up Islam. And then they were asked by the Polish prince and the Lithuanian prince to help with -- well, I mean -- was he a prince? He was --? I think he was a king, King Vytautas, was to help them secure their kingdoms because they were getting a lot of people trying to overtake it. So, they did that, and they -- they were so grateful that they said, "Listen, stay here. Help us protect our land, and -- and we'll give you land, we'll give you rights." And I guess they said, "Yes, let's do that."

And, of course, the -- those -- like Genghis Khan, they really didn't have, like, last names, so basically -- and they were men and where are they going to find the women? So, they picked Christian women or Jewish women, and they married them, and converted them, and they took the -- the women's last name. So, they -- they didn't have those Polish or Russian-sounding names before, but that's what -- what happened. They -- and they assimilated into the culture of that country -- those countries at that time. So, praying five times was -- was something that that was, like, not listed as an important thing to do.

But when the holidays came and Ramadan, the holy month, fasting was very important for the 30 days, and also going to the mosque, and Friday night, like, is our Sabbath. So, we -- very important in terms of opening the mosque, and also teaching, and having

religious activity at -- it's -- it's a sign of respect. And so, Friday-night classes were the classes that we would go to.

And being out in Long Island, my mother didn't drive. We had to take a taxi and the Long Island Railroad, which was really bad in those days. You think it's bad now, but it was really bad then but -- and we -- and then we'd have to get off in Jamaica and -- and -- and then take another bus that take -- would take us right on to Grand Street and then we would be able to get here. So, it was, literally, maybe a three hour, two-and-a-half to three-hour trip on Friday, which is the last thing a kid wanted to do when they had their weekend, you know? But it was a chance to see my cousins and -- and play with them, and -- and the religious classes were like, "Oh, okay, we'll -- we'll do that."

What we did, they taught us Arabic, they taught us these prayers. They taught us the essential way of praying upstairs and -- and meaning as best as they could. And I'm -- I guess we're fortunate in that.

And it was up to our parents to make sure that -- it wasn't really like a school or anything, but up to our parents to make sure we attended. And, like my mother would make sure that we would continue to learn when the classes were out. So, summer was, like, we had to go and spend every day, like a half an hour reading the Qur'an, and that was torture. It really was.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: I have to be honest because, you know, you're dealing -- the -- the problem, as I see it now, that they taught us the prayers, but we didn't understand the -- the language. If we had learned Arabic then we could understand the prayers and the meaning. The transliteration -- and they tried. We had books with transliteration. They created, in the 1940s, what they called the Blue Book.

STRONG: This organization did?

SEDOROWITZ: Yes and -- which has all the prayers that you essentially need and a little primer on Islam. And it is really wonderful, and it -- it also did it phonetically and they trans-- and they translated it into English. So, you had an idea, but it's just, like, kind of how the Bible is. We needed some other kind of story to help us.

When I would go years ago into the doctor's office, and they would have a Bible there, but -- and it would be like in the story form. And I would open it up and read it because we do believe in the Old Testament. So, we would read -- I would read that, and it was, like, fascinating. It was great stories, but it didn't translate to us in -- in -- in -- in here because of the -- the language situation. But we knew that it was important, that it is respect out of -- with your -- your parents, and -- and stuff -- that we made sure that we learned those prayers.

And I could be nowhere near as my uncle, Ibrahim Ratkewitch, did because my uncle was not only an imam, but he also was someone, as a child, that memorized the Qur'an. And that was a big celebration when he was in Europe, and they always talked about that celebration. So, we had a very high honor for that. And he also -- he was very serious about Islam, but he was also broadminded in that he read everything about all the religions. And he would -- he do a lot of work for the mosque in terms of working with other mosques. So, he was very good in that respect.

Unfortunately, he -- he -- he -- he went to Mecca in a hajj. And he -- his wife had passed away, my aunt, about two years before, and he had had a heart attack. But he -- he -- he got well and then he went with another companion, another man who -- who also had been several times on the hajj. So he was -- this was his moment because this is a dream come true for him. And he -- they were going to go to Egypt first and then make it to do the hajj.

But what happened is -- is that he did make it, and the unfortunate thing, he got heat stroke there. And he passed away in Mecca, and -- which is the most, I guess, respected, heavenliest thing you could possibly do is to pass away in Mecca. But it was a very hard thing to try to get his -- his body out of Mecca to be buried with his wife.

But -- I guess, there were a few people who -- who had the feeling that he might not make it back, and I was one, my mother was one. And I -- I just knew that something was going to happen, that he wasn't going to make it back. And he knew because he said to me -- one day, he said to me, "I -- I don't think I'm going to see my cousin's daughter being born." Alyssa. "I'm not going to -- I'm not going to get to see Alyssa being born." But I thought it was because he got diagnosed with macular degeneration. But then I thought about it, and I realized that he was trying to tell me something. So, I think he knew. This was his calling and he needed to do this, so he did.

And I mean it was a sad time, but for him, we -- he became Hajj Imam Abraham Ratkewitch. So that was -- that was very interesting. And so, we -- we learned a lot from that experience about that, you know, in trying to do the hajj. It's very exhaustive, and extensive, and -- I don't know. We'll probably -- it is something that is we're obligated to do, but I don't know if I can virtually do it because it is scary in a sense because it's always hot there. So, I'm -- I'm going to take a moment for a drink.

STRONG: Oh, yeah, of course.

SEDOROWITZ: But then that was funny that that happened that way.

STRONG: I'm curious a little bit about -- you mentioned in second grade when you moved out to Long Island that you -- you missed Brooklyn because it had been, kind of, like this ideal place for you. Can you talk to me more about your life before second grade, and describe the neighborhood where you lived and how you played?

SEDOROWITZ: Yeah. Well, we lived in -- in Granite Street in -- on -- in Bushwick right near Bushwick Avenue and the -- the el train. I'm not sure. I couldn't tell you whether it was the -- the M or the -- not -- it wasn't the L train but -- but the elevated train when I say el

train. I think it was either the M or whatever. But basically, we lived in an apartment. We did live in the projects in Brooklyn on Cook Street first and then we moved to -- to Granite Street. And so, we were in an apartment, and we'd walk to school -- or I walked to school with my -- what -- who -- I guess it was my mother. Or, you know, maybe my father picked me up. My father worked. He could walk to work. So, he worked in a Chevrolet, Grove Chevrolet it was, and that was just up the block near the -- where the -- what's -- Jackie Robinson Parkway is. But, yeah so he lived right over there. I mean he worked right over there, and we lived like right by there. So that was -- it was that and we --

I had -- there was a lot of younger people on our block, and I had a lot of fun. You know, we'd play all those street games that we would play. And it was very sad for me to lose all of that because everything was -- seemed like right around me. I wanted to go down the block for bubblegum, there it was, go right -- right around the block. Okay, you had to pick up the bread, or the milk, or whatever, but you -- you -- you got bubblegum or a -- what they called it -- Chewy Chunky -- Chunky? It was this little square with raisin and lots of chocolate. They're like a penny a piece, or two for a penny, or something like that. And -- I think it must have been two for a penny because I would share it with my friend Jackie at the time. And -- and there were a lot of boys and girls. We'd play stoopball, or, you know, all the other -- all the other games that we play. There was no lack of -- of fun, and they --

And even those trucks would come down, not only for the ice cream, but they would come down, and you would have those amusement ride on the truck like a little a ca-- a carousel, a little Ferris wheel. And you just come down the block and -- and a couple of those things, and we would, you know, go in those things.

But my parents were -- had it planned because they had purchased this property out in Hauppauge that they were going to move there. So every weekend, we'd pile in the car

and go -- go there and live in -- in the shell of a house for the weekend and then come back on -- on Sunday, you know. So -- and it was like every -- every weekend in the summer, we were there. You know, my mother was doing what she needed to and -- whether it was painting or whatever. Because in those days, people -- my parents, literally, built their own house. They build a Cape Cod from scratch, I mean literally. There wasn't even electricity at some points in the beginning. Well water. And they built their own house.

My uncle was an electrician, so he did the -- the -- the wiring and everything, and in those days, they get past inspection and we -- we -- we lived in that house for quite a long time, you know, until they got a good offer from somebody because it was right -- it happened to be like 100 feet from the Long Island Expressway, which we thought it was going to go through our property. And it was going to be eminent domain when they were trying to go to build that, but it just missed it by 100 feet. And so, our property became now an important thing if you put businesses up there. So, my parents sold that and then they moved to Huntington. And then my brother now lives in the house over there in Huntington.

So, it was good for them, and the property was very good. My parents always talked about owning land, owning your own place. That that was the goal in life, and that's -- you know, I followed that goal. Buy your own home and -- and -- and, you know, it's very important to have land. And it's been good for actually our whole family by doing that. I don't know for the next generation if that's so much going to be the plan, but that really was the plan then.

They truly believed in that ownership, and they -- they loved United States. My father said he would never go. My mother never wanted to go to -- back to the -- because she never was there, and she never really wanted to go there. She -- she was more like traveling in other areas, you know.

STRONG: That reminds me. Can you tell me the story of coming back through Ellis Island?

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, you know, the last trip back, well, my father was too -- still too young to be separated from his mother, so -- but my uncle was old enough to be separated as an adult male. So, they were put on two separate lines to check then on the health and as well as going through immigration for their passport and information. That, as they were going through my -- my father and his mother, they spelled the name Ratkewitch, you know, phonetically, so it was not spelled -- today, it's not spelled as it is in -- in Europe. And my uncle got a completely different name from them as Rotkowitz. So, when they came out of the line, and, I guess, nobody wanted to say anything about changing at the time because they just wanted to get in there. And it was like really weird because they -- he had a birth certificate that said a different name.

So, it was -- I guess in that time, you know, things were so -- like I'm sure a lot of people were leaving Europe and returning to the United States, and I guess that's what happened. And so, they had to -- my -- my uncle, finally, as he, a little bit later in life, said we can't have two different names. It doesn't make sense. Because there were other Ratkewitchs as well, but they -- they were somewhat related on a second, or third removed, or -- or cousin. I'm not sure of that definition so much because I know it's a little confusing. But so, they said, "No, we want to be both the same name." So, my uncle changed his name back to that and so. But it's -- it's fascinating what happened.

STRONG: I'm curious also about how -- you know, you have uncles and cousins all living in this part of Brooklyn together. How did -- how did this part of Brooklyn grow that community, and how did you guys fit in to the local culture here? And what foods were there in common? You know, what -- what was -- what was life like, and why was it -- why was it good for your community here?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, because of where they came from, they worked very closely with the Jewish population. The-- they felt most comfortable with them because, one, the Jewish people didn't eat pork, and they -- they didn't pork. And also, a lot of the foods

they ate were the same foods that -- that the Jewish people ate. So, when it came down to where to live in -- most of them settled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which was close to the Jewish community, and in the Lower East Side, which was close to the Jewish community. And they also -- and some people went to a community in Massachusetts, which I don't know too much about. But that's really, really how they settled with that and they --

The foods -- because they always talk as well lovingly about the food, the pickles, the, you know, corned beef, the pastrami, or -- or cheeses. The smoked fish, you know, the lox, sable, herring. So, these were all the foods of their traditions. And then there were these things that were -- and, of course, perogies or we call them kalduny, Russians call them pelmeni. There's different names for them. But we had other dishes like babkas, which doesn't relate to the Russian -- or the Jewish babka, but it's a different kind of babka with layers of dough like filo layers, but it's not really filo, but that's the difference. There's a lot of little difference, and that might be the Tatar part of that.

And from what I see now, since -- let's just face it. In the '60s and the '70s, the only way you could communicate to those people back home were through letters. And, really, they really talked about very little things because they were really looked at. Every letter -- every letter, every packages were opened and -- and looked at because of communism then. And so, even though we, as an organization, did send a lot of things there, it would be -- it was very difficult to make sure that they actually received it. And you -- if you send money and small little things or they asked for jeans, at that time, that they -- they could sell on the black market to -- to make ends meet. But they were really hurting in those days. So, I know, the organization made an attempt to try to help them.

Nowadays, through the internet, I'm speaking on a daily basis to people in Belarus, Lithuania, and Poland through Facebook Messenger. It's just fabulous, you know? And so we -- I could see that a lot of the foods that they have are very similar, and also the --

the -- the Tatar influence on the food, which my -- my parents, my mother especially didn't say that, "Oh, this is Tatar." It just was just what she knew when she's in Connecticut, how to make these things and because this is what we made. But there was not enough background, and I -- you know, I can't blame her because, you know, that wasn't -- they didn't think about those things. They're just thinking about existing and -- and just, you know, going on with life, not really looking at, like, we have foodies today and stuff like that. It was just that.

But today, we look at it fondly as, "Wow, they -- they were delicious." I mean, they weren't spicy when you look at that, but they were delicious in how they -- how they were. They were also fatty, so you can't really eat a lot of it, you know, when you have it, but it is -- they -- they truly are delicious.

STRONG: I'm curious about your experience as a young person in this building, not just as classes, but like the community, the other children that you got to know, your relationship with prayer, your relationship with the organization. What was it like being a young person and a teenager here?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, it was very comfortable I would think. As -- as a young person, it was mostly classes and then really close with families. Going to one another's houses, and they would play cards, and they -- and we -- we just have fun in playing with the kids.

But as I got older and like in the teenage years, they had a youth organization that was pretty active. It was always active. There was always a group of people that were doing things socially. So, we would do different trips as a group. I was -- towards the later part, I was probably -- my age was the -- the last group that really got into the youth organization. My brother never joined it because it was already dissolved at that time. It was -- it was a great time. We'd go bowling. The things that, you know, kids did as a group; bike trips, car trips, camping. We did camping trips. And then it kind of dissolved because most people were in college at that point in time, and that wasn't their -- their focus.

And when I went to college then there was a group of people that I always hung around with because there was another organization of Tatars different than us, but that was in College Point that also we would interact socially with. And some of the older generation, like let's say 10 years older than I am, would -- actually married people from that other organization. And so, they -- we would do trips with their young people, camping trips or boating up the -- up the Hudson River, or one of those Bear Mountain cruises, or different other kinds of trips. And so, it was a lot of fun. And I got to know a lot of people and -- not just from our organization, but they were fellow Tatars and so they also had a similar thing.

So, we created another newsletter. We called it *Anur* and -- the light. And we -- we had different things that we did. We had people that would write poems. You know, we're the children of the -- the '70s, we're -- you know? So we're -- people writing poems, people doing different things, you know? And so, we enjoyed that but then that dissolved, I guess, after doing it for a few years, you know? Because, I mean, it was a lot of time and effort. We're mailing things, we're typing things, you know? Then we had got to xerox -- now, we were xeroxing. We're not mimeographing, but we're xeroxing. But still, I mean, that's a lot of time and effort, and everybody had to take chances typing this newsletter. And -- and -- and when I look at it, I laugh because it's like hysterical what it looks like, you know, with the typing, and the typos, and what we tried to do. But it was a lot of fun.

And again, I -- I met a lot of people from the other organization, and we did have a lot of -- a lot of really nice times together. But again, those people then married, and they had families, and then their -- their -- I guess what was important, what was at the top of their list there -- there, they had was raising their family. So that organiz-- those group of people went on to do that.

And -- and there's still a core group of us, but we -- we -- we haven't -- their children have not set up an organization because, I think, it's just like what's going on in the country in general. I've gone to a lot of different programs. One is called the Abraham's Table, and I've been to that a few times where it's a rabbi, priest, ministers, and -- and imams, and they talk about the -- the similarities between the religions. But one of the things they brought up was -- is that -- they -- they said it, which was -- was alarming to me, 70 percent of the young people today don't believe in organized religion. And to me, that -- yeah, and they're suffering. I'm listening to their problems and their issues. And I -- I realized, we're -- we're -- we've done that and we're -- we've suffered that. But it's just more obvious to us than for them because we were such a small organization to begin with.

And when I talk with the College Point group who -- all those people that were there when I was younger, they're not there anymore. It's a different group of people, but they're very nice, professional people. They're talking about their kids not wanting to even come and I'm like, "We were there 20 years ago." So, yeah. So, they're concerned.

But we've, kind of, joined in a lot of aspects, a lot of social types of things. They've also supported us in our social activities, our brunches. They -- they are -- they -- they celebrated 90 years last year of existence. We -- and they came to our 110th anniversary so that was nice.

And we do a lot of things. We do -- during the month of Ramadan, it's called iftar dinners. They did one last year. They're doing another one. We're going to do one this year. And it's like opening our doors to the community because -- I guess because of the issues with the older generation, with -- with black Muslims, and the violence, and 9/11. They -- they wanted to keep a very low profile. But -- and that's not so good sometimes. You really have to open up, and let people know there's nothing to worry about here. You know, educate people. That's what should be your goal, not hide, and

think it's going to go away because it's not going to go away. You know, people don't know what to think, you know, and they -- they listen to media. But if you give them alternative, hopefully, they're open-minded enough to understand and be receptive to what you're saying.

And one of the things is like Kurban Bayram. We did a Kurban Bayram where we opened up, and we did a lamb barbeque. We opened it up, and there were people from the block and around that came. And -- and people from the College Point group came, but it was -- I did a little -- I did a little, I guess, a little presentation about the holiday, and what it meant, and -- and about Abraham, and how that relates for the Christians, for the Jewish people, and for the Muslims. It's the same story. So, we are -- we are all -- all praying to one God. Okay? So, you -- I don't think people really understand that. They look at it to what they hear in the media and do not really understand what, really, the religion is about. And -- and that's -- you know, that's today's world, and -- and -- and it's up to us to change that story.

STRONG: Was there --

SEDOROWITZ: Yeah.

STRONG: -- was there much anti-Muslim bias growing, sort of, in the general US attitude when you were younger? Or did that really start to take hold in the '60s as you described?

SEDOROWITZ: No. I didn't -- I didn't even note anything. The '60s with the Black Panthers, they became nervous about that and -- because of the violence. But that really -- then it was okay for a long time. And then 9/11 created another sit-- the whole situation to really go into this -- the -- I guess to the point where we're at now in people's idea of us.

But our neighborhood, itself, have seen us, and know us, and know what we stand for, so they're not concerned here, you know -- and over here. But, you know, I think the -- I -- I -- I meet people and if -- you know, one of the biggest things when you meet people,

politics, right, and religion, they're like taboo, do not discuss. But as you be -- come to know people over time that kind of -- kind of creeps into the conversation.

And a lot of people, you know, they have this feeling, I find from my perspective that, as I said before, they just don't understand what the religion is about. And I've had quite a few people who are my friends now, I consider my friends now, say to me, "Well, what you said, why don't people say that? Now that makes sense." But they are listening to a different narrative, and that's problematic. But that could only work with people who are open-minded. If you're prejudiced and you close your mind then that's not going to work.

But I'm hoping -- I'm, I guess, an optimist that -- that if -- if people are educated or, you know? Just so that they could realize and understand about the -- what these words are and not fear things. Like -- what -- one of the words that a lot of people fear is Sharia law, okay. But it's different for different people, and -- and -- and I guess that the -- the definition they got is -- or jihad -- is the wrong definition because they were told that from the media, from the -- the little blips or Facebook blips, or all their friends sending them all this stuff that's fake news or whatever you want to call it. That they've got the wrong impression.

But can you imagine? Jihad was -- it was a beautiful word. And there are people -- I know physicians, a lot of physicians are named Jihad, their first name. Can you imagine that? They've taken that word, and, you know, they made it a bad word, a bad name. And so, you know? Like sometimes, I say that there are always people that are fanatics in any religion or any kind of culture. So, you know, you have to be more educated to understand the difference. Instead of -- you know, they --

I feel my religion has been taken hostage by, you know, ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria], you know, or any of those other terrorist groups. And it's become -- Islam is

equated to terrorism. I mean, if -- when you have a president that says that, and thinks that, and -- and reacts to that with this whole immigration situation then, you know, that the -- the -- that's not good. So --

STRONG: Yeah.

SEDOROWITZ: -- hoping -- and I've said this before, somebody had asked me that. I said, "This too shall pass." And -- and hopefully, we -- we have to stand and -- yeah. Because if anything, this presidency, for me -- what -- it -- it shook me to my boots because I -- I knew it was going to happen because I could see where the country was. And people were telling me I was crazy. I -- "Oh, no, what are you, kidding me? That's not going to happen." "No, no, no, I feel it. There's something going on." And we -- we're -- we live in New York. That's different than middle America, and there's something going on.

And this is -- this is -- it -- it was very upsetting to me for a bit of time, but -- and I had to shut down friends and unfollow friends that I thought were friends, and what they were saying. And it shocked me. So, I just -- like I -- I was getting emotionally feeling very bad, so I said, "Oh, forget that." I unfollowed, and I said, "I'm only going to look at pictures of the kids, and I don't want to hear anybody saying anything about anything. I'm not going to even look at it." And that helped me a lot and then, finally, I said it, like I just said before, "This too shall pass." And I have to, you know, move on and go from it because what -- what are you going to do, you know?

STRONG: It's so interesting that here at the mosque you're -- you're having these conversations about whether to go under the radar to wait it out or to open up more. And it sounds like from conversations we've had, there's a -- there's a philosophical difference between the generations.

SEDOROWITZ: Yes.

STRONG: Can you tell me a little bit about those conversations? And -- and how you talk to people about opening up and getting more awareness with this community?

SEDOROWITZ: It's very tough because the -- the older generation, they went through the Depression and everything. So, they're pretty strong people, and they had to work hard

to get to where they are in their retirement. And what they thought they did, they thought they did it with all good reasonings in their mind.

But I try to counteract that, and I've gotten a lot of resistance from them. But I counteracted that with the fact that I think that for us, our role needs to be education. We need to face up to it and -- and also, to also honor our ancestors who put their -- their time, their money, and their hard work to create this. And I ended up with, basically, I cannot let that pass, and they shouldn't either. And do you want to honor them, or you don't want to honor them? And they're in a little -- they go, "No, we want to honor them." "I know you do because you talk lovingly about your parents, and -- and your and grand--" they remember their grandmother, and what -- what they did, and how they learned things. Now, they stay in that era, but they can't move forward, but they understand that.

I said, "Well, you take how you love that and then put it to me," and I still love that. I love the way my -- my parents -- I don't remember my grandparents that well because I was very young when they passed away. But I remember my entire family, what was the importance and how this organization was important to them. And so, they know now. I haven't had much resistant now in the last couple of years because, first of all, they've gotten older.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: So there's much less fight in them.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: But for them, I guess, they want to make sure what's important to them, and make sure they have -- they're buried where their parents are, their grandparents are in -- in the cemetery. And they want to make sure that that's taken care of for them. That's where they are, I mean, the ones we're talking about in their eighties and nineties.

We have one lady that's 99, and we had a couple of people that were over 100 that -- not more than a couple. I mean, my -- Jack's -- my husband Jack's aunt passed away last year. She was 102, and she was good up until 100 and then, you know, dementia happens. But when you -- what -- that's even more interesting.

And I -- I just remembered something. When you're dealing even with somebody with dementia, they still remember those old days, and they still remember a lot of what happened. And if you will ask even my aunt who's 95, she'll talk about a lot of the connections of what happened in the organization. She knows who's who, and I tried to grasp all of that and try to make sense of it because we really don't have a good history of that. We have papers. We have minutes. Like boy, do we have minutes, you know, of every meeting, and so I -- I have an idea what went on but you know, there's a lot of good, fun factors, you know, that -- that we're missing. So I hope that --

I -- I -- I do try to talk to her often and see her, but, you know, things like the present, the memory is bad, but things from older days, they stick with her, and they're fond memories. She still talks about her grandmother making her memorize certain prayers, "And how I said it was very important." And I get a kick out of that. So, I -- I -- they do understand about that part, and so they can't -- they have a hard time of telling me that -- that that's -- What I'm -- what I do and how important I -- I -- I talk about this mosque. They -- I think that they understand that I'm doing it from a good place, and so they let me do that.

And -- and Alyssa, she's so much younger, and I tell Alyssa, "You did, at your age, more than I did because at a certain point, I gave up. And I just couldn't deal with their -- you know, the older people at the time, the adults, you know, and what they wanted to do, so I just shied away from it." But then when I got married and Jack asked me to be on the board with him then I got more involved, and I realized they -- they need a little bit more structure. So, I've been trying to do that and inch my way and only now are we

really able to move really forward with a lot of different changes. And it's all to keep the organization running as -- as -- as long as it can run for our membership. That's the goal.

STRONG: Do want to take a short break?

SEDOROWITZ: Sure. I'm -- all of a sudden, I got -- I guess I'm talking.

[Interview interrupted]

STRONG: All right. So, just diving back into this idea of communicating with the older generation about changes, remind me of the story you told about the separated prayer space for men and women when you were young. Can you tell me that story?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, I think traditionally, Islam, and I think every religion, at some point in time, they did separate men from women. And certainly, in the Jewish religion, that's the case. Women are -- in terms of Orthodox, they're -- they're usually maybe up on top or somewhere different from where the men are. I -- I -- Reformed Judaism, I think that's different because I've been to -- to -- to that, to temples, that it's not like the case.

But in Islam, it's still remains the case that men are separated from women, and that was certainly up in -- in our -- our mosque here. That when we went to pray up on the prayer room, that we had a big -- a big curtain that went from one end splitting pretty much the -- the prayer room in half. And it was a big, heavy, wool curtain separating about, oh, I would say, maybe five feet high. And it's pretty in-- intrusive, but that's how we grew up. And it was like, no, that's the way it is and -- and -- I mean, I have to say it's a big room up there. But in those days, if you didn't get here in time for when prayers were, or you're a little bit late, you -- you were standing room only, okay, in the back and in the front. So, that was a big thing to rush to get there to -- to go upstairs and be able to pray, you know, on the carpet. So that was all great, and fine, and dandy.

But as we grew older and because my uncle was one of the imams, I had several conversations with him saying, basically, that I couldn't understand why that separation was. Because it's not the case in today -- in modern Judaism or Christianity.

And he -- his case was, basically, that when you pray, you're -- you should be -- your whole focus towards God. And I -- I -- you know, one of his things, which I discounted, but I'll say it anyway, is that men are very weak and their thoughts will be that, if there was a woman next to him, that his thoughts could not focus on God.

And I'm like, "Oh, okay. That makes no sense." "But --" he said, "But men and women could pray together if they were all put on the same covering and head covering like a -- like a hood. And then you couldn't tell a man from a woman." I said, "Well, that's not going to happen." I said, "But why would you let women be, you know, ignorant" -- that was the only word I could use at the time -- "to not understanding or seeing what the imam is doing in prayer and follow --" And we -- when he said follow the imam, who --? We're following a curtain in front of us. We -- we don't really -- I mean we know but it -- that makes no sense. So, he said, "Okay."

And our organization wasn't as big at the time but he said, "Okay, you could stay in front of the curtain. One -- you could sit in one row behind -- in front of the curtain, you know." And so, I said, "Okay, I'll take it. I don't mind us being separated, but, you know, I think that if we're here to pray at -- individually, it's up to us to -- to meet that expectation to -- to focus on God. If we don't then that should be our own sin." So I guess it was a convincing argument at the time but --

So he allowed, and I said -- I said to my cousin's wife. I said, "Aisha, you've got to help me here. I can't be the only one sitting there." And so, I -- I did gather a couple of the younger women to sit there, and it was maybe four of us or so at the time, maybe five. I can't remember exactly. But my mother and my aunts, they were like, "Oh, no. There she goes, you know. No, I don't think so." "Look, look if Uncle Abe said I can do it, I can do it." And then, of course, they said, "Okay. Well, if Uncle Abe said you could do it, and he's running the prayer." So I -- we did that.

And, I guess, it became worldwide known within our organization that this was happening. Now, nobody complained about it, but then we said, "Okay." The men goes, "Well, we don't really want them over there." I said, "Okay. Well, what if we pull back half of the curtain, and the people that want to pray behind the curtain, I understand and respect what they want but -- you know -- and the people who don't will be on the other side." Okay. So, we did that and slowly behold, everybody was moving over to the other side of the curtain, except for a few people that decided that they wanted to see what the imam was doing.

And so, it became the majority of the people on the other side. My mother, I think, prayed once and then she -- it was too much for her, she had to go back to the curtain. [laughter] But my -- and so now, there's a very few people who want to be behind the curtain. So, we just have a -- like a -- a room -- like a little room divider for about, like, a fourth of the -- a quarter of the space, not even, you know? Because everybody sits just looking at the imam and -- and praying, following the imam like it should be. So, I thought that was very -- really when you think about it, it seems minor, but it was progressive at the time.

STRONG: Did you tell me that even the way women prayed was a little bit different --

SEDOROWITZ: Yes.

STRONG: -- back then?

SEDOROWITZ: Yes, there were different things. When -- there are some things you do with your hands. And -- and also, you also have to go down to the -- to the rug and -- and pray. And the women would do it one way, and the men would do another way. The men would stand up, and the women would be sitting on their knees. And we're like, "Why -- why are we sitting on our knees?" So, we stood up, and we followed what the imam was doing because that's what the imam is doing.

And so, I guess, you know, other cultures -- I've been to Turkish mosques and other mosques, and I noticed the women also still are in the back, or even in another room, or

up above on another tier. But they get to -- they get to see the imam, or they get to see the imam televised into their room because -- and it's most of Middle East is where the mosque -- the men are the first people to go in on the main level and then the women get the second level, which is something that I'm not really -- you know. I don't understand that because when you read about Islam, Muhammad was very progressive for his time based on -- what -- the culture and the history that was going on there in that area. And he -- he saw that women were really abused, and he felt that that was not right. And, yeah, in -- in the Qur'an itself, it talks about honoring the woman and your wife, and the importance, and what's involved. But it was progressive in those days.

Unfortunately, for Islam, we -- there really was not a strong, progressive movement. And I think that now there is one, but in those -- it's -- it's really caused us to look like the women are treated in a backward way, but that wasn't the intent. So, you have to read through things and understand. But then again, it is practice where it seems like the woman is not important. But yet, in a lot of things, and in the way of life in Islam, women are making -- are of central importance. So it's -- it's different now.

STRONG: Talk to me about some of the -- the other people you remember maybe who aren't with us now. Like the important characters or just the strange characters, you know, people in the history of this community that stand out in your memory.

SEDOROWITZ: Well, most of the people that -- as I mentioned before, like my grandfather was a furrier, or they make ones -- furriers. Some of the old types of jobs from years ago but then the -- their -- their children went on to become policemen, or other blue-collar workers, electricians, plumbers, you know, they took on those aspects of life. Very few people got to college.

But one of the things about Tatars, they're very proud people, and they're also very -- some of them have voices that you could hear from end in the room to the other end of the room quite clearly. And they also have very strong tendencies to let their feelings be known. So, there were quite a few characters like that. But there was, truly, a

separation -- and I think that's probably the case in most organization -- where there was the religious people, the imams, and the other people, the families that were very religious. And then there was the political part, the people -- the operational people, I would call them, that ran the operation or ran the organization.

They all believed in the same thing, but was more apt -- like there was a separation of duties and that was clear. And so, a lot of -- of the prayers and what we did came from, what we call as, hamails, and these were handwritten from the old country that were brought over. And it really discussed not only prayers but also in the Tatar, or sometimes it was in Russian, or sometimes -- well, mostly, it was in Polish, Turkish, a combination of things, of languages in each hamail because they just copied things. There were also stories, but they were stories that -- of things that happened in Europe, but they brought them over. And -- and they thought it was part of maybe a -- a prayer service because it says it was part of the prayer service, and that's what they were used to.

But then -- you know, for example, my uncle had it translated by some people that he -- he was able to get involved with this, and found out they were doing stories about the tsar, and what was happening. Because every -- every service in any of the religions does have a little bit of what was going on in the community and things like that. So, this was what was going on. So, it was like, "Oh, we got to cut this," which was good because the -- the -- the actual prayer service, like, got cut in half.

STRONG: Oh, wow.

SEDOROWITZ: I was like, "What happened to all of that what was happening before?" "No, no, no, that's no good. That's no good." And my uncle cut it all out and -- and made it more relevant to today.

So, they did their part on that, but the political people, they were always looking to what could -- they could do better for the organization in terms of running it

operationally, also social events, you know, getting together as a group. And -- and also different types of ways to raise money. So they did that and -- and they had different ideas.

But again, this was a generation that was a lot of people surviving the Depression and World War II. So, what they thought was important was, you know, over the years, didn't become important, you know? But for them -- and they also were -- I don't know of a better term. I want to call it pack rat. But they saved everything regardless of whether it was useful or not. And that -- that -- in the paper world, it's -- it's amazing how much paper we have and -- and documentation. But, you know, in other things, it didn't -- you know, we weren't able to move as fast as we should or should have moved. But they did invest as they could for what they knew.

And the technology -- as technology advanced, they were a little too apprehensive to take -- take that on and embrace it as -- as much as in my generation has. You know, and we look at it as tools and aids to help us live. They -- they look at it as, "Oh, it's too complicated, so we're not going to do that. We'll just do what we always know and what -- what works for us."

I mean, there were a lot of individuals on both sides. I mean, from my family, I mentioned my -- my father's family, they were very on the religious side. My mother's brother was -- had been president here for a number of years, and so he was more on that side. My father, I don't think he took any sides. He was like -- like we used to say Switzerland.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: He never wanted to upset anybody, and so he just went with the flow, and that's really how -- how that happened. And then -- and, of course, my husband's side -- Jack -- his mother's family, they came from a family, they still are in -- in Europe, imams on the Moorwitz side of the family. His father actually converted even though he was

born in -- in Poland. They -- he converted to Islam upon marrying his mother. So, that was very important then, you know, to keep -- to marry within your group and religion. So, if you weren't from, you needed to convert to be accepted at the time. So, that was a very, very tight in that regard.

And, I guess, that was another reason why that's dissuaded a lot of the younger people from being a part, because of the backlash that they would feel from them -- the older generation. And they were just trying to keep things together, you know, and I understand that. I mean, I ended up marrying somebody from -- from the organization but you know? I didn't understand that as a younger person, but as an older person, I understand that.

STRONG: Tell me about why that's important since you understand it now.

SEDOROWITZ: Well, because I felt -- you know, for me, when I was younger, I was unhappy about that because I was not, personally, be able to date a non-Muslim. And as I grew older, I -- I really could not bring anybody home that wasn't a Muslim that I was dating. And -- and I -- and purposely, I used to date Muslim Indians, Muslim Middle Eastern, and my poor -- poor parents when I bring them home, they were, like, sweating because it was, like, not really Tatar.

So I guess -- I guess that's one of the reasons why I saw that, and I saw that my parents, you know, really felt that. I don't know. I know that it was not important to a lot of my cousins, and I -- I love their -- my cousins' spouses. They -- they're wonderful people. So, I mean, that wasn't the issue either. So, for me, it was mostly comfort that I didn't have to explain myself. And -- and I guess, the energy level in terms of that, like for Jack, I mean, we don't have to -- it's just what it is, and we all -- we believe in the same thing. And it's very easy in terms of the -- that type of -- that part of the -- of the relationship. And it is important when you're -- you're doing that.

But I could see the other way. The children of my cousins, they're wonderful people, and they also -- they have choices, whatever they want to do, you know? For example, Alyssa's brother is not so interested. His wife is Christian, and she's raising her children as Christian, but it doesn't matter. They're wonderful boys, and they -- they're great. And Alyssa chose for her reasoning, and Pete has accepted that and appreciates that. And she's choosing for her children to raise them as Muslim, and that's her choice. So, you know, but that's -- that's exceptions. Most -- most of my cousins chose, you know, their children -- not to really raise them as Muslims. And -- and -- and maybe it was the time. Maybe it was because of the issues we talked about of not really understanding the language of Arabic and, really, the religion itself.

But the -- the religion is -- is -- really just shapes you in how you think and in terms of -- it talks about modesty, and helping people, putting people above yourself and -- and -- and -- so I feel that most of my family really does that anyway. And I think as good human beings, you do that anyway. So, that's all that really matters in the end, right? So that's how I think. And how you practice and whether you believe in God, or believe in a force, or don't believe in God, it's really how you live your life. And that is what Muhammed was about -- living his life in a way that was honorable. And that's the goal that we all should have as people.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about meeting your husband and how your relationship grew over the years.

SEDOROWITZ: Well, I mean, I met him in -- I'm sure he was part of the organization, but his -- he -- they didn't have -- they went by public transportation. It's a little difficult if anybody knows about Brooklyn, about trying to use public transportation to get from one end of Brooklyn to the other if you're not near a subway. And they -- yeah, he can do several buses and a long trip to get here as well. But I don't really have too much of a recollection of him as a younger person. But when I -- in college, or when we had the youth organization, I think that they were at the -- the end of it as well. Okay. I'll say my -- my husband is a year younger than me. Okay, that's -- but he was part of the

organization for a little bit of time. But again, it was difficult for him to -- to get to different places to meet up at that time.

So I guess, as we got older in college years, we -- at dances, we would meet. We would have the different dances that -- we had the spring fling, the fall fling what -- whatever, you know, kind of thing then, and stuff like that, and holidays that we would get to meet each other. And he loves with a passion, and so does his brother, polkas and dancing polkas, and they were part of a dance group. I didn't really take part in a dance group, but I enjoyed dancing the polkas in those days. So, we would go to these places since I had the transportation, and I would take his brother, and we'll meet up with people, other polka lovers of our organization. And, you know, you dance the night -- polkas. A great exercise, aerobic exercise for sure, but -- so. We would go to Port Washington, Bayway, a ton of other places that were around the area -- you know, the local area and dance.

And so, we dated in the '70s for a bit and then we, each, were still in college, so we chose to -- you know, chose our career. I guess, we were -- we were definitely not ready for marriage or anything like that. And then quite a few years later, we ended up getting married. And he was always part of every holiday. I -- I knew that he was -- felt as I did about the organization and about the religious part, not just the org operational part, which was important to me. That's I guess -- I guess, it was meant to be at that point, you know, that -- that.

But I was -- like I said before, before we had this conversation, that I was, kind of, focused on my career, and so was he as an architect, to, you know, enhance our careers and not really looking at the bigger picture of things until we got a lot older, I guess maybe mature and then we got married, so I think last year was 20 years we were married.

STRONG: So, you were married in '97?

SEDOROWITZ: Nineteen ninety-seven.

STRONG: Ninety-seven. Well, tell me about the decision to get married then. How did you know you were ready?

SEDOROWITZ: That's a hard question. I guess it was just something that just happened. It was the time for whatever. You know, sometimes, at some point in your life, you want a more constant companion, and that was the time that that was happening. And so, that it just worked for us. It was just -- it was like a two-year period. I think I lo-- I lost my mother, and I think he lost his father.

And then my father was very, very much strict in terms of morals and ethics, and he didn't like that fact that we were, like, kind of, living together for a bit. And he was very upset and wouldn't go on vacation with us. And he -- and it was difficult because he did have a -- he did have a cerebral hemorrhage, so he was -- like had a left-sided -- left side -- no, right-sided deficiency. But he still had it. He -- he would tell you what he wanted to tell you, you know. He -- remember, I told you he was Switzerland? He changed after that to be -- he just told you what he felt like. And he didn't feel like that was appropriate.

And, I guess, unbeknownst to me, Jack had a conversation with my father and then -- and then I -- I just -- I knew it was the right time. I don't know why. And then we decided that we would get married. Unfortunately, my father passed away like two months before we were going to get married. So, we had the invitations out, and he passed away. But I -- I -- I kind of -- I knew that too, that was going to happen because he was having difficulties, you know? So, it was still heartbreaking, but I guess that it was just the timing of things.

So, and -- and then after a while you -- you just -- like I said, you wanted a -- a companion. You're done with, you know, being on your own. Like I knew I could be on my own, be self-independent, and whatever, but, yeah, okay, now -- now what? So, it was

like a new phase for me, and I guess for him, he decided to be mature about it, too, from his end. So, I guess, that was what happened.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about your going to college, your education, and your career that followed, and -- ?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, in terms of that, I mean, I was always great. I survived the whole math problem -- issue in second grade to come to enjoy math and science. So, I boldly told my mother that I was going to -- of course, we were going to college. There was no question asked because when we did the weekend drives -- because that's really what you did. You just -- when my father was home on the weekend, you just did your Sunday drive, and she would go and make my father drive in front of colleges and universities, and she'd just talk about that.

She -- what -- she never asked me to become the doctor. She always had my -- my brother, "You're going to become the doctor," and -- and -- and then she -- I -- but I knew I was going to college. And honestly, I now think I really wanted to be a doctor, so I was like, "I didn't want to do that." So, I said, "I was going to be -- like, I want to be a researcher in -- in -- in -- in biology or chemistry." And she listened to me. And she's like, "What? You're going to -- you're going to have to go through a lot of schooling for that and higher education." "That's what I want to do."

And then one day I came home from school, from high school, and on the kitchen table is -- "I want you to look at this. This is about being a pharmacist." And I'm like, "What? What are you telling me what I'm going to do?" And I said, "Well --" She goes, "Read it. It talks about, you know, medical. You like that, math, and you like chemistry, and when you finish this --" It was five years at that time, "When you finish this, you could go out and get a good job. Other than you have to go get your doctor degree. It will be 10 years before you're going to make any money." And I'm, like, looking at that and going, "Oh, oh, yeah, it does look good. Okay." So, I guess, she was the one who decided my career, kind of got me into it.

And she was right because I really enjoyed going to school and to St. John's [University] College of Pharmacy [and Health Services]. I was lucky enough to have full scholarship at the time, which helped my parents tremendously. And I went to school, I had my books paid for me, and I lived with my -- my uncle, and my cousin, and my -- my aunt in Middle Village, and would commute to St. John's. And I went through five years of school, and I -- yeah, I got a job. I did a -- I did an internship or -- at the time, they called them internships -- after I graduated. You had to spend some time in a pharmacy.

I worked at a pharmacy, and I did a two-year internship at the VA [Veteran Affairs] Hospital in New York, which I wanted to live in New York, but I couldn't afford it. But I did that and then that got me into [Mount Sinai] St. Luke's-Roosevelt where I worked in the hospital, staff pharmacist, moved up to supervisor and assistant director and then moved on to do -- manage a homecare infusion company that was out of Waltham, Massachusetts, and I managed the New York branch. And -- because at that time, they wanted managers who had a clinical background and pharmacists as well, so I went and did that. And I also was able to get my master's in clinical pharmacy and have it paid for too. So, I was -- it was very good.

School was very good for me. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed St. John's. It was a wonderful campus. My parents were, like, dead set against me going to Brooklyn College of Pharmacy, now called Arnold and Marie Schwartz College of Pharmacy. Because in Brooklyn, "Oh, no, you can't go downtown Brooklyn. We'll be scared to death, and this, and that." So, yeah, "What's going to happen to you?" So, I could go to Queens and stay with my uncle. I wanted to get out of my parents' house for just independence sake, but this wasn't exactly -- she was happy enough that my aunt and uncle were watching me, but I was -- still had somewhat independence, and that was fine with her. It worked out, and I became that.

And then over time, as I did the director of this -- the New York center, I had a few different, kind of, other designations within the company. The company purchased different other infusion companies. And then I got to know different physicians, and I went into business with the physicians, infectious disease physicians at NYU [New York University], and we did -- this was in the mid-'90s. We did electronic medical record, which was really like in its infancy. And we -- the reason why they wanted to get involved was to try to collate data to -- because of the AIDS situation at the time and understand therapies. And so, I was exposed to a lot of other HIV physicians at the time, not only in the New York area. Brooklyn, the city, Queens, the Bronx, New Jersey, I went all over the place, Connecticut. So, I went all over the place and -- and setting up people with electronic medical record.

And then I then since moved on to doing my own consulting company and doing more data involvement and specialty in forms in -- in creating electronic medical record forms in these -- in everybody's medical records because now it's a requirement. That was able to collect data in a -- in -- in a discreet way, standardized way so that they can actually do trends.

And of, course now, with the information and portability act, Health Information [sic] Portability, HIPAA, that has created, through Medicare and everything, the same sort of situation that we tried to start in 1995 -- and collecting data, dash-boarding physicians, making sure that they're following certain protocols, managing the patient's health care and wellbeing. And of, course now -- and HIV has become more like treating a chronic illness rather than a death sentence, thank God. And that has helped, you know, tremendously.

It's been very fulfilling for me to work and meet a lot of people, and I -- I work, a lot of different clients. I had all kinds of clients, all different kind of specialties. But because

of my background as a pharmacist, I had a lot of ability to speak with physicians, understood their terminology, understand how to take that and work it within their day-to-day workplace. And -- and not make it overbearing, let's say, just as a plain IT person would where they would just "Oh, you want this? We'll just do it this way." It's -- it's more I try to create more intuitive forms that they feel like they're not, you know, just writing down information. That they're actually -- it's useful for them. And so, that's been very rewarding for me. So that's what I've been doing. Eventually, I'll retire.

STRONG: [laughter] You're going to retire or you have already?

SEDOROWITZ: No, I'm not retired yet.

STRONG: Yeah. Did you stay connected with the mosque community all -- all through this time?

SEDOROWITZ: Yes.

STRONG: Or did you sort of come back in the '90s?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, I think, like I know -- I connected in the social things, not in the -- I would go to prayers and do and -- and I always try to go to the social dances and -- and stay connected. But I'm also -- you know, I'm always connected, in a way, with all the other members of -- my relatives in that -- in that respect. So, we always talked about it, and so we -- I mean, yeah, I've been in one way and another. Right now, obviously, since 1997, I got more formally connected in the operational part and have taken over the -- really the -- the financial end of things.

STRONG: So, you mentioned a little bit how your -- your career in data and in medicine, kind of, informed the way that you wanted to contribute to this community as a board member. Can you tell me a little more about that?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, I guess that, you know, being the fact that the -- the -- the -- in the 1990s or all along. I mean, as an organization, they were doing what they can do with the tools they had. But they would just talk about people leaving and not understanding what their membership was. Then I said, "Well, maybe I can take all the census cards, and put them in a database, and then take a look, and analyze where people are geographically, what age they are, whether their children became members

or not. And show you, in a real sense, through chart -- charting -- you know, the picture is worth a thousand words -- what's really happening to your organizations so that you can understand it a little bit better." You know, because you could talk -- talk, but they didn't under-- You know, people like to see the bigger, broader scope. And when you see it in a pic-- in a graph or a pie chart, then it becomes clearer to you what's going on, and maybe make better, informed decisions, but --

So, I started with that from the beginning when I first started. I took that to -- and that was a big task, putting that in a database because they had, not only -- besides addresses and whatnot, they had date of births, their children, their children's date of births and whether they -- they were Muslim or not, and then -- so, I attached it with a -- you know, like their book number or membership number and then created this database of information. It took a -- a bit. I have -- I don't recollect how long that -- [coughs] Wow, I'm talking too much -- but I don't recollect how long that took, but it took a long time.

But I cre-- I did a presentation and then I sent out the presentation out to the membership. And we had a few discussions on what we could do or not, but I don't think they were ready to really comprehend, and understand, and do what they needed to do. So, that took a long time to change their minds and how they did things. Because, as I said, they were very resolute on what they did, and they didn't want to change things. But that time has changed, and hopefully, we could, you know, at least, do as good a job as they did.

STRONG: It's interesting that they were so meticulous in keeping these records and every little piece of information, and yet resistant to keeping those records in a new way, in a digital way.

SEDOROWITZ: Yeah. That's -- I found that interesting too.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: That's because, I think, they were afraid of the new. You know, I think that's basically it. You know, I know quite a few people, you know, they were -- they didn't understand, and I said -- so, I said, "But you -- your -- your grandchildren want you to communicate with you, so you need to get a cell -- a cell phone. You need to get a smart phone." "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no." But then, of course, their grandkids deter-- you know, they determined what they're going to do. And so, next thing you know, they got smartphones and then they're like, "Okay, well, I just use that for the FaceTime, or, "I know how to do that. I know how to make a call." I said, "Well, no, now you could text." "Text?" So, a part of my thing is -- is to, really, try to teach them how to text, or teach them how to go on a website on their smartphone. It's amazing that you know -- but it's like that. But once they see that, and they -- I said, "You know, you realize a smartphone is really a computer." "What?" I said, "Yes. You're becoming computer literate. It's not a scary thing." "Well, maybe we should have classes." And I'm like, okay.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: "That's a tough one. You know, I guess, you guys are retired, so maybe you could take a class with the library." Because the New York [Public] Library does classes on how to use a computer. And I had a few of them sign up for them at their local library for classes. So, I feel good about that.

But I know that in -- in the early on, I tried to present to just have a -- a website, and I was completely turned down. And so, hopefully this year, we're able to get the website up and going. But we're talking close to 20 years, and I've been trying to get this website up and going but it's just -- they don't understand. It's the -- the thing, "We're on Google. We're on Google. We're on Google! I -- we got -- how can we get off Google?" "No, no, you -- you -- Goo-- it's -- it's -- it's -- it's a public domain, okay. We don't control. We could -- we could -- if something is wrong, we could say it's wrong, but we can't tell them not to include us. Okay?" But that -- it's -- it's those things. It's -- it's scary for them because they're a different generation. And -- and you have to respect that, but we have to move forward.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about the 100th anniversary, 10 years after you joined the board and what kind of discoveries you made while you were doing research there?

SEDOROWITZ: You know, I guess, that that's a good point. Thanks for reminding me about that. Yeah. I -- I guess, I was on the board, and we're talking about things. In every meeting we go to, we talk about things, we read our, you know, minutes. And -- and then new business comes up and -- and this was, I guess, 2006. And I'm saying, "You know, 2007, we're going to be 100 years old." "Oh, yeah, yeah, we should do something." "Yeah, we should do something." And nobody wanted to take the -- you know, and say, "Okay, I volunteer."

So, I -- I don't know what possessed me. I feel like something from beyond kind of pushed me just to -- at some -- at some point in 2006, say, "Okay. I -- I -- if you allow me, I'll do it." "Okay." You know, it was right away, "Well, yes." Because they wanted to do it, but they didn't have any idea how -- what to do. And I said, "Well, I'd like to make it a weekend celebration, and we'll have -- one day, we'll have a lecture series. We'll have a lecturer talk about how we came to being and -- and the organization came to being. And we'll have a traditional dinner here. And the next day, we'll have a dance, a social dance and with -- with a polka band. And we're going to have Polka Family," which was a big band at that time. I think they still are, or maybe they retired. I'm not sure. But it was a big band at that time, and -- and it was a lot of money to go with that polka band. Five thousand dollars was a lot of money. And they were like -- we're talking about Depression people -- babies, okay. They're like, "What?" "No, this is our 100th anniversary. I'm in charge, I'm doing that, and I'm going to do it." And so, we did.

We -- we had the -- the 100th anniversary. We had the lecture, and we had people from all over come from all these members that I haven't seen in many years. Also, the spouses of these members who were non-Muslim came. We had people from the Turkish mosque come, the Turkish consulate came, a lot of people, like a -- well, the place was full. And we had a beautiful dinner that we -- well, pretty much I created

without thinking about it because I cooked for -- for -- for -- it was really a lot of work, but it was like 2007, and I -- and I was a lot younger then and --

I had come back from a week in London and Paris with my brother and my husband, and we were walking, and running all over the place, and so I had all this energy. It was just what I needed, the boost. So, I just said, "I'm taking the week off from work, and I'm going to just concentrate on doing this." And I cooked all these dishes. And I -- I did remember getting -- I must have got something. I couldn't do it all by myself, so there must have been some help. I hired people for cleanup, and the serving, and stuff like that, and it was very good.

And the next day, we had at Plattduetsche Park in Long Island. We had -- and the place was packed full. And we hired a photographer, and we took -- they took pictures. And we -- we -- we -- we really celebrated that day, and then we -- like I -- the presentation that I did -- I did a PowerPoint presentation. We printed it out and mailed it because, you know, a lot of people were computer not literate, illiterate. And I hate using that word literate -- illiterate, not literate. So, that, you know, I put that and a CD of all the pictures of the -- of the tables, so photography of every table. It was very, very nice. It was a huge, huge success, and -- and everybody was very happy. I was happy that it was over because I was tired, but [laughter] it was -- it was very fulfilling for me, too, I have to admit, to be able to do that.

And 10 years later, a little less work-wise for me, we had a brunch. And -- and now, I have Alyssa who is helping with Pete, and they did a lot of the decorating and stuff. And I did the presentation of this Tatar heritage tour, which got a nice response from people -- people who wish they could go, but they're a little bit too old now. And people -- we have people in -- in the mid-seventies going, you know, because they really are very interested because they're -- they -- they've already raised their children, and

children have families that they have now the time for their own special things, you know? And so, now, they're very interested in doing those things, and they --

And like I said before, they remember the good days. "Oh, I remember coming." We called it -- we don't use the mosque as much, as we call it jamia because that's the term that Tatar -- not -- so, it's not a Tatar term, but it's a term from our villages. I wouldn't say it's a Tatar term, jamia. "I remember coming to the jamia." This, and this, and this. Every time I talk to these people, they bring out a lot of history from what it was that -- and it's -- it's -- it's -- they're very excited about that, you know, talking about those days. They have very good memories. They all have very good memories.

And I have their grandchildren emailing me saying that, "Oh, I remember my parents talking about, or my grandparents about the jamia and the times that they had." So, they -- those stories are still coming through, and they hear that. Alyssa gets a lot of context from people that contact her about that.

It's very nice. And it's true. It's -- it's a sense -- they feel a sense of community when they hear these stories, and they want to know more. So, one of the way is, like, through the organization Brooklyn Historical Society, that they can, if they choose, they have another the source of finding this information once people like myself are not here. So I -- I -- I -- I relish that idea that they could have that opportunity to find that information.

STRONG: Tell me about how you first began the -- the project of going through all of these rooms, and -- and finding what needed to be saved, and what needed to be thrown out, and the kinds of records that you had here.

SEDOROWITZ: Well, I -- I still -- it's an ongoing project.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: I have to say that. Because trying to go through these file cabinets and other storage cabinets was an experience -- indescribable experience because it was

like history unfolding. Where we have, what they have a baptism, we call it Azan and it's -- and it's documented. And we have books there documenting my Azan, so it's still there, and all of my cousins and the people that I know. We have books of marriages that were done, you know, and that's documented. And so, it's really interesting that -- that was all kept in. And the more that I looked into things and went through each cabinet -- there's a room in the kitchen -- behind the kitchen that was -- had cabinets in there. And I'm like, "Oh, jeez, I don't know. Do I really want to go in here and look?"

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: And, of course, Jack goes, "Yes, let's go look," and he opens it up. And Alyssa, too, was good too, "Oh, yeah, let's go look." And there was information in these things that I couldn't even expect. Old notes from the beginning minutes in -- in ledger kind of books, bounded books of meetings that were in a different language other than English.

And we -- we -- we are -- you know, that we found the original copy or of the first constitution, you know, and it's in -- it's in English and in Russian. It's small, but it's -- it is really quite nicely done, and it's -- it's like everything. If you look at the meeting minutes, everything was done according to rules, *Robert's Rules of Order*, you know, and how everything proceeded was very professionally done with what they had. It's -- it's amazing how well they did it. And dues, how they kept the dues, the documents, the financial records, everything inked out, you know, in the -- in the ledger thing. And what -- you know, this -- how they assessed, how things were done.

And it's like a history that, you know, nobody talked about at the meetings because it was just more. "We read the past meeting. We have the new me--" you know? And it wasn't really about the history, history because we never went to that. So, it was a -- an awakening. I mean, they had everything.

But, of course, with that, they also had checks, you know? You know, because in those days, we -- checks were returned to us. Checks from the '40s, '50s, I'm like, it's amazing, amazing, amazing. Statements, bank statements from way back then, from banks that are no longer here.

And it's funny because we still have bank deposit slips from the original bank that has become Capital One. It said Williamsburg Bank on it. And the -- the -- they said, Capital said -- you know, the bank that I was at, they said, "Oh, no, you can use it because it's the correct, you know, routing number and -- and -- and checking account number." "Okay." I mean, okay, fine. The other day, I went in and -- because as the treasurer, and so I do some transaction, you know, deposits for membership donations, and I'm like -- the -- the young woman goes to me, "What kind of checking deposit slip? It's Williamsburg Bank? What is that? Is that a --? That's not our bank." And I said, "Oh, you don't know the history. Williamsburg Bank was -- is Capital One." "Really? I thought it was some other --" "Oh, no, that was before that. It was that --" It's like, "Wow." It's -- people don't really understand. I mean Chemical Bank, and other banks, you know, the names have changed, but the information is there. And it's just like a -- very interesting. We have evaluation of the -- you know, New York City puts up evaluations of the property year after year. Well, we have them all. We have insurance policies from God only knows how far.

And I'm in the process trying to ca-- categorize this, and put them in some sort of order, and try to, you know, figure out whether we need this, we don't need this, and is this of importance or not importance. And it's a -- so it's a big, big task. But it wouldn't have really started if I didn't do the 2007, the 100th-anniversary celebration. I don't think I would have even done that. Maybe -- I can't say, the -- I wouldn't have, but I -- it wouldn't -- it wouldn't have happened when it happened.

STRONG: So, no one was opening these cabinets?

SEDOROWITZ: No.

STRONG: They were just here?

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, no. They were, like, nobody even knew what was in the cabinets.

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: You know, I'm surprised. I mean, there are stuff we have -- remember they used to have these stamps? These like -- somebody had -- like has all these, like, 100 different stamps. I was like, "Well, I guess that was important" because it was -- it had different things about it. But I remember that growing up that we had stamps. And we had the date thing with the rolling thing to put the date, all this old stuff. And if somebody like Alyssa looks and then go, "Oh, this is neat!" And I'm like, "Oh, this is old."

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: It's a perspective of things. That's funny, you know? But you do need that perspective because you might just think, "Oh, it's old, it's not necessary." "Oh, no, this is really neat. This is exceptional."

And -- and one of the highlight things for Alyssa was they had a -- a chalkboard in the other closet. By the lady's entrance up the stairs -- by the stairs, there's a chalkboard, and it has her grandfather's lesson on it, the last lesson on -- on the chalkboard, and it's his handwriting, and she said, "Are you sure?" And -- and, of course, my cousin, her -- her father goes, "No, that's not my father's handwriting." "Okay, bring a sample of your father's handwriting," and we looked at it and go, "No, that's his handwriting."

STRONG: Okay.

SEDOROWITZ: So I said, "You see that? That's your grandfather's handwriting on that chalkboard." I mean, they were put away in the closet. I mean old chalkboards with chalk. You know, where do you find that now? Maybe in New York City's public school system but --

STRONG: [laughter]

SEDOROWITZ: -- I don't know.

STRONG: Yeah. So, tell me about your hopes for this community going forward? And what inspired you to -- to pull together this -- this trip, this tour that you're working on?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, the trip was inspired by just my personal feeling that it would be a great undertaking and really nice if we could go there someday. And I presented that to -- to the -- the board, and they said, "Okay, you know, why don't we put it out there and see what the membership thinks?"

But to my surprise, there are quite a few people that were -- have the same thoughts, but they felt that the task of trying to organize a tour was very daunting for them. And now -- I mean in the last year only, 2017, I believe, Belarus actually has a visa-free entry for like a five-day trip. Otherwise, you have to go through the whole visa process. So, it now made it easier to do this trip.

And, of course, having these connections through the internet allow us to communicate much easier and to coordinate events, so that we can make appointments to meet at these mosques or meet people. And I could -- it's not only just the hotels. I could get transportation. I could get translators. So, it's like language is not the barrier. It's much easier than it was to organize a trip of this magnitude years ago, unless you had to pay a lot of money to get somebody to -- to be your guide and to do all of that. Now, it's a lot easier to do. So, I think that that -- that's helpful. And I was surprised to see that there are people, mostly like my age or older, that want to go and do this trip.

Now -- okay. It must be my head being full with sinuses congested that I forgot what the first part of your question was.

STRONG: What do you hope is the -- the future of the mosque moving forward?

SEDOROWITZ: Well, to -- the -- the understanding is to keep it functioning as long as it can be functioning. And to make sure that we have it as open and -- and used as much as it

can be used. And that has not been the situation before. I have to take a break. I think I've got to take a nose blow.

[Interview interruption]

SEDOROWITZ: So, to keep -- to not only keep it functioning but to open it up. And that would be, more or less, more religious activities, more educational activities so that we could try to ensure that -- and educate the general public, whoever decides to, you know, visit that, you know, what we are and that we're -- we all believe in the same thing and -- and in one God. So that's, kind of, how I would do that. How? I don't know.

We, certainly, can't exist if we don't have new membership. You know, we have members that have been very -- various ages, but I mean the members 40 and under are very little. You know, they -- they're really a small group. So, I don't -- I feel that the issue would be we need to have more membership, and we have to be a little bit more open in how we get that membership. And -- and so, we're -- we're looking into all of that. And that's the only way that we can survive as an organization for the long run. But to make sure also in the -- the short run, that we give our membership the benefits and the things that they need when they're alive. And -- and -- and, you know, unfortunately when they pass away that their family knows that they'll be taken care of in the correct manner in which they wanted to be taken care of, you know? And certainly, we're supported by members who we know won't be buried here, but they just support us because it's something that they want to do.

And it's -- it's a very difficult thing because the whole path of -- of immigration is like a closed-door issue. You know, people in -- in these other countries, they don't need to come to America because they can find their own way and enjoy a -- a living style there as much as they could here. You know, it's not -- it's -- it's not like America is the land opportunity like it was in -- in years gone by. So, I think that -- that's -- there's a whole different perspective of where the membership is going to come from.

But I see, you know, like with other organization, the -- the younger people have a different way of thinking about religion and what it means to them. So, we have those challenges. So, it's very difficult to see more than 20 years from now. There's no crystal ball, but it's going to be difficult. I could -- I know that for sure.

STRONG: And you're, kind of, in a place of being a -- a bridge generation where you understand the perspective of the older generation that you've had your disagreements, and you understand the perspective of, you know, the younger generation as well. How do you see your role in -- in helping this transition move forward?

SEDOROWITZ: Just so that we try to make the best decisions, and know and understand, like I said before, what's important to the -- the older generation. And be there for them. And for the newer generation, try to give experiences, past experiences to -- to make the best decision going forward.

And I mean we -- we have to judge everything and look at everything, you know. I mean, we have much more grave plots, for example, than we have members who are going to be buried. So, what do we do with those extra grave plots? Do we, for our non-Muslim spouses, offer them grave plots, so they -- they can be with their loved ones? You know, these are things where they -- they wouldn't consider these things previously. We have to make decisions that makes sense. Or do we offer, kind of -- a different kind of membership to the people? Because there's plenty of Muslims in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. It's just that we get messages all the time on our machine, but we're not open.

We don't have a full-time imam here. I mean it would be very difficult to afford a full-time imam here. But certainly, we should be open on Friday, and that's one -- a goal that I'm trying to do. Also, offer different types of programs, whatever they maybe. Example, Alyssa brought one that we can do, that a -- a -- a Muslim woman brought to her that maybe we could use our space to do yoga for women, Muslim women because

they can't be with men doing the yoga. That's that, and I -- I don't understand that. I've done yoga with men -- I'm in yoga, and that's where my head is at, but if that's the case and they -- whatever. Sure, why shouldn't we open up, and do that, and help that situation? Why shouldn't we have different kinds of programs? Why shouldn't we have an Abraham's Table here? They had it in -- in -- in other places -- in -- in Long Island, in other Muslim places, why can't we have one here, you know? So, I want to be able to be more open about all of that.

STRONG: So, those are all the questions that I have.

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, okay.

STRONG: Is there anything that I -- that I should have asked you that you want to make sure that you -- you get on the record for future generations to hear?

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, I think I've said it throughout the whole talk that we had. That basically, the most important thing is for people to understand that this Tatar community was a very, very tight community. And the people really worked very hard to accomplish what they accomplished in -- in creating an organization that, not was only religiously based, but also based in terms of helping one another. You know, as a -- coming to a new country, you don't know the language. You don't understand how things are done. But to be able to have somebody of your faith and of -- coming from your area helping you, and helping you in the good times and in the bad times is very comforting. And to have that feeling that -- that -- that organization did that for many, many hundreds of families.

And those families, relatives today, they're the -- the children and grandchildren, hopefully, can respect that and -- and feel good about that, especially when they look at their 23andMe or ances-- AncestryDNA, whatever those programs. When they test their DNA, that they could realize and feel, "Oh, gee, not that -- oh, my grandparents or my great-grandparents were Muslim.", But no, they were Tatars who believed in Islam, and -- and lived it, and practiced it the way that they thought was a way that honored who they were and their ancestors. And I think that's the most important thing. It's --

it's your way of life and how they honor that, and that's, hopefully, what I hope that people understand when they go look into the history of -- of their relatives.

STRONG: Thank you so much for your time, and --

SEDOROWITZ: Okay.

STRONG: -- so sharing your stories for this interview. And, yeah, I look forward to the next steps and working with you. Thank you so much.

SEDOROWITZ: Oh, thanks, Liz.