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Haughwout, Alyssa, Oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, April 25, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.16; Brooklyn Historical Society.

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Oral History Interview with Alyssa Haughwout  
Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.16  
Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on April 25, 2018 in  
at the Brooklyn Moslem Mosque Williamsburg, Brooklyn

STRONG: So, today is Wednesday, April 25, 2018. My name is Liz Strong. This is for the Brooklyn Historical Society's Muslims in Brooklyn Oral History Project. Alyssa, just introduce yourself, say who you are, when and where you were born, and maybe a little bit about your life growing up.

HAUGHWOUT: Okay. I'm Alyssa Haughwout, maiden name Alyssa Ratkewitch, and I am a -- I'm the vice president of the board here, as well as the caretaker of the mosque building, and was born December 24, 1984, in Queens, New York. Yeah.

STRONG: Okay, tell me about your childhood, your brother, your parents, anything you remember.

HAUGHWOUT: Okay. I have a brother and parents. [laughter]

STRONG: That's good.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: Yeah.

HAUGHWOUT: So yeah, so I have an older brother, Dan, and my parents, Steve and Aisha, and my aunt Marion, who you met earlier. She lived above us always, growing up, back in Middle Village in Queens and then all together, when we moved to Long Island when I was about four years old, three years old. Yeah, we've been coming to the mosque my whole life, my mom's whole life, and most of my grandmother's whole life -- my grandparents' whole life.

Yeah, my parents are entrepreneurs, they started -- when I was born, they were running a stationery store and then they sold that and then they ran a deli and then now they're -- we came to Long Island and they, they run an insurance agency. My brother runs his own insurance agency as well. I did not follow that path. I got a degree in art education

from SUNY [State University of New York] New Paltz, graduated in 2007, and then a masters in art and design education from Pratt Institute in 2010, and now I'm currently working for Avenues: The World School in Chelsea, as the ah, the head of extended learning, so that's running the after school and summer camp program there.

STRONG: Okay. Tell me about your, your family's relationship to the mosque. Maybe start with your family history a little bit.

HAUGHWOUT: Sure.

STRONG: As you told me before.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. So we are of Tatar heritage, so and that's both of my -- both sides of my family, my mom and my dad's side. My mom's parents came from Poland and Russia. My dad's parents, well, my dad's dad was born in Bayonne but before that, his family came from Belarus, and my dad's mom came from Belarus, I believe, or what's now Lithuania. These places, I think the borders have moved a little bit here and there, but that's what they would say, they would say I'm from Russia, pretty much.

So they each independently kind of immigrated in the early 1900s, yeah. My mom's mom, I know came over in, I think 1910, thereabouts, yeah thereabouts. And I know that she in particular, came over with her mother and her siblings and one of her cousins. Like so many people, they sent her -- her father, my great grandfather, came over to America by himself, to try and establish himself and get some money, and he would send money home to his wife and kids so they could gather up enough to come join him in America. And I think they -- that he had to do that for something like seven to ten years, something like that. It took, it took a long time to be able to you know, bring the rest of the family over. And yeah, they -- I know they had to travel quite a ways, they were quite inland, so finding a ship was -- took -- was a long trek. I don't really know much about that journey, but I know they finally, you know, finally found a ship that they were able to get out on and they came over around, I think it was around 1910, I could be wrong. Maybe that was the year she was born, I should probably check these things. [laughter]

STRONG: How old was she when she came over?

HAUGHWOUT: She was nine.

STRONG: Okay.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. That should be easy to check.

STRONG: Yeah.

HAUGHWOUT: I'll let you know. [laughter]

STRONG: Okay. Well, there will be time.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: When, when you get the transcript, just to double check dates and stuff.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: So that's fine. [00:05:00] So she was pretty young when she came. Not many memories of life before?

HAUGHWOUT: No.

STRONG: Not many stories of life before.

HAUGHWOUT: No. Really, she, I think she, what she remembered she was told probably, but she was also, she had a younger cousin with her. So she wasn't even the youngest one on that journey. She had two older siblings and her mom, and I know that when they did come, they came through Ellis Island and there was, there was a bit of a scare there because her sister was sick, she got sick on the boat and there was like a moment of like oh God, they're not going to accept her. And I don't know what, what moved them, but they, they kind of like either she snuck off the line [laughter] or somebody just, you know smiled on her, but they were, they were held there for a little while and there was like a panic of like whether or not they were all just going to be sent home, on account of, you know? But they, they let them in and they joined some friends and some family.

I think around here, in Williamsburg, there was a very small community of Tatars, like establishing themselves. It was a primarily, I believe Jewish neighborhood. It was not a great neighborhood at the time, it was like a poor Jewish neighborhood, very like *A*

*Tree Grows in Brooklyn* kind of a scene, and that's where they -- this is, this was like their like touchstone. So they knew when they came here, they had other people, they spoke the language and you know, ate the same foods, and they probably knew somebody who knew somebody who knew them, you know? But this is where they, they connected to and, and also found jobs from, because my great grandfather was a furrier, so he would work in a fur coat factory, that's what he did back in the old country. He would like trap animals for coats, so he did something similar, like that, here, and then I know that my grandmother worked in that factory as well. Probably her siblings too, but I know my grandmother for certain, would like sew fur coats when she came here. And I have one or two of those still. [laughter]

STRONG: That's awesome.

HAUGHWOUT: Like politically, I don't want to wear them because it's like oh, fur, but I'm like oh, but my nana made it. [laughter] So, it's a little bit of a struggle but they're real pretty, I've got to say that. [laughter]

STRONG: That's fantastic.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: So, her family came to Williamsburg before this building existed, or was established as a mosque.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: About like maybe 20-ish years before? We're going to double check.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: So that would have happened when she was a kid or a young adult. How did they get connected with this religious community?

HAUGHWOUT: Well, it's all the same people who came from that -- from those little towns, you know, in, in Eastern Europe. There's a couple of towns that are like major, known for their Tatar roots, heritage, so, and they're not terribly large cities, you know? Iwye and Navahrudak are like really small places, with tight-knit communities, because even, even back then, they were minorities, so they kind of like stuck together. So when they came here, it would be like oh, I know that last name, you know there's only like

two dozen last names that people recycle, you know cycle through, and they're like oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I know your aunt knows my mom, that kind of thing. So they knew that this was the place to be, and I think, I believe at the time, they were, they were meeting for religious prayers and celebrations, like just in people's houses, you know, in, in backyards, in basements, wherever they could find space, before they were able to save up, as a community, to buy this building. So, I never really spoke to her about that in particular, about her having been here for the premiere, I guess. She passed when I was in high school, so that was before really, I was involved in, in a real way, with the goings on of the mosque, so it wasn't something I'd even really thought to ask her about. But yeah I mean it's, it's interesting, she was you know, certainly among the founders, or her family was.

STRONG: And your grandfather or grandfathers, were involved in teaching classes?

HAUGHWOUT: Mm-hmm.

STRONG: Yeah. So tell me about your, your parents and your grandparents' involvement in running this community.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. So actually both of my grandfathers were, were teaching classes here, which is how my parents met, so cute. [laughter]

STRONG: Oh my God, tell me that story.

HAUGHWOUT: Well, it's basically, my, my dad's dad was the imam here, so he would you know, he was the one who led prayers and he was [00:10:00] really, the religious leader of the community in a lot of ways. And then my mom's dad taught Friday evening classes. So there's a couple of pictures of the two of them kind of at the front of the, the room, right over here, where they're you know, leading classes and, and you know it was definitely old school. So there's you know, the boys up front and the girls somewhere else, out of the shot, you know? But they had, you know, like all of my dad and my uncles and all their friends, all together, as kids and yeah, that's how they, they -- my parents really met through all of the social things that used to happen here. There was a lot of like social activities and you know, you were kind of just, it's a little bit of a - - it's funny because it's like everyone's family, but also, you're expected to marry one of

those people, you know? [laughter] So like, I didn't have that pressure but I know it was very prevalent for my parents, it was like very much like this is -- these should be your friends, these are the people you should hang out with, you're going to marry one of these people.

That really dissipated, thankfully, by the time I grew up, but that's how my, yeah, that's how my parents met, because it was just like a group of kids that all grew up together and did all these social functions together, and even if you didn't necessarily live in Brooklyn or in Queens, you always came out for Friday classes and you always came out for these big events. So with my two grandfathers, kind of always having -- you know, always being a part of that, I believe that they were both on the board and they were both like involved in the direction the mosque was going on, you know my parents got dragged along as little children, and then you know, kind of did it on their own as, as adults as well. [laughter]

STRONG: So, what are your memories of this place as a little kid?

HAUGHWOUT: It's funny now, because I think my memories are a little bit changing, because I'm, it's now I'm here so much, [laughter] that like if you had asked me that five years ago it would be different, because it, it's very much nostalgic and it very much feels like coming home every time, but now, I'm here so much more often that it really, really literally is like coming home. [laughter] But it, it always has a very warm, comforting feeling, to be here, and we did a lot of you know, celebrations. I think that there's -- it's hard to say that there's like a, a connotation, but there's like a feeling, because I know that this is also where pretty much every funeral I've ever been to has been here as well. So it's kind of, you know, you have those memories in here as well, but it, it's definitely a peaceful place and it's always someplace that I liked coming to, we would do prayers. When I was little, I remember thinking that they went on for so long, but I'm pretty sure anybody who goes to church [laughter] or goes to any kind of religious ceremony, thinks that that's the same, thinks that's the case.

But from what I hear, I think they really did go on quite a bit longer when I was little, because I know that there were -- there are certain holy days where you pray well into the night, and I, I do have memories of like going upstairs, where the prayer room is, and like sitting on the rug and then getting sleepy, and then kind of laying on the rug, and then kind of dozing off and then you know, and my mom kind of being like if you make it through this, we're going to have a feast, [laughter] we're going to go downstairs, we get to eat when we go downstairs. You know?

But yeah, I remember when I was little, we really couldn't see the imam, because the women would sit behind this big green curtain, that was sheer, but it was like, it was kind of like pulled off to the side. So like I would say, when I was in elementary school, we -- it would be like you might get a spot behind the curtain or you might get a spot where they had opened it. My mom and my aunt Marion were kind of at the forefront of that. You know, they would probably be the last people to call themselves feminists, but honestly, that's what it is. You know, they were like it's ridiculous, we want to see him, you know, we want to see the prayers and we want to see the imam, and there's no reason why we shouldn't. So they would pull, pull it open a little bit and all the older, my older aunts and the older community members would always kind of stay behind the traditional part of the curtain, but I remember sometimes we would get a good spot, sometimes we wouldn't, sometimes we'd have to sit way, way, way in the back, [00:15:00] which was nice, because that meant there was a lot of people here at that time

Now, that's not the case, so it's just, you know, there's only a handful of people who come to even the biggest holidays now, but yeah, and, and it's still kind of the case, because even though we got rid of the curtain and the whole divider, there's like a little fold-y accordion wall, temporary structure that we have, basically so a couple of my elderly aunts can sit behind there in their respectful manner, the way they, they seem proper. But they don't, you know, they don't yell at us for not doing that, it's just like

that's how they were -- always wanted to pray, that's how they were raised to pray and that's how they're going to continue doing it. So it's, you know, it's still up there.

But yeah, I think as, as I grow older, fewer and fewer people attended the events; not just the prayers but like the, the celebrations that we would have and things like that. So it's kind of, you know there's a bit of sadness, to kind of like watch that dwindle, but also being part of a board and things are a way to bring it back to that, hopefully anyway.

STRONG: What kind of services do you guys do now? Is it just high holidays?

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, yeah.

STRONG: Okay.

HAUGHWOUT: It's just holidays. We would like -- we're trying to do more social events, so we did a couple of like cooking classes for like traditional Tatar dishes that everybody loves, that everyone is like oh, my grandmother used to make this and oh, I never learned how to make that. So it's, there's a lot of people, particularly I think my parents' age, who kind of lost the recipes and, and/or haven't used -- done them in a long time, who kind of bring it back. And then there's people like my generation, who are like oh, this is just a fun thing to do, or like oh that's a weird food, let's try, [laughter] let's try and do that. We made kishke, I think, the first one, that's the first one I went to, which is like stuffing sausages with, I think it was lamb, I want to say, and like herbs and stuff. I'm like okay, this is an experience, this is just a funny thing to do, let's do this. I think there's a lot of something for everybody. [laughter] But yeah, it was -- there were a lot of fun things. For those we get probably a good 40 people, so that's probably the most lively we'll see the building, is when we do one of those classes.

And there's a couple of other initiatives that we're trying and that we're, we're going to experiment with, just as -- not just to have people come in, but to like raise awareness about the building and the history of our community in the, in the neighborhood, because people who live in Williamsburg don't even know really, what we are, what

we're about, because we're open so rarely. Like they don't see people coming in and out, so they don't know who utilizes this building. You know, they'll see the crescent moon on the roof and that will give you an idea, but there's nowhere on the front does it say mosque, nowhere does it say the oldest mosque in America certainly, you know nowhere does it say we've been here since 19 -- in this building since 1927, or something like that, and we've been established since 1907.

And I understand, there's a lot of people who are hesitant about doing that, but I think the direction we're trying to go in, in the future, is to cautiously put ourselves out there, so that we can be that voice of like hey, look, we're Muslims and Americans, go figure. You know, we are peaceful and we've been here a long time and we want the best for this community too. And I think the more that we are vocal about things like that, the more people are like oh yeah, no, I know Muslims, they're cool people, you know? [laughter] You know?

It's nice, because there's a lot of people -- now, Williamsburg, this particular part, is a lot of hipsters and old Italian people, [laughter] so I think we get along well with both of them, with both of those groups, and it's from things like that, just like getting to know our neighbors and getting to know the people of the community, people who have been here for several generations and literally didn't know who we were, and we're like oh, we've also been here several generations. So there's a couple of things [00:20:00] that we're trying to do, to like invite more people in and tell them about ourselves. Last year, or maybe it was two years ago, we had a barbecue for holiday, Kurban Bayram, and I think that was really the first time that we had ever opened our doors to the people in the community. Like I was handing out flyers to be like hey, we're going to go roast a lamb in the backyard, that's a lot of food, come eat, [laughter] you know come find out what this holiday is all about. You know it's not just for us, it's not just for the dozen and a half people who come to the, you know, to the prayers, it's

for everybody who lives in Williamsburg, you know? And it's nice, the churches around here do that a lot too.

There's a lot of interfaith things that the -- I can't think of the name right now, San something, the church not far from here, they do a lot of interfaith things and a lot of feasts and celebrations, and you know. I know there's a day, I forget which holiday, someone's saint's day, where they like come down the street in a parade and bang drums and hand out bread to people, and they're like, "Come, we're going to have a feast!" Like okay, [laughter] that sounds good, let's go, and they were like yeah, just join the parade, just come on over. And I'm like, I want to do that, I want to like just go tell people around the community that we're here and like come, come party with us, [laughter] come celebrate this wonderful, joyful holiday that we have and you know, be a part of it, because we're here anyway.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about like the, the history of that insular culture, or anonymity.

Was it always that way or do you think this was always kind of an anonymous space?

HAUGHWOUT: I think that we've always been that way. I think there's always been this mentality of keep your head down and no one will bother you. Especially for, for like my grandparents' generation, there was a lot of like pressure to assimilate as quickly as possible, to be accepted as American as quickly as possible, and I think that they wanted to identify as American as quickly as possible, as a community, because even without you know the modern kind of view of you know, this Islam phobia, like even before there was even a word for it, I think they were very cautious of the fact that we're kind of different and people don't like different stuff, and we should you know, not necessarily pretend we're not who we are, but not advertise, that we could be a target for something.

You know if someone is in the mood to be hateful, or someone needs an excuse for something, that's an easy, that's an easy one, you know pick on the different guy. So I think that they wanted to showcase how similar we are, so there's that similarity I

guess, you know there's that, that thing that we have in common with the people who founded the, the organization, but it grew into such a fear, it grew into such an inhibiting factor, that it really came to our detriment because when people stopped immigrating, like when the big rush of Eastern European immigrants kind of slowed down and the people who came here were established and started like moving away, like okay, they got on their feet, they don't need this crutch of being in this community any more, you know they moved to Massachusetts or Jersey or wherever, it really hurt us, because we're not reaching out to anybody new, we're not reaching out to anybody at all, except for those people who came from the same little towns, and once those same little towns stopped sending people, there's nobody new coming at all and the, the next generation of people are living all across America, you know?

So that, that fear really stuck with them, and I think that every now and then, whenever there was like a targeted, like Muslim, you know something, something went wrong, someone put a swastika on, on a synagogue, or something stupid like that, it would almost vindicate them and say like see, see, they don't know what we are, so they can't do anything, you know? And obviously, 9/11 had a huge impact on that as well, because obviously, we -- it was horrible, you know we would never identify with anybody that was even like close to that, but like the, the backlash [00:25:00] of like people's reactions to Muslims in general was so scary that you know, it was just like they doubled down on efforts to like bring it all inside and like hold your cards even closer to your chest, because it's, it's scary out there. You know?

I think that with a little bit of time and with a little bit of seeing New York change and New York kind of growing, we do take that -- hmm, how do I say it? We, I think we kind of came to the conclusion that showing people who we are, as opposed to hiding who we aren't, is the best course of action. Yeah. So, showing people that we are, you know, Americans, good, wholesome people just like you and you know, everybody else, contributing to society and contributing to the community and not hiding, is, is the

best way to be. And I know that that was, you know that was part of it, when they, when they first came over here, because a lot of the people like my grandfather and my uncles, my great uncles, took on jobs that were like union jobs and like service, public service jobs, you know things that were very like American, I guess. You know all the, all the boys joined the baseball team and all the girls did, you know, I don't know, they didn't do Girl Scouts, but you know that [laughter] kind of thing. Girl Scouts was a little too, too much of a Christian organization, to join, but you know that, that sort of, that sort of idea, that like we're going to be that Norman Rockwell painting, you know, [laughter] that's us too.

But yeah, you know, and they, they did it, they enlisted in the armed forces, you know I have lots of family who fought for America in World War II, and I think that was the most, the biggest show of like no, no, no, this is exactly who we are, this is -- we're not anybody else, we're not looking to be anybody else, like you can't, [laughter] you can't say it any more clearly than that. Like yeah, I'm going to go die for this country.

STRONG: A couple generations later, do you think, like your generation, still feels like you have anything to prove in terms of your American identity, or do you think you have a little more freedom to experiment with what this community can, can be and show as its identity?

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, I think we, we definitely -- it's kind of both, I think. We do want to -- I think the feeling that we need to prove ourselves is not an internal pressure, it's -- like, I feel it as an external pressure, like the more we go out there, the more we have to say, like this is who we are and this is who we've been. It's definitely different -- it wouldn't be right to acknowledge the fact that we don't look Muslim to a lot of people, you know. And that's something that people -- I remember people saying to me, when I was in like high school and college, they're like oh, you don't look Muslim. I'm like don't say it like a compliment, [laughter] like that's, like that's -- are you complimenting me, that I don't look Muslim, because that's a weird thing to say. And so I think that that's -- that definitely changes our experience of the whole thing, of coming to America, of proving

ourselves as A, Americans and not just like you know, every, every culture got pooped on [laughter] when they came to America, you know? So, being white definitely helped with that.

I think that we are, we -- and it almost puts us in a way to, obviously demonstrate how diverse Islam can be, because there's a very set image of what people think a Muslim man and woman look like, you know, like head scarf, beard, dark skin, like that's what, that's what is conjured up when you say you know, a Muslim family. Not being that, I think kind of opens people's eyes up and if, as you know, as crummy as that is, if that helps people's perception, I'm going to use that racism for good. [laughter] You know, it's like a really terrible [00:30:00] way to put it, but like if that's -- if someone is going to be -- I'm trying really hard not to curse right now but [laughter] if someone is going to be terrible, then you know, I want to help them be less terrible. Yes, that's how I'm going to phrase it. [laughter]

STRONG: That was expertly done, only cuss words were coming to my mind as well.

[laughter]

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, yeah. So but yeah, so there is, there is a bit of a pressure to, to like prove ourselves, but less so because of our ethnicity, because the Tatars are less -- we, we don't look like a target so much. Yeah.

STRONG: So that almost makes the insular nature of the community easier.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: You can fly under the radar in most situations.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: How did, you know, your life personally, being Muslim, living in areas where you may have been the only Muslim family, how did that, how did that go for you in the different phases of your life? Were you living out and proud, were you talking to your friends about it? What did you decide to do?

HAUGHWOUT: Well, when I was little, like in elementary school, I didn't know that it was a thing, like I didn't even know there was a different thing. When I was in like

kindergarten -- I would say probably, the community that I grew up in was probably -- like my friends were half Christian and half Jewish, and that was always the question around December, was like are you going to celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah, and I'd be like I'm not going to celebrate either, huh, and I thought that made me cool, like that made me special and different, and I suppose it did. But like, I was like, we have a holiday called Ramadan, because it happened to land in December, around there, or in the wintertime anyway, around that time, so I'm like I get to not listen to music or eat for 30 days, but afterwards, there's a party. [laughter]

But yeah, so my friends and my friends' families, were all very accepting. There was never -- it was never even weird, it was never a thing. Like I remember as kids, like my parents would like abridge what Ramadan is for us, so we didn't listen to music for 30 days, that was the thing that, that was our fasting, so to speak. So, I remember being in, I think it was like third grade, and we were watching a movie in class and I like excused myself, I'm like there's -- I think it was like *Sound of Music* or something like that, I'm like "I can't, I can't watch this." And my teacher was like, she felt so bad because she didn't -- she was like, "I didn't know that was part of it." And I'm like, "Oh it's okay." And she's like, "Okay, come," and I just like hung out in the teacher's lounge and like sat on the couch and like ate cookies [laughter] because she felt so bad that she like wanted to be sensitive to our needs, you know, and she's like oh, I didn't even know that was a part of being, you know, part of Ramadan. I didn't even know to tell her, I'm like it's not, my parents just made it up. [laughter]

It was just like that's how we're going to do it because, you know, I wasn't going to fast as a third grader, and they wanted me to do something, you know? So, but yeah, everybody was, was -- I'm really lucky because it could have gone -- now, in retrospect, I see it could have gone a much worse route, you know, and I think it, it was good because people got to know us before they knew we were Muslim, you know like oh, yeah, Steve and Aisha, they're great, like yeah, Aisha is kind of a weird name but

whatever, you know, just like look past it. And then it would come out, like, as like a nonchalant thing, like oh yeah, it's a Muslim holiday or it's like one of my holidays is you know, I'm like, I'll be coming -- I'm going to come in late today because it's a, it's a holiday, I have -- what did I used to say? I don't know -- I remember, I remember we used to say, there was like some phrase, it was like I have prayers, or something like that, you know, and be like, one of my holidays I have to go do. And, and yeah, I think, I think that also goes back to the fact that we don't look like what people think Muslim people look like. So, we did, we got that like first step in of like oh, you get to meet us and know that we're nice, and then this other piece of what should be irrelevant information comes in, as opposed to like oh, the first thing you know about me is my religion. You know? So I think that's -- that was definitely again -- helped, helped us integrate as a community.

As I got older, it really didn't -- it, it was a pretty -- not so bad. I mean there's always like stupid high school people, you know, but I think there's just dumb [00:35:00] boys in high -- in every high school, [laughter] who will say stupid things, and nobody ever said anything to me, like ever threatening or ever, you know, in any way like that. They would be like oh, yeah, Muslim, you're a terrorist, not, none of that, but it was like, it would be like some Muslim joke and be like, hey moron. Is that what you think of me? And they're like oh, I'm sorry, I didn't -- not you, not you, not you. Like, yeah. [laughter] So it, it's that kind of conversation where it's like not directed, but like just a stupid thing, and the more that I, you know, talk, and the more people I meet, then you're like oh, not you, and I'm like no, not, that's not just it's not me, [laughter] you're just wrong. It's not anybody.

So you know, I think that overall, it was not a bad experience in my little suburban Long Island high school. And you know, it -- I think with everything, kind of my own interest in religion, kind of ebbs and flows. So like there wasn't a lot of -- like I wasn't, I wouldn't call myself terribly religious through high school, and then like, and I didn't

even really know much about Muslim -- other Muslims, or being Muslim, or anything like that. Like, if I were to look back on like ninth grade me, it would probably be embarrassing, by how little I knew, because I never went to religious classes. They had stopped before, you know before I was a child, and whatever I knew, you know my parents had passed on to me, but never any kind of formal education. So it was just kind of like stories and what I had picked up from conversation. The prayers were all in Arabic, so it's not a language I understand, so like even if there was a sermon, I wouldn't know what they were saying.

But you know, after 9/11, it was kind of like how can these people have anything in common with me, like how, how is there any similarity here? What, what am I doing wrong if these people say they're the same thing that I am? So that kind of inspired me to actually learn anything about Islam and being Muslim. It was interesting, because like again, it was, it was out of like this, like that can't be me, and then like the more I read I'm like no but that's -- they're not, they're not doing it right. Why are they saying they're Muslim, because everything I'm seeing here does not coincide with what they're doing. So you know, that kind of was like an interesting part of finding out about extremism for one, you know about how you could take one phrase and build a whole ideology around it, but also, you know, kind of reinforced my own beliefs, because I did like what I was reading, you know, like I did. It was, it was good information, it was like good stuff, so.

STRONG: What did you learn and how did you learn? Did you just --

HAUGHWOUT: Google mostly. [laughter] Yeah, yeah, Google mostly. Like, that's, that's, honestly what it boils down to, is like -- I don't really remember what I -- like, the order of things that I looked up, or I mean like I know we owned a Qur'an and I read it.

STRONG: In English?

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: Oh.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And a Bible, and I read the Bible at that time too, most of it anyway. And there was like, I, I really don't remember. Like I remember like, because also, it was college essay time for me, [laughter] so I'm like okay, this is what I'm going to write my college essay about, like me figuring out how to be Muslim, you know, in this very weird and sensitive time. So, I, I don't remember, like part of the, you know, it was research, like school research and personal research, and I don't know what order it came in but whatever it is, a kind of piecemeal together of, you know? And asking my family and being like hey, why do we do it this way or why do we do this or what does that mean, and whenever they didn't know something, then go look it up and kind of figure it out.

I don't know, I don't know that my parents understood how little we knew about the religion until that time, because they had grown up with it as such a part of their, you know childhood, that when we didn't know like -- my brother and I. When we didn't know, like really basic things, there was like oh, yeah, I probably should have told you about that. You know? Not in a bad way, not in a blamey way, but it's like certain things don't come up unless you're living it, you know, unless you're in a situation where you're like teaching a class or going to a class. So it wasn't something that like naturally came up for them.

STRONG: Like what? Could you give me an example?

HAUGHWOUT: Well, like so when we have prayers, we have sataga, which is this like food that we have at the end, afterwards, and the imam will come and he'll, he'll pray, like basically over the food or you know, adjacent to the food, and we always would bring 41 of whatever we brought. So if we were to bring, like if we were to bring something, it had to be like 41 apples or 41 pieces of chocolate, or something like that, to share with the rest of the community.

So I'm like that seems really arbitrary, why 41? And -- or like what is this whole, the whole idea of it about, and that was one of those things that like, that's not something

that every Muslim does by any means, that's like a very Tatar thing that we kind of borrowed from like our Jewish neighbors also, like it's kind of an amalgamation of like when we lived in these Jewish neighborhoods back in the old country and when Williamsburg was largely Jewish as well.

And it's like you know, they're sharing with your community, honestly the 41 is like escaping me right now, but [laughter] it's a theme that keeps coming up because, like when you pass away, I know that your soul hangs out for 41 days, to like do like a victory lap, [laughter] you know like say a farewell tour to everybody. So you have 41 days after you pass, to like say your final goodbyes. So it's a number that, that is significant and keeps coming up. But like -- and then the imam would pray and we would dedicate certain things to be like okay. My dad will be like okay, I'm bringing the apples for my mom, who passed, and we're going to bring this for, for your parents who passed, and this one for that, and so we would bring things like in memory and it would be to share with the community.

And the idea would be that like I think back in the day it would be like everyone can come, and if you didn't have enough food, you'd come and we're praying anyway and you know, it's just share with the community. Now, because there's so few people who come, it's just like we're going to take doggie bags back and you know, have this later. But you know, it's that kind of a, that kind of a thing, like I don't -- I don't even know how to spell sataga, like what, what is this thing that we're doing and I can't find any you know, trace of it anywhere.

But that, that's the kind of thing where it's like separating also, the history of our own congregation that evolved from a minority, that evolved from something else, because it's just its own brand at this point. It's definitely rooted in Islam, obviously, but I think of it as like you know how animals evolve differently if like -- and if there's like an animal on, on an island with no other predators, it evolves differently than an animal

on the mainland. We were like that one little tribe that went somewhere else and we evolved in a really different way, even from -- you know, we're going to go have a trip to Eastern Europe in September, to all these communities, and like I know there's going to be differences, because we're even different from that because we're so Brooklyn-y. [laughter] You know, they're probably not going to have bagels and lox after their, after their meetings, you know? It's, it's very much borrowed from, and it was an interesting educational journey, to figure out what is Tatar, what is Brooklyn-y about us, you know what is, what is our certain little congregation's own mark on it, what is Tatar and what is greater Islam.

Like there's, and also there's so many similarities of like things that we do, that we honor, that everybody does, you know everybody who is Muslim will do. And it's cool to see those things [00:45:00] because those are the times when you say like whoa, every Muslim, every of the millions of people who practice Islam, we're all doing this today, you know we're all doing this whole thing today, and that's, that moving, that's a pretty cool feeling, that you're like part of this, you know celebration that's happening in basically every country in the world.

So as different as we are from other Muslims, we're also, you know, got those similarities. But also there's times when we've been told that we're not Muslim enough because of these differences and these things that we've evolved. There's people who -- I keep hearing this story. I don't remember it because I was too little, but I've heard this story a dozen and a half times, where these gentlemen from, I want to say Saudi Arabia came, and they happened to be in Brooklyn for some state visit thing or other and they came and visited in like full regalia, like full decked out, and they came and they were like basically yelling at our imam and our like family, being like you're doing it all wrong, and we're like no we're not. We're doing it exactly the way we want to do it. And he got -- things got very heated apparently, and it was very frightening I think, because it was like okay, we're not getting -- in, in the elder members' minds, we're not really

being accepted by the, the majority of folks in America, and we're not being accepted by other Muslims, so we're like stuck in between both of them. Really, they were just crazy people and we are being accepted by other Americans, but it was like, it was like one of those things that they always go back to, where they're always like referencing this, this time that they came and it was very, you know jarring, to be told that we're doing our religion the wrong way.

STRONG: Do you remember any details, like what specific things they took issue with?

HAUGHWOUT: I don't. I know one specific thing was that like, I think as you, as you saw, there's a lot of women on our, on our board and our community leaders are -- many of us are women, and that was true even at this time. And they came in and my mom was actually by the door and she had greeted them. I don't know if we were expecting them or not, but in any case, she greeted them and the dude like straight, didn't make eye contact, brushed right past her, and like shook my dad's hand and she like no, no, no, no, no, that's not how we do things here. [laughter] I don't know if she said it in those terms but it was very much like they didn't make eye contact, they didn't face their body toward any woman, and we're like we're going to have a problem with this, [laughter] this isn't going to work for us. And this was like probably in the '90s, early '90s, so I think that's probably at least one of the things, that there was like too much comingling, you know, men and women, but I don't really remember what the ah, what the other things were.

STRONG: What about you? As you grew up, did you have you know visits or relationships with other Muslim communities, and, and what did you see and what did you learn?

HAUGHWOUT: Not so much. I didn't really venture out of here very much. I think one of the only times is I remember we were away on vacation in Florida as a kid, at the end of Ramadan, so we found a mosque nearby to pray, and I think that was the only time in my childhood that I had done that anywhere other than here, and it was, it was different, it was very different. I remember, I remember being like kind of struck by, A, how many people were there, because it was probably hundreds, and, B, because there was so, so many people, the women were in a -- like, we were in the parking lot and the

men were like in the building, and or maybe we were upstairs and the men were downstairs, and we got like speakers and like where are we supposed to look? Like there was just speakers and we're all facing like a wall, like there's nothing to do.

It was, it was again, that cool feeling of like oh, I know the words to this song, that kind of a feeling, being [00:50:00] you know, like okay, I know what to do at this point. But it was very, again, it was very weird, because it was so segregated, and being like oh, this is not how we usually do it at home, you know? But I didn't really check out other mosques until I was an adult, and even that has been not, not as much as I would like to, more out of time restraint than lack of ambition. [laughter] But --

STRONG: Tell me about those experiences as an adult, what did you learn?

HAUGHWOUT: I learned that there is still a lot that I don't know about Islam, that's for sure. And like while there are certain prayers that we -- I do know, there's a lot that are just not in our repertoire, that I think that -- like everybody else was like you know, you follow the motions, you do the thing. It's like when you're -- I've probably been to more -- no, that's not true. I have one hundred percent been to more churches than mosques. [laughter] Because again, I would go with my friends, you know, to their, to their events and things like that, and I didn't have any Muslim friends, so every time there was anything, we would be going there.

But you know, it's the same feeling of like okay, I know this psalm or whatever, you know, and they know when to stand up and sit down and kneel, and turn to your neighbor and hug, and you know all that, that sort of thing, like they know all those things and it was like the motions that I didn't know. Like oh, I thought I, I had a grasp on this but apparently not, there's a lot that I still don't know. So, it also would help knowing Arabic, which I don't. And I don't think, I don't really -- I don't have the brain to grasp languages very easily, that's not one of those things I pick up smoothly, so I don't think that I'm probably going to ever really know Arabic, but I can get -- I can

remember enough to know my -- a couple of standard prayers, you know, that's about it.

STRONG: Talk to me about languages in this community, because I know there's interesting crossroads there as well.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. Hold on, let me get water.

STRONG: Of course.

HAUGHWOUT: Do you want some water?

STRONG: I'm still good, thank you.

HAUGHWOUT: So, languages.

STRONG: Yes.

HAUGHWOUT: There are many of them. There are -- we -- Arabic was never a language that was like spoken as, in, in my memory, at all. Even my grandparents didn't -- were never like fluent or anything. They could read and they could probably write it. When -- I, I can only speak for my family, because I don't know if other community -- other families in the community did the same, but I know that when they came to America there was, with that push to become Americanized, they picked up English pretty quickly and they basically stopped speaking their home languages, even in the house. I know my uncle Sam went to school and he actually had difficulty differentiating between Russian and English, and then he was so embarrassed by that, that my grandparents were like that's it, we're only speaking English from now on, in the house, because like he had mixed something up in like first or second grade, or something like that, and they were like yep, no more, and he was like horrified by it.

So it clearly had a big impact on them. But there's a mix of Russian, Polish, even some Turkic languages, like kind of thrown in there. And then again, because we are who we are, Yiddish for some reason, because [laughter] my, my mom's mom, my nana, spoke probably as many Yiddish words, like peppered in her language, as Russian words. So, I never knew, growing up, what language was what, and I think there are still times

where my parents are like is that Polish or Russian, or something else entirely, because they, they, you know, can't really tell.

I took Russian in college, which was a mistake, because I thought that I would recognize more but I didn't, [laughter] because a lot of what my grandparents spoke was not Russian. I passed with a C, [laughter] I'm proud to say that. But like Tatar is a language in and of itself. It's, it's a dying language now, [00:55:00] from what I hear, but it's, it's a dialect that is all its own, and I suppose that's what my grandparents were speaking, because it is kind of, it does kind of borrow from a lot of other languages, but they, they were very liberal about mixing their languages however they saw fit. If they felt like a word that described something was best in Yiddish, they would use the Yiddish word. If they, you know, if there was a word that described something in Polish, they would use the Polish word. My grandfather was Polish and my grandmother was Russian, and they both spoke English, but they would yell at each other, [laughter] in their own language. So, we picked up a couple of curse words, that was about it.

And, and they, and like I said, they would just kind of mix and match how they saw fit, which makes it really difficult to decipher documents that were handwritten at the time, because there's some things that are in like okay, it's a Cyrillic alphabet, cool, now what? And then, somebody who helped try to transcribe a few things, found that there had been like an outdated, like not ancient but like an antique, I guess, I don't know what the word for it is, like an old version of Turkish script, again, kind of just peppered in there. And they're like these, these characters are from this language and these characters don't exist in any language that I'm familiar with, so we're going to have to keep digging.

And then, just, just to like put the last layer of this confusing cake, there's also things that were transliterated using an English alphabet from Arabic, or a Cyrillic alphabet from Arabic and then try to make it English. I don't even -- it's almost impossible to

figure out who was trying to make something understandable for another person, you know? They were trying to take the Arabic and make it understandable in this Tatar language, by sounding it out. [laughter] So if you only read English, you are completely at a loss for what is trying to happen. You can just kind of look at the characters as sounds and, and try and piece it together, but there's so many layers of like colloquial phrases and transliteration and just deciding to switch into another language arbitrarily, [laughter] that make it really, really difficult, and I could see it being really exciting for a linguist, to try and figure that out. I am not that person. [laughter]

But you know we have, we have a wealth of documents, handwritten pieces, Qur'ans and prayers, and then like liner notes that are in these languages that, that no one really can understand, but they're like personal notes about probab-- I mean one would guess commentary on the text or reminders, or shopping lists, I really couldn't tell you. [laughter] But it's, you know it's all there and it's -- hopefully, at some point, we can kind of get a glimpse into what, what was trying to be conveyed. But, yeah, a lot of languages in here.

STRONG: Yeah. [laughter] Since we're talking about the documents, can you tell me about your personal history with them and your, your evolution of snooping, as you call it.

HAUGHWOUT: [laughter] Yeah, my snooping. Well as a kid, I definitely -- it's such an old building and it was always fun to go into the closets and go around in the office and kind of find nooks and crannies, because there's all these little artifacts from the past hundred years of existing, even if it's just like a cool little bowling trophy or a cool little, you know antique pot, or something like that, ashtrays, we've got cool ashtrays in the way back, you know? So that would always be kind of my thing, because when my parents were on the board, sometimes they would schlep us along and we'd kind of have to just like occupy ourselves for a couple of hours, or you know if they were hanging out with their friends, you know, we would just kind of like hang out.

But I always, I -- that was always like a fun thing for me to do, is just kind of treasure hunt and that evolved when I became the caretaker, because then, I always felt like I was kind of doing something [01:00:00] a little bit naughty as a kid doing it, like I shouldn't be in here, but I'm going to like you know, poke around just a little longer. But as a caretaker and as an adult, I had free rein. It was my job now, to go into the closets and clean them, and go in and organize and sort, and that was a very -- that was kind of fun and exciting for me, but also a little bit horrifying, because then we would [laughter] go into these closets and find really important documents and really fascinating books and things like that, in the weirdest places, like the back, you know, supply closets, under sinks, and in, in a filing cabinet that had hammers in it, there was also like someone's grandmother's passport, you know like that kind of, that kind of level of like who, why did -- why, why is this here?

But it was, it was always really fun to, to do that, and once we kind of had a rhyme and a reason for sorting things and like putting things in the library, such as it is, you know our little bookshelf -- bookshelves -- you know putting those things together that made sense and taking out the things that didn't make sense. Or things that were repetitive or you know, not special, maybe it was like a mailing, you know like a calendar from 1997 that was like with the handwritten pieces, again, letters home from, from the old country. So kind of going, having -- taking the time to go through all of these things, we were able to find a lot of really interesting stories from past members and really interesting pieces of our own history that could have potentially been forgotten or lost. And we've gotten a lot of mail in the past -- I would probably -- you know, I don't know how long it's been going on but certainly since I've been here, we've gotten a couple of packages of people who have passed on, who were members or former members of the, of the society, who were no longer religious or their families weren't, weren't Muslim, and but they did have the forethought to mail us things that looked important. So, a couple of times now, we've gotten our, like handwritten Qur'ans or just the family's Qur'an back, and the family was like this isn't significant to us but you might want it,

you might want it for whatever, for your records. And it's always appreciated, because they're sending things back that are a part of our history and if they're not going to value it or if they don't know what it is or if they don't know why it's important, it's really lovely that, that they're sharing that back with us.

Sometimes it's like passports or prayers. Or like I know there was like a landlord, maybe last year, two years ago, who I think found our address on an envelope and you know, when her tenant, who was the member, passed away, he didn't have any next of kin and she sent the things along and it was like these, these look important and like if they're not, feel free. She's like I had to throw things out but you know, please take these and -- and you know it was, it was our blue book, that book that we publish, his copy of it. And a couple of other religious texts. It was, it was nice to like have those things come back and they can live in our little archive such as it is. But yeah, I feel like there was more that I was going to say about that.

STRONG: Well tell me, when you say there were little bits of history that might have been forgotten if you hadn't found these things, can you give me an example of something you learned and were able to share?

HAUGHWOUT: I think among the like old phone books and receipts that were no longer relevant, I think it was -- was it the deed to the building or the deed to the cemetery? There was something that was really quite significant, that was kind of shuffled in with other things, and that was, that was part of like one of those oh my goodness moments, like what, what happened here, why, why did we let it get to this point? But old, old newsletters, we had copies of old newsletters that were sent out in the probably '70s or '50s, for a couple of like random, [01:05:00] because we've never really had a consistent run of newsletters. Part of that is on me now, because I should be the one sending them. But you know, we, we'll kind of have a start and stop a couple of times, so we'll get a couple from the '50s and then we'll get a couple more in the '70s and then like in 1992, and then like it will be quiet for a while, you know.

So we'll have, we'll have little things like that. And again, it's just like okay, we'll put it in the -- this little folder or this file and keep it for when we have, we can -- we have a time to put everything together, which is nice because then like the 100th anniversary, the 110th, which we just had, are nice little deadlines for us to [laughter] put these things together and really look at what we have and look at our history. So it's, it's a nice way to organize these things.

STRONG: Tell me how you became the caretaker, tell me that story.

HAUGHWOUT: Well, I was on the board. Should I got back to joining the board, because that happened first.

STRONG: Yeah, go -- yes, go back even to, even to like college years.

HAUGHWOUT: Okay.

STRONG: Because you had sort of a drifting, it sounds like, in high school, and then kind of came back in your early career, that you were involved.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: So tell me all about that.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. Well, when I was working on my masters, I was working part-time and going to school part-time. I had a very wacky schedule to say the least. But I -- we came here for some holiday or other, I forget what it was, and this is probably from one of my snooping things, that I had found these paintings, some were hung and some were kind of shuffled about. They were of the -- some great mosques, you know the Hagia Sophia and other really beautiful, like architectural marvel, and it was like a shame because they were in these like really crummy frames that were falling apart and broken, and they were getting all tinted, or the ones that were hung were getting all tinted and you know, certainly nothing archival, it was all like handmade janky frames put together.

So as the art student that I was, I'm like oh, I would love to try and you know, put these -- show a little more love for these and put them in a nice frame, and I bet you they would look really nice and cleaned up, and put them behind archival glass so they can

at least stop, like mitigate the damage that's being done to them. I know that from a couple of them that were kind of falling out of the frame. A lot of them were dated from 1929 and had, I think it was a great uncle's name? Someone who's like distantly related to me, had painted at least one or two of them. So it was kind of like, that was a cool thing, you know, an interesting little tie, like oh, this has been hanging on this wall my whole life and I didn't even know that you painted it.

So, I guess the next board meeting or you know, a couple months later, I put a proposal together to ask the board, to say like I'd really like to spruce these up and re-hang them and get them framed from a nice professional, can the board give me some money to do that, because I'm a poor college student, [laughter] and, and they were enthusiastic about it. I think they were really excited that I was excited about it. And I was young, and I'm like oh, a young person is excited about something that has to do with the mosque, great, go for it. So they gave me, you know, I don't even remember how much it was, whatever I asked for, I had a proposal.

So, I put it together, I put probably 12 pieces together and it was really nice, because it did like really brighten up the upstairs room, because we hung them and they were like -- everybody noticed them and everybody was like oh, yeah, because you, you kind of forget that they're there. This building, this room, the décor has literally not changed at all, at all, [laughter] for the past probably 60 years, and if you were to be here, you could very easily imagine this place looking almost exactly the same 60 years ago. So you kind of, every -- you kind of become blind to the details [01:10:00] when it looks the same as it always has, so reframing that, I think brought attention to them that people just hadn't paid before, or hadn't paid in decades. So, you know, it exalted them and it was very -- it was really nice to see, it was nice to see that people were excited about it.

And then that's when -- once that was, that project was over, that's when the board kind of came to me and was like hey, why don't you join the board, we have this opening for

a recording secretary. And I'm like sure, why not, like I'm not doing -- like I have the time, I have the energy, I can do it. So I started as the recording secretary and then, in, I think in -- I'm not sure, I want to say two years ago, three? No. I've been in the house three years, so about four years ago, the president of the society, Alan Bonowitz passed away and Jack, who is now the president, he was the vice president, he became the president, and so they needed a vice president, so I was still on the board and I was still active, so I took on that role when Jack stepped up to be the president.

Alan was also the caretaker of the building, so they were looking for that as well. And my husband and I are pretty handy people, so I'm like we could do it. There was a little bit of -- I mean it was a difficult transition because Alan had been elderly, and so a lot of the physical tasks of taking care of a hundred-plus-year-old building, had become too, you know, had become understandably strenuous. So when we came in, there was initially a lot of work to be done, a lot of cleaning and sorting and fixing and replacing, and basically everything, to get it back to a clean and functioning place. It's still kind of an ongoing process.

STRONG: Yeah. Just for the record, it's not just this building, which is the mosque itself.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: It's also the building next door, which, which is your home now.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: So tell me about both of those.

HAUGHWOUT: The caretaker's house, it's, it's lovely, it's a wonderful house. The community purchased that house, I want to say about ten years after this building, so they knew -- I don't know what their intentions were with it initially, but I did find the paper. I think they, they bought it for like \$7,000 or something like that, it was some crazy thing, you know. It was like -- or maybe they took out a loan for \$7,000, maybe that's what it was, but either way, it was like a mind-blowingly low amount of money. I'm sure then it was like a huge burden but it's just funny, to see that number on the piece of paper. [laughter] But so yeah, so traditionally, the person who takes care of the,

the mosque, lives next door, and then this way we're always on call to do anything that is required and kind of keep an eye on it, and that continues, you know, to today.

Even though there are fewer events, but like whenever there's any kind of event or anything like that, we're always the first ones here, the last ones out. And we're responsible for all of the grounds keeping that there is to do here. So yeah. I, I love living here, it's like I said, it's always been a very peaceful kind of a building and kind of a peaceful area, and I think that being here helps us like chip away at all the things that need to be done for a hundred some odd year old building, you know, because it's never, it's never over. It's never like okay, we're done fixing, you know, it's always like okay, now that's done, okay cool. Now we can start working on the toilets. Okay, now that's done, okay now we can start fixing the floorboards. Okay now that's done, now let's look at the heating.

You know and it's, it's an ongoing, always ongoing and hopefully improving, because now that we've kind of fixed everything, now we're able to look at [01:15:00] what can we improve to make it like a more welcoming space. You know, we would like there to be more events here, we'd like there to be more weddings here, and like use it for celebrations, but you know, it's not quite there yet. We need a new heating system, we need better lighting. These are things that we're just trying to keep up with the time really.

STRONG: So, when you, when you started being the caretaker, you're at a point in your life, you're about to have your first kid.

HAUGHWOUT: He was -- he had just -- when we moved in, he was four months old.

STRONG: Okay.

HAUGHWOUT: So we had a newborn. [laughter]

STRONG: And the house was in what state and what was the work there?

HAUGHWOUT: Not the state that you can bring a four month old in.

STRONG: Okay, tell me more. [laughter]

HAUGHWOUT: So, it was like I said, and I don't want to speak ill of the dead obviously, they did -- Alan dedicated many, many decades of his life to service to the mosque and I would never want to take away from that because that's like his lasting impression is he had a wonderful impact on the community. That being said, the house did, did fall into quite a bit of disarray and it -- the smell, [laughter] there was, there was a lot of, there was a lot of issues. So after his, his wife had, had moved in with their children, the house was, was really left in kind of a rough state. So it took another probably two months of, for my husband, full-time work, and for me, like nights and weekends, of full-time taking stuff out. And like everybody we know in our whole family, both sides of our family, had come in to like help take out rug and all this flooring, and probably five dozen dishes that were just left in there, and, and just a lot of, a lot of mess. It was a lot to, to do. I would say probably it took at least six weeks before I felt comfortable bringing the baby in, because of all the dust and asbestos and mold and everything that was going on.

So it was, it was a big rehab. It's -- I wouldn't say it was like temporary housing, but the caretaker -- like Alan and his wife had been there for the longest, I think that any caretaker had been in this position. So generally, they'll -- the people who are the caretakers will live there for a couple of years and then move on, you know a couple of years and then move on. So, it's been in so many people's hands that it's, it's -- no one, I think felt like it was their forever home, so it was being treated as such. And then we would find these like horrible decisions that people would make, design decisions. [laughter] Like there's, I know there's a skylight in the hallways upstairs that's been painted over. It was stained glass at one point.

STRONG: Oh.

HAUGHWOUT: [laughter] And it's like why would you do that? Why would you do that? And they tarred over the roof, so right over the glass. So I'm like, you didn't even give me a chance, I could have done something with this, but there's tar on the other side of this now so it's just there forever. And other like structural damage things that were,

were like -- you know, again my husband, he's handy. He's not like a professional carpenter by any stretch, but he would look at these things and be like what happened here, who did this to you? [laughter] You know? And like there's a, there's -- even now, we're like okay, we want to fix this lighting unit, we're like okay, do we really want to look at what kind of wires are in there though, or do you just live with this until it dies, [laughter] because there was like a mix of modern wires with like, what's it called the, the tube, like the old fabric wires and you be like oh God, what do I even do with that. And there's -- I mean again, it's like fun snooping that I would get to do in the house, that I would -- the same thing I would get to do over here.

In the basement over there, there's like [01:20:00] all of these like crazy weird treasures, like -- well first parking signs from -- I think I've got six different versions of the No Parking sign from the street, [laughter] you know, because you can't park in front of the mosque doors, in case there's an event or something like that. So I think I've got like six different versions of that sign, found in the basement somewhere, which is just like oh, that's a fun, New York-y bit of history, that's cool. There's some pieces -- there was a -- it's over here now, but it was like a thing that would go on top of a flagpole, like a crescent -- it was a really heavy crescent moon and star.

I don't even know what metal it was, but it was like something extraordinarily heavy, and we, we dragged it back over here, but it was, it clearly was like the top of a, of a flagpole. There was a machete for some reason, there was -- when we were doing the kitchen, there was a full on rat skeleton, like the full, like science class rat skeleton. Yeah, I'll have to show you pictures of that. [laughter] Like perfectly preserved too, like it didn't die in a struggle. It had laid down to die after living a good long life and it was not disrupted for, I don't even know, how long does it take for a whole corpse to decompose? I don't even know, but that's how long it had stayed there. Because it was just skeleton. Yeah, horrifying, but you know.

STRONG: And these things appeal to your snooping sensibilities.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. [laughter] Exactly. Well that one less so because that one, [laughter] I let my brother in-law handle that one. But it was one of those just like -- every -- when we were doing the house, every couple of days or every couple of hours sometimes, one of us would call out, "Babe, come look!" I'd be like do I want to? Like no, no, no, come here, come here, come here, come here. One really cool one was that when we were doing the living room, my -- we pulled up the floor, because we were hoping for hardwood but we did not find it. So we pulled up, there's carpet on top of laminate, I think, on top of more laminate, and once we finally got to the board, there was, pasted to the original flooring, was the Dodgers win the World Series, front page cover of the newspaper, of the *Brooklyn Star*. And it was like very -- like I wanted to, I wanted to like peel it up or something, but there was nothing we could do to like make it not be part of the floor because it had been so permanently there for so many decades.

So we took good pictures of it at least, but we weren't able to save that. But that was like, that was a very cool thing. I forgot the date but that was one of those things where we pulled up and pasted -- and it looked like it was like pasted over something, like they happened to just use that paper, you know it just happened to be this historic, [laughter] you know, newspaper cover, because it was like haphazardly, like diagonally kind of slapped on there. But it was like yep, the Brooklyn Dodgers won the World Series. [laughter]

STRONG: That is a treasure.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: So, tell me more about your role as VP now and how it's different from maybe what that role would have been in the past and how you've sort of made it your own.

HAUGHWOUT: Well I think that being the caretaker and the vice president together -- and like I'm here the most -- also has me being the one who corresponds to people who have inquiries the most. So people who will call, I'm checking the machine, but also like I responded, when I first got on the board, or when I first became the caretaker? No, it was when I first joined the board, I was looking for pictures of the building for

some reason, for something or other, online, and I saw somebody posted a picture from the blog, the “Islamicana” and she had posted this article of like, does anybody know anything about this place, it’s like such a mystery, it’s been here forever. She’s like, I just want to know more about it.

And I commented on the blog post and it wasn’t -- like, I had commented like two years after she had posted it initially, or something, something like that, and I’m like, “I do, email me, come find me,” and I like put my email address in the, in the comments sections. And I said, [01:25:00] I’m like yeah, I would love to talk to you, I’m like I’m on the board and you know, come visit. You know? And from that was like I really think that that was like the first time that anyone had ever publicly, online, said anything about the mosque, because I’ve gotten so many inquiries of like oh, hey, are you still part of this congregation, because I see your email address on the Islamicana. I’m like yeah, that’s me, yeah, we’re still here, come on over. You know so journalists and just interested people, or people who knew that their parents or grandparents had some kind of history to this organization, have all reached out to say, you know like oh, I saw your email address on this thing.

So, I kind of became the default history person, the history -- you know historian, of the mosque, because I’m the one who’s answering the emails and answering the inquiries and the phone calls, and often the one who’s explaining what we are and what we do. And I think it, it started because when I was in college, I just had that kind of time, you know I could answer them, but now, it’s just like I’m kind of becoming the go to person to reach out to if you have a question about our history or anything, anything that is going on here because I’m just the one that’s here all the time. [laughter] I’m the one keeping an eye on the email inbox. So, but it’s something that I enjoy doing, it’s something that like, I know I can contribute in this way and I have the patience to do it, so that’s the main -- that’s the key ingredient.

STRONG: And that's, that's very different from what we were talking about before, with this kind of insular nature, and you're just kind of going out and doing it on your own. Have you gotten any kind of weird comments from the board about educating the public or conducting outreach? What are their thoughts at this point?

HAUGHWOUT: Yes, but not in a terribly negative way. So yes, there's definitely been some members who are like what are you doing, don't, don't tell anybody where we are -- particularly elderly members. And then there's inevitably some people who are like but then they'll be able to find you on Google, and I'm like, um, they already can. And like I think that when we showed them what Google Maps was, probably five years ago, and like that we're labeled, and we were labeled as, we were still labeled as the American Mohammedan Society, because that's what our name was decades ago, and like nobody had claimed the business. I did, I've done that since then. But they're like, they're like, "They have pictures of our building!" I'm like, "They have pictures of every building, like in the, in the planet, on the whole planet." And that was a very -- that was a bit of an awakening of like the Internet is not a -- I mean, yes, it's a scary, horrible place, [laughter] but it doesn't have to be. It can be used for good too. So I think that that was, it's -- they're slowly coming around to understand that it's a tool that we can use to our favor, including now, we have a website, which is amazing. It only took us until 2018. [laughter]

STRONG: Tell me about your website.

HAUGHWOUT: My husband made it, so definitely not like a professional programmer or anything like that, but it's, it's modest. We're still tinkering with it, just you know a calendar and our, like a history, and links to the articles that we've been in, which is literally dozens at this point, because people are actually interested in the history of Muslims in America, which we are it. [laughter] We are actually, you know, we're at least a large part of it anyway, a piece of it, let's say that, we're a piece of the history of Muslims in America. And you know, there's probably, yeah, as I've said, there's probably a dozen articles that mention us by name and like talk about our significance, and, and I want to share that and history, in things that like the Brooklyn Historical

Society has shown us, that we didn't even know about our own history, about the history of the building and about the history of you know, the noise complaints [laughter] from before it was a mosque.

[01:30:00] You know, it's a funny little tidbit that I think people really like, and I think that as there's an interest, a growing interest in people's ancestry and family history and things like that, and people want to find out more about where their family comes from, we're going to be even more of a resource for that, because we do have records of every member who has ever been a part of our society since 1907, you know, pretty much, which is you know, amazing, that we've been able to keep that sort of thing. Not that that would be on the website, but they would be able to find us through that, you know? Like we're not going to publish every birth certificate, marriage certificate or anything like that, but we will be able to say like yes, we've been here since this date, and if you think that you had a Muslim, or a Tatar ancestor come through Brooklyn, they probably were here at some point. You know, like we probably knew them, so come reach out, come, come visit. Come donate.

STRONG: [laughter] A new heating system, hint, hint.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, yeah, speaking of, [laughter] it kicks on right then, that's perfect.

STRONG: Yeah. Well this reminds me, I actually copied your email that you sent, saying that you wanted to say a few words about like the future and you know, how old this community is, your relationship in that line of history. Whatever you would like to say would be great. I've got it here if you want to --

HAUGHWOUT: What did I say?

STRONG: -- freshen up on it. But I mean, not that you need to read it word for word, I have the email for posterity.

HAUGHWOUT: Oh, yes.

STRONG: But that general idea, you said it was important for you to share.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. And this is something that kind of only dawned on me recently, is that I, I joined, in my early twenties, and I know a lot of the elderly members joined

around the same time, because that's kind of like what you did, you know it was expected.

STRONG: In their early twenties you mean, their early twenties.

HAUGHWOUT: Their early twenties, not the early -- yes. So, it was kind of just, you know, expected that you take on these roles. And thinking of like my aunt Rose, who came on, I want to say in the '40s, you know and she's -- well, I won't name her -- she may not want her age to be known, but let's say she's well up there. [laughter]

STRONG: She was here in the '40s, that says plenty.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, exactly, and she's still on the board, she's still an active member of the board, God bless her, and if -- I, I want to be able to plan and, and proceed in such a way that they did back in those days, where they had the, the long game in mind, where they weren't just planning on the next six months or five years, they were planning on 2018, which is probably a year they couldn't even really comprehend. And I kind of put that in perspective for myself, said okay, yeah, I also joined the board in my, my late twenties, and if I'm going to stay here for like aunt Rose years, that means I'm staying here until 2077, and that's an absurd thing to think about, but it's a really healthy exercise, because it gets you out of that frame of just planning for right now and thinking about like what are my grandkids going to get out of this place, you know what, what, does a community 50 years from now, need from a mosque, or from a historic structure, from a historic cultural center.

Like thinking of it in those terms is, is very humbling and I think that that's probably -- that may be what they thought at the time, you know like they, they definitely had a long-term view in mind, because when they purchased the building, they also purchased acres and acres of land in a cemetery in Queens. Well, two cemeteries, but a huge parcel of land in Queens that I don't even -- I don't even know the number of how many graves it could fit. I don't know if they knew at the time, how many graves it would fit, but they were planning for hundreds of people to be part of this community

and then ultimately, you know pass away part of this community and all go to the same place.

So like that forethought is astounding, and I want to be able to live up to that and like I want to be able to keep that tradition going, where something I do now could possibly [01:35:00] impact somebody 70 years from now, which is again, like a crazy thing to wrap your head around. But if, if you know, God grants us the ability to stay open through the next couple of years, if not decades, then I want to be making the right decisions for the direction of you know, where this whole congregation is going and what it's going to be used for. So, yeah.

STRONG: And at some point, you know, you, your generation, gets to decide. It's wonderful that the older generations are still so involved but what do you think will happen, what do you think will be different?

HAUGHWOUT: Well, we need more of the younger generation, aside from myself, because I'm, I'm it, I'm the only one. So I think bringing -- there's -- there is a lot of interest, not necessarily in physically coming here every month for a board meeting, but like in the Tatar community globally, like Facebook is an amazing tool, because like I'm part of this youth Tatar group of North America and you know, like there's -- it's good to see that there's momentum elsewhere throughout the country and, you know in the, in Russia, Belarus, and Lithuania as well, of the younger generation, my generation, and hopefully even younger generation, the generation that we're having. [laughter]

But like it's, it's good to see it, but I, I -- we've got to figure out how to like leverage that and make it be part of the community and how it can help us in a literal way, not just like an oh, that's interesting, like oh, you have a mosque in Brooklyn, cool, you know, from across the country. But you know, figuring out how to make that part of sustaining this place. I don't know how yet but I think that going in a direction where we are a cultural center, because even, even without the religious aspect, or if you downplay the religious aspect, people are interested in the history. I'm religious but I'm

not picky about what people choose to use this place for. You know like that's what I would get, that's what I get out of it, and that's what my family gets out of it, but if somebody who doesn't identify as being Muslim any more, wants to like come and visit and see the history, or come to a cultural event, a cooking class or whatever kind of celebration we have, that's just as valid, you know? I'm, I'm happy just to have them here.

STRONG: Tell me a little bit about the, the religious aspect at this point, you know how are, how are services, who's the imam, how are practices evolving, anything like that.

HAUGHWOUT: Well like I said, it's definitely dwindling for religious services, and I think that that's part of an overall trend of like people not having religion be as big a part of their life as it was 50 years ago. Our imam is a wonderful guy named Imam Ahmet [Yuceturk]. I forget his last name. His -- his day job is actually he's the imam at Terminal 4 at JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport], the international, you know flights, at JFK. So that's what his like day gig is, and then when we have services or a funeral or anything else like that, he'll come out to us. He's not Tatar but he's very much adopted our ways, or at least is very good-natured about doing things the way that we've been doing them.

He's very respectful about kind of like what we talked about before, where somebody might come in and say you're doing it wrong, he's much more of like a student of like oh, this is how you do it, that's really interesting, okay. We do it this way but this is your mosque, so I'm going to do it that way. You know, so he's very flexible and very understanding and respectful of the ways that we've grown to do things. And he, he does he -- he'll like, he -- I enjoy his sermons quite a bit, because also he does them in English and in Arabic, where, whereas I know a lot of people won't, just won't do it in English, and it's like oh, you should just understand Arabic. Like, so, [01:40:00] you know that's another, another thing where it's like refreshing and, and really nice, but again, there's not that many people here to hear it, so again, bringing, trying to bring more people around. What was the other part of the question?

STRONG: I think you got all of it.

HAUGHWOUT: Okay.

STRONG: The follow-up was going to be, I'm curious about your, your family, because you mentioned marriage within the community is no longer mandatory. How did you meet your husband, what faith is he, how do you guys handle that with your kids?

HAUGHWOUT: We met in college. He is without religion, adamantly so, [laughter] but good-natured about it you know. We agreed to raise the kids Muslim and he will just give them alternatives should they, should they seek them. And I was -- I mean I was never like pushed into religion, like I know some people are. Like we didn't, like I said, we didn't have classes, we didn't have, you know, any kind of compulsory education about it. I kind of found my way, my own way here, and I'm not -- I don't feel like I was pressured into doing it. So, if they feel like they want to do something else, I wouldn't be, you know devastated by it, but I think just being part of the - like, they're, they're part of the building at this point, because at least Dexter, the older one, you know, we moved here when he was four months old, so he's basically at every meeting and he's basically at every -- he's literally at every service. So they've you know, watched him grow and watched -- he, he has it as part of his regular life, you know as part of his routine, and if there were classes, I would like to enroll him, I would like to have him to have that, what I didn't have, but again it's, it's not something that I would push on him or anybody. [laughter]

And I know other members of my family who are not -- who have either completely walked away and said like, you know, this isn't for me, and I would never hold that against them. Maybe they think it's weird, how much I've gone into it, I don't know, but it's you know, it's not -- like I said, it's not something that was ever so forced that it like became a weird rebellion or anything like that because it wasn't. It just wasn't an issue.

STRONG: How do you do your own holidays and unique family things at home? Are they like when you were a kid, do you still have a birthday bush?

HAUGHWOUT: Oh yeah, the birthday bush. Yes. [laughter]

STRONG: What, what -- how do you make it your own?

HAUGHWOUT: So when we were little, my birthday is Christmas Eve and my parents did -- and my brother's birthday is [date redacted for privacy]. And my parents, I think felt a little bad that we didn't have, you know, a December holiday to celebrate Christmas cheer, so we would always get a birthday bush and decorate it. There's really, like inexplicably, Santa would come and probably give us a present or two, but that --

STRONG: Birthday presents.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, exactly, a birthday present. He's just a nice guy like that. [laughter] But it was a very, you know, it was like a, a cultural thing, and I think -- I don't -- I think that my grandparents did that too. I really think that my grandparents got Christmas decorations. I know they did. They had Christmas decorations, and like got Christmas trees, because again it was like American. It wasn't even like a Christian thing, because they wouldn't participate in Christian things, they wouldn't actively -- you know, avoid the things.

Like my mom wasn't allowed to be in Girl Scouts because it was too Christian, but they got a Christmas tree because that was American, that's what their perception was anyway. So now, yes, we still do that, we still, we, we -- my husband's family is not particularly Christian, but there's a hist-- hmm, I guess they were a couple of generations ago, they were Christian, so there's like a tradition of like you know, Christmas dinner, Christmas Eve dinner, that we'll still do, and it's not -- [01:45:00] I think that his family, my in-laws, have been again, really loving and accepting of like the, the grandkids being raised Muslim and not being weird about that, because they -- I'm lucky. They don't really have strong feelings on religion, so it wasn't a fight. [laughter] I know that's a really sticky situation in a lot of families, but they were kind of just like oh, okay, yeah that makes sense. [laughter]

But yeah, I mean we kind of -- we don't -- we have -- we kind of downplay. I don't think there's anything that's hugely like non-negotiable holiday, you know, anything that's

crazy like that, so I think we're, we're kind of lucky about things like that. But yeah, they've been good about it and we'll see, kind of how, as the kids get older, see what their classmates -- I'm curious to see what their classmates' view of their religion is, if anything, you know. Growing up in the city is going to be, you're going to meet Muslim kids, that's -- you know it's not like -- it's not going to be an anomaly I don't think. So we'll see how, we'll see how, how that goes.

STRONG: And I guess they're still pretty young, but like fasting, prayer, Qur'anic studies, anything like that in their future?

HAUGHWOUT: I don't know. I mean like I, I observe Ramadan to a point, like I always will make -- like we -- okay, backing up a second.

STRONG: Okay.

HAUGHWOUT: There's not so much a taboo about drinking in Tatar culture as there is in other Islam, you know, in other cultures of Islam, because Russians like vodka, I'm just going to say it. [laughter] So you know, okay, so that's, that's again, a cultural difference. And even like the most religious people that I know, like in my family, my grandparents were like the high bar of you know, being religious, drank regularly, you know. So it's not something that like we've ever even been made to feel bad about. You know like we would never drink here in the mosque, we would never drink on a holiday, because that's like a respectful line, but also, it's never been an expectation that we wouldn't drink ever.

So that being said, for Ramadan, I don't drink or you know, try and do everything good, like extra, be extra good, you know giving alms and doing all that stuff, and I would want to pass on that to my kids. And the idea that what I get out of it now, as an adult, is like I cannot drink for 30 days and I can do all these things, and that will show me that I can be a better person the rest of the time. You know, like if I can be this good now, why aren't I this good six months from now, or you know, I'm stronger than my vices, I'm stronger than my inclinations or my habits, you know, so that's kind of the takeaway from it.

And then also there's of course, the aspect of see how people who are less fortunate live, which I know is a -- it's a big part of the, the holiday in general. But like fasting is very unhealthy and I've gotten sick the last two, three times that I've tried. I've gotten like terribly sick from trying to, to do it, so I stopped doing that.

STRONG: Certainly this year it would be --

HAUGHWOUT: Yes. Yeah, certainly. So, yeah, nursing and fasting don't work together, so. But like I did -- I think my longest stretch was senior year of high school, I went two weeks and then I like collapsed. Then the last time I tried, I think it was the next year or two years after that, and like I was just racked with migraines and I'm like this, this is not the way a body should work. God bless you if you can do it, but this is not the way my body functions, so I'm going to stop now. But withholding other, withholding other things can -- there are other ways to keep yourself humble without fasting, I think, and to check yourself and remember that you are privileged [01:50:00] and you should share your -- what you have.

So, as long as you can keep that in mind, then I think you're doing Ramadan okay, and that's what I would want to pass on to my kids, the sentiment of it, not necessarily -- we won't all get to it the same route, but that's the end game.

STRONG: [laughter] I just, for the record, I realized, whoever listens to this won't be able to see us. We are both eight months pregnant. [laughter]

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: Enjoying cookies in the kitchen of this beautiful mosque, which does indeed look like something out of the '30s, I would say.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: And you know, you've taken incredibly good care of this space, it really looks in beautiful shape.

HAUGHWOUT: Thank you.

STRONG: But it does remind me of walking into my, my grandmother's --

HAUGHWOUT: That's always what I say, it looks like someone's grandmother's like basement, or someone's grandmother's house.

STRONG: Yes.

HAUGHWOUT: That's very much, that's the, that's the vibe we're going for here. [laughter]

STRONG: To, to have preserved that, I think is really wonderful. So, I guess as we come to a close of this interview, is there anything that I, that I should have asked you? I know there's a lot of details we skipped over. I'll just take a look at my notes, while you were thinking.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, please. Yeah, please.

STRONG: In case there's anything major. But you know, has anything come to mind while we were talking, that you would really like to share, that maybe we didn't even talk about over the phone a few days ago.

HAUGHWOUT: No, I don't think so. I think we talked, we covered a lot of ground.

STRONG: We covered a lot of ground. [laughter] You were very thorough today.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah. I don't know, I think sitting, sitting in here, my brain automatically goes to like a to do list.

STRONG: So you have things to do.

HAUGHWOUT: Well, no it's like, like okay, what do we -- what do we need to do in the kitchen, like okay, we need to fix the drop ceiling, we need to fix the fluorescent lighting, we need to take down the wallpaper, which is peeling, and, and we need a new coat of paint back here.

STRONG: I would miss the wallpaper.

HAUGHWOUT: Well you know what, the wallpaper actually hasn't even been here my whole life, because I remember it used to be green in here. So this, this is probably only 30 year-old wallpaper. [laughter]

STRONG: No need to get sentimental about it.

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah, yeah. Everything else, everything else is yeah. But --

STRONG: What's the to-do list for the prayer space upstairs, which is again, a beautiful green space, lush carpet, and then the, the paintings of, I guess former students, that you restored, up on the walls. But what, what's the future of that space?

HAUGHWOUT: The, the main, the main ticket item is heat, air conditioning, because the, the heating that we have right now, I call them the fire breathers. They are these big gas, fire powered heaters, with a fan, which are scary and loud, and we can't even keep them on in the winter because you can't hear the imam over how loud they are. So you either freeze or you can't hear, so that doesn't make the space very functional any longer. And then it's the opposite problem in the summer, where we have the giant fan from 1934, literally, where it's so loud -- there's no air conditioning -- so it's so loud that you have to turn the fan off and keep the doors open, but if you go on too long then you're either sweating or freezing. [laughter]

And that's not good for, you know, we're trying to archive things and keep things -- you know, keep the integrity of the, the building. When you're drastically changing the temperature every single year, things are going to get a little wonky. So, some kind of temperature control throughout. There's no heating or air conditioning in the office, there's no heating or air conditioning in the back room over here, where the ladies room is. It's just space heaters and hopes and dreams. You know, it's like -- so that's something that has been a conversation for literally my whole life, because I remember this conversation happening when my parents were on the board, before they quit because it was too frustrating, to get anything through, that it's such a big expense that no one can ever justify it, but we're just running out of money.

We're not bringing in the amount of money that we need to sustain forever, so it's, it's getting harder to justify a huge purchase, a huge investment, when you're like watching that, that number kind of go down and down and down. But then we won't sustain if we can't have modern -- [01:55:00] some degree of modernization to the building. No one is going to use the space for anything if it's so uncomfortable that

you can't sit in here for any period of time, unless it's like spring or fall and it happens to be nice out, like it is today, you know? It's, it's a good temperature, so we're not you know, terribly uncomfortable in here. But like, we have a coat rack of shawls because that's the solution that, that was -- that we came up with. "Oh, is it too cold for you, here put more -- we're not going to fix the heat, put a shawl on." [laughter] You know?

Like, so, we're just trying to -- every year is a struggle to try to convince the board that this is necessary for our survival. And I think we're getting -- I think we're getting closer, I hope we're getting closer, showing them all the things that we can do, that we can offer other people if we were to make the space a little more comfortable, I think is helpful. We've had a couple of people, film crews, use the building for holding areas. Did you ever see that? It was like they film on this block all the time, like people, TV shows, *Blue Bloods*, and like all these NBC shows. We'll get random calls every couple of months, that were like hey, we want to use your building because we're shooting down the block, can we use your building for catering. I'm like yep, yep you can, come on in.

STRONG: Funding, thank you.

HAUGHWOUT: Exactly. [laughter] So we've done, we've done that twice before, and a couple -- we've had more inquiries but they haven't -- it hasn't worked out. But like they filmed *Elementary* across the street, that like Sherlock Holmes show, and it worked out because again, it was like in spring and people could come in here and chill. But I'm like imagine if like it was the wintertime, they'd go -- they keep going to Grace Church a couple of blocks away. I'm like we're so much bigger than Grace Church, we can hold so many more people. If we only had heat, they would want to be here. [laughter] You know? So, it's, I think seeing that is like an, oh, yes, this is like an actual thing that can show results. It was helpful, so hopefully. And then there's like a whole grant road that we're all afraid to go down because it's so much work.

STRONG: Yeah.

HAUGHWOUT: And so scary. But I think that's probably going to be another one of those things where it's just like suck it up and figure it -- find somebody who can help us write a grant for this, because aside from just the initial installation and everything, like a lot of plumbers don't even want to touch historic buildings. Like a lot of people don't -- it's like too big of a job almost. They're like, you definitely have asbestos and I don't want to deal with that. You definitely have structural issues. Not really but you know, like there's going to be something and they don't want to deal with it, and I'm like there's got to be somebody who does this, somewhere in Brooklyn.

STRONG: Yeah.

HAUGHWOUT: And there are. They're just going to charge you your whole, your whole -- all the money that you have. So, that's the, that's the, that's the next big thing that we're working on and have been working on for a couple of decades now.

STRONG: Your parents quit the board because it was too frustrating?

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: What's that story?

HAUGHWOUT: [laughter] Well, they were on the board for, I don't know how many years -- a couple of years, when I was little, but they kind of came up against that wall of the older generation saying like no, we shouldn't open our doors, we shouldn't let anybody know we exist basically. And that, that argument, because I think it got -- it definitely got very heated. Like I remember as a kid, people like yelling at these board meetings, they got like heated; there's a, you know, gavel and a podium, and they actually used it. You know now it's just like collecting dust because Jack's like all right guys, calm down, [laughter] and we're like okay.

But it's much, it's much more like civil now, but there were, there were times where like my dad and these other people, you know older members, would go like head to head about trying to sustain the mosque, and my dad, who is financially minded, like he, he is very logistical and knows what we would need to do to [02:00:00] thrive, and they would just absolutely like nay say everything and be like no, we can't, we're -- it's not

safe, we can't do that. And my dad and mom eventually were like no, I'm not going to lose my temper in the mosque, I'm not, I'm not going to yell in the mosque any more, this isn't right. You are wasting my time, if you want to drive this into the ground that's on you. I mean they didn't, but I think that that was -- my, my dad is also kind of used to getting his way, so. [laughter] So, I could see that being a bit of an issue.

STRONG: Do you think they loosened the jar for you? Because you're starting to make progress in some of these issues now.

HAUGHWOUT: Maybe, yeah, I think that, and then I think also, that they just are getting tired of fighting. So, they -- we -- our side sent in more troops and they're just like I don't want to make this argument again, [laughter] you know? But we are. And like, and like you said earlier, we're, we're starting to like gather steam and you know, my aunt and I are kind of like a strong front, I think, for that progressive idea of what it -- what we could be.

STRONG: Your aunt Marion?

HAUGHWOUT: Yeah.

STRONG: Yeah. There's a lot of aunts, so just thought I'd ask.

HAUGHWOUT: Sorry, yeah, no that's totally valid. [laughter] I think of everybody as, I refer to as my aunt.

STRONG: Yeah.

HAUGHWOUT: But yes, my aunt Marion and I, I think are, are pushing that forward and hopefully can continue to do so and get more people on our side, and get people, more people who are on our side, to come to the board meetings, [laughter] you know? So.

STRONG: So, yeah. Unless there's anything else, I think that's a great place to wrap up and --

HAUGHWOUT: Cool.

STRONG: -- thank you so much for your time and, and your cookies. [laughter]

HAUGHWOUT: Of course. Of course, yeah, thank you for coming out.

STRONG: Of course.