



## WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies, other reproductions, and reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

- Brooklyn Historical Society is not responsible for either determining the copyright status of the material or for securing copyright permission.
- Possession of a reproduction does not constitute permission to use it.
- Permission to use copies other than for private study, scholarship, or research requires the permission of both Brooklyn Historical Society and the copyright holder. For assistance, contact Brooklyn Historical Society at [library@brooklynhistory.org](mailto:library@brooklynhistory.org).
- Read more about the Brooklyn Historical Society's Reproduction Rights Policy online:  
[http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn\\_Historical\\_Society\\_Reproduction](http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn_Historical_Society_Reproduction).

## GUIDELINES FOR USE

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only.

Hashem, Mohammed, Oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, May 10, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.18, Brooklyn Historical Society.

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.
2. Every oral history relies on the memories, views and opinions of the narrator. Because of the personal nature of oral history, listeners may find some viewpoints or language of the recorded participants to be objectionable. In keeping with its mission of preservation and unfettered access whenever possible, BHS presents these views as recorded.
3. This transcript is a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. As such, it may contain the natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, and repetitions that are common in conversation. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
4. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
5. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
  - Hashem, Mohammed, Oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, May 10, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.18; Brooklyn Historical Society.

**Oral History Interview with Mohammed Hashem**  
**Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.18**  
**Interview conducted by Liz H. Strong on May 10th, 2018**  
**at Mohammed Hashem's office in Kensington, Brooklyn**

LIZ STRONG: Today is Thursday. It is the 10th, 2018. My name is Liz Strong. I'm here with Mohammed Hashem. This is for the Brooklyn Historical Society's project on Muslims in Brooklyn. Hashem, why don't you just introduce yourself. Tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about your life growing up.

MOHAMMED HASHEM: My name is -- good afternoon. My name is Mohammed Hashem. I am from Bangladesh, American citizen, and I born [redacted for privacy], 1957. And I'm from Bangladesh.

STRONG: Tell me about your parents, your siblings, anything you remember from your childhood.

HASHEM: Okay. My father name is Masaramuel Houk [phonetic], and my mother's name is Mufiza Wego [phonetic]. And we are three brothers and three sisters. And all are living here in New York, Brooklyn especially.

STRONG: What do you remember about Bangladesh from when you were young? What did you do? Where do you go to school? Who were your friends? Anything that comes to mind.

HASHEM: I started from the -- from Bangladesh there's primary. And after the primary, I went to high school. And high school, to -- I went to the college. And every stage I made the friend. And we had a good relationship and classmate. And I graduated 1974. And from the commerce -- accounting department. And 1979, I came to U.S.A.

STRONG: What brought you to the U.S.? Why did you come?

HASHEM: Okay. I was believing that United States is the better life, and I want to give it to my family. And for the community in future. So that's the way I like to come to visit in America. I came here and I loved this country and I stay here.

STRONG: What did you -- what did you like about it? What were your impressions when you first got here?

HASHEM: When I came over here, I met a couple of my friends -- those I know in -- back in Bangladesh. And also, here, for everything, I like it, just like the life -- better life, better treatment. And the people are so nice. And American people like cooperating with the foreigners. That's why I decided to stay here.

STRONG: What was Brooklyn like in 1979? What was the -- the neighborhood you first moved to?

HASHEM: First I came in Brooklyn. Then I moved into the -- Queens. And I stay in Queens six month, and after that, I moved to Brooklyn with one of my friend -- close friend. And after that, I like the Brooklyn and I stay in the Brooklyn.

STRONG: Tell me something that you remember about it -- the -- the people here. What did you do for fun? What did you do for work?

HASHEM: In the beginning, when I came, I did not have the job. I was looking a job. So I was learning some job, as I started with dishwashing. And from the dishwashing, to -- I started -- busboy, busboy to waiters. And that job was at night. Then I decided, with my friend helped me -- started with painting job -- with the construction industry. And once I started with the construction industry, and I loved the construction industry, and then, slowly, I start a business with two other friends. And I continue business with them three years. And after that, I decided to do the individual. And from 1992, I started -- by myself, the individual business, and still now I'm going to do the business.

STRONG: Were there many other Bangladeshi people here when you first arrived?

HASHEM: 1979, when I came in this country, and especially in Brooklyn, is -- is not too many of Bangladeshi was here. But every -- every year, I see it's grown up, grown up. Now, in the Kensington, I believe so, it's 40,000 to 50,000 Bangladeshi around and here. It's like it's a Bangladeshi community -- we call little, mini-Bangladesh -- right now -- in especially McDonald Avenue and Church [Avenue].

STRONG: I'd love to learn more about growing that community. How do people meet each other, especially early on? And how did you build businesses together?

HASHEM: In the beginning of 1980 or '84, they -- some brothers -- some Bangladeshi -- started a business here. Some guys, they started in construction. Some guys start working on restaurant. And especially they started on grocery business, because everybody is need -- loves the country food. So today, is like more than 10 grocery here on McDonald Avenue. And then they started a restaurant -- started one, and grown up now, it's like seven to eight restaurant here. Then, the subsidiary bank, and also, accounting. It's like back home. We don't miss, like, back home. It's like here is little Bangladesh, as I said that before, and we don't miss here. And also -- and started a religious thing -- some -- some people, religious people, they start one mosque. Now it's around here 10 mosques, just one mile of distance. So it's -- day by day, it's growing, and more people coming.

STRONG: Do you remember the first mosque opening, and what was involved?

HASHEM: I remember those days. Early, when I came, we had only one mosque in -- Madina Mosque in First Avenue and 11th Street. We usually go in especial days -- just like twice in a year -- Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr. Then, after that, a few religious brother feel that way, that we had to do something in the locality. So early 1987, those brothers order one building -- it's 1013 Church Avenue -- and renovate a two-family building and started the mosque. And first, when they started they had a executive committee to maintain the mosque -- two years. And after the two years, when the -- not new committee again form, at that time, I get into the -- them as a treasurer. And I sat with treasurer [inaudible 00:07:50] times. And after that, I have the general secretary post. Every two years, the committee change. And I sat [inaudible 00:08:04] four times on general secretary. And after that, I came -- became the president. And still now I'm the president and doing the service for the community and the mosque. And when we feel it -- like, early 1996 -- that the people are so grown up here, this -- the place we had is a very small place, and I was thinking myself that I always pray to the God -- the God give us the big place so we can pray for you together. Because especially Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, those very sensitive day and very religious those -- those two days. And people had a big line for it.

And we cannot finish it, have all the people pray at one time; we have to do every half an hour service. It's like five to six a month. So at that time, I was thinking and praying to the God that God give us the place so we can pray for you. And God listen, and give us the big place, just which we -- we call 105 Cortelyou [Road]. Today, we had a big -- we call as a big mosque in the community. It's name for Bangladesh Muslim Center and Islamic School, 105 Cortelyou, Brooklyn, New York, 11218. And we bought this building -- it's a four-story building. And it was 23-family -- is a apartment building -- was [inaudible 00:09:40]. And we bought it. And after we bought it, three years, we form a construction company on -- on the behalf of -- of the mosque. And we had insurance and everything. And one of the brother we made the president. And then we renovated the building. And it just takes three to four years almost to renovate it -- the building. And then we moved here 2000 -- yeah, 2000 -- and then we started over there. And right now, in Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, we have almost 5,000 people pray at one shot. It's a bigger space. And people call -- it's a big mosque in the community -- it's the good name on it. And we started also -- in the inside of the building is called religious school, which is -- memorize the Qur'an. So we have a -- a madrasa also, which is a religious madrasa, and teaching on Saturday, Sunday. And the school we have for the Qur'an memorize and also, we have a home-based school link with the -- another home-based school.

And right now, we have 37 students that memorize the Qur'an. And every year graduated two or three. And they're leading two Tarawih, a different mosque. The last year is the -- fourteen mosque our student leading the Qur'an and Tarwih salat in the community and New York. And also, after they finish all these students, we give them a certificate, and they go to South Africa to finish their higher education.

STRONG: Tell me about how you -- you set that up -- the South Africa relationship.

HASHEM: Well, our imam, Qari Ruhullah [phonetic], he is very experienced and very good imam. And he knows a couple of teacher over there, especially principal. So he spoke

with them, and arrange it for the students. And that's why they get to go over there -- South Africa visa and go over there and get the higher study.

STRONG: That's so interesting. In the early stages, who -- you know, in the first couple years, when it was still small, who were the teachers, and how did you get an imam on board and begin building that kind of religious life?

HASHEM: The -- the imam we have right now, he -- somebody sponsor him in Buffalo.

Buffalo has a big madrasa. And somehow, he does not like it over there to stay, and he came to the New York. And one of the -- my friend [inaudible 00:12:58], we met him. And we spoke with him. And we -- he recited Qur'an, and it's so beautiful his voice, and we love his voice and -- reading the Qur'an. And we offer him: We will sponsor you from our mosque; will you be -- services to here? And we just sponsor him and his family. And he good to the green card, now he's citizen. And from 1997 until now, he's giving us good services in the community and the mosque. And he's a very nice man. We love him. And we pray to the God to stay here to give us more service.

STRONG: Tell me about your -- your personal history with your faith. Tell me about your education as a child, your relationship with the -- with religion, how it's different from your parents.

HASHEM: Okay. It's my family -- I have three daughters and one son. My elder daughter finish the master's on Brooklyn College, and she married my country boy, and he is also graduated from the -- from here. And he's software engineer. And they live in Staten Island. And -- and they have one boy and one girls. And the second daughter also goes to Brooklyn College, and she finished the graduation. And she married a doctor. And they live here. And they have three son. And third one is also graduated from the Brooklyn College. And she married a -- she married a HVAC engineer, and who is finish it here in the City College [of New York], and doing a government job.

And she has one boy and one girl. And they're living very -- a very good life. And my son finish here the graduation. And he married. And he's take care of my business. And also, he's doing the community services and helping me in the mosque, helping me in

the business, helping in the community. I'm really proud for my son. And he's very religious. And he's doing very good. And believe me, I -- I proud for my children. They're religious, and they're doing with the family life is nicely. And I pray to the God they could continue same way what they are doing right now.

STRONG: Tell me about your wife. How did you meet her?

HASHEM: Oh, she is great. [laughter] In the back home, the days we married, they had an arranged marriage -- it's not like today's -- the boys like the girls and girls like the boy and they arrange it. That time, like -- parents arrange it -- marriage. And those, they arrange it, but we go see each other, they arrange a time and a date. And I went to see her, and I like her, and then I married. And she is very helpful. And she finish also high school. And she is my part of the life -- that they are -- the situation I have right now, God give me a lot of things -- business, the name, and community people loves me -- all of this supporting behind of her. And she is very friendly and she is very helpful for the family. Because of her, we had a big family -- almost 40 peoples in the family. And all are listen to her. And she's the eldest one. And whenever it's a small thing going on, everybody comes to the one place and enjoy. And she is the leading person for that. And she hold, like, a whole family -- like a, you know, big family. It's together under one umbrella. She is great. I'm proud for her.

STRONG: Thank you. (cough) Sorry. Tell me about your home and what it was like getting your family raised here in Kensington.

HASHEM: I -- I live over here in [redacted for privacy] East Seventh Street. I used to live on 443 East Second Street, and I move it from here to [redacted for privacy], because I do not want to move somewhere else -- to go Long Island or somewhere else, because I love the Kensington. And especially here, living people, they don't miss Bangladesh. So it's walking distance to go to the mosque, walking distance to shopping, grocery, walking distance for my office. So the community people are so nice. We have, like, a bridge to the other religion people -- Jewish people, Christian people. We go together. We go their church, we go their synagogue, and to meet together, to drink a coffee. It's

like a family. Though we are different religions, the religion is their own, but we like each other. Any problem, we goes together to solve the problem.

STRONG: So how have you found people locally -- you know, Christian, Jewish, non-Muslim people -- have come to understand their Muslim neighbors? What do you teach them? How do you share that?

HASHEM: Okay. This is happen usually -- let's say we have, as an example, Bangladesh Muslim Center and the other mosque also here. So over here, East Five, they have Flatbush synagogue [Flatbush Jewish Center], right? The whoever over there in church, right, they wanted to call to meet us. And they come to the office, and we introduce ourselves. And that's why we have the bridge. And we invite them to come to our mosque. And they invite us for the dinner to go over there.

And the other people come on the dinner, and we meet each other, we introduce each other, we give them the card -- business card. That's why we have relationship. And even any -- anything happen in the community -- why we had a demonstration or we have some people gathering, we invite the community people, go door to door, and flier. They come here, and they introduce themselves, they say a few words. So that's how we have a more relationship to the community.

STRONG: You mentioned demonstrations. Have you been involved in organizing local demonstrations, or community actions?

HASHEM: No, it sometimes is, happened some bad things, so we go together to say we need this, we need that, the local politicians, they come. So we, you know, it's not a demonstration, it's like invite them to come here, and actually to explain ourselves and the local problem, how they can solve the problem.

STRONG: Tell me about a recent example where you've reached out to politicians for support.

HASHEM: Just like an example, we have the Councilman Brad [Bradford S.] Lander, and very good man, he always says when he comes to the mosque, sometimes to say a few words, and we, I introduce him as a community friend. Because his door is open for us

any time -- for the community people, not especially Muslim people. And so, if we need anything like over here, he's the one made it, of the Avenue C Plaza. So, sometimes, we have Memorial Day in Bangladesh, and we will invite him, he come here, and he say a few words. And that time, if you have an opportunity to say something we need here in the community, and sometimes the 66th Precinct captain, he invite us to go to that, and we also, they want to know what's happening in the community, especially on Friday, pray, especially Ramadan, pray, if they need more services.

So, we tell them we need more police at night, to give us service, because our -- all men goes to pray at night, it's starting like ten o'clock, and finish at twelve o'clock, so they have to work and then just go home, so we need more service from the police department. They are very helpful, and they're giving us the police to, around it, and they especially come and work for us in front of the mosque, and giving us service. So that's where we have a bridge.

STRONG: Yeah. Tell me, you know, before you had these communications with the police, were there misunderstandings in the past? Are there any examples of that?

HASHEM: No, we did not have any misunderstandings in [inaudible 00:22:36]. We had this community, since I'm here in this community, living, we haven't had any misunderstanding.

STRONG: Great. What about formal, not formal, former council members? What were relationships with them like? Because it sounds like this one is special, so just to get some comparison.

HASHEM: Well the --

STRONG: Before Brad Lander.

HASHEM: Before Brad Lander, honestly, I did not have a great friendship with him, because he sometimes come here, and pass by, but I never get a chance to meet with him. But, this Brad Lander, he comes in the mosque, and sometimes he call me, so that's why we had a good relationship.

STRONG: I'm curious about your impression of social services and opportunities for civic engagement in Brooklyn, and maybe New York City as a whole, beyond just the city council, and the police. Do you think this community is represented well, or understood well?

HASHEM: Yeah, I believe so. That has a good relationship with the councilman's office, and the police department, especially 66th Precinct, yeah. Sixty-sixth Precinct captain, Mr. [David A.] Wall, most of the time, you know, once in a month, he come and visit us. And even before Ramadan, and he make -- before Ramadan, he invited us to meet the community leaders, and the imam for the mosque was [inaudible 00:24:27] especially we need for, in the Ramadan.

STRONG: What services does this community need more than others? I mean you mentioned public spaces, you mentioned, you know, protection during holidays, and prayer, but what kind of services have been needed in terms of finding housing, or finding employment, or dealing with immigration? What are the main concerns here?

HASHEM: OK. About, to find the housing, and from the mayor's office, that Dr. Sarah Sayeed we have a good relationship, she is the community affairs. And she sometimes arrange a meeting in the community, especially BMC, Bangladesh Muslim Center. And then, we invited different community people, and also different religious people will come to our mosque, and especially from the housing, and from the different departments, representatives, they come here and they explain us how you get into the business involved, how you can get to the manager [inaudible 00:25:51] the business involved. What facility in the minority you have. And also, how you can apply for housing. Those things, they analyze it and explain it. So that way people are educated, and we try to always arrange something like this, to spread out the message to the community, to upgrade community people, to educate the community people to learn and to help get those benefits from the city.

STRONG: I'm interested in your personal history with community work like this. Have you always found yourself in a leadership role? Or was there [phone ringing] -- oh sorry, do you want me to pause?

HASHEM: No. No. No.

STRONG: Have you always found yourself in a leadership role, even from a young age? Or was there a time when you felt like that changed?

HASHEM: No, since I'm involved with the mosque, then I slowly, slowly build it up, and build it up myself inside, that I want to help the community people, the community people has a lot of problems, some education problem, some other problem, people to find the job problem. So, people wants to buy, they need help for different ways, right? So, I tried to myself, to help the people, because I believe these things, that you people, you people, to the people, God will help you. Oh. So that's why I tried to help, I start that. It is the, those helping through the -- some other people, maybe God be happy to me, and to help me, too. That's why I believe that I came to this position.

STRONG: I'm just going to pause here one second, until their conversation stops.

HASHEM: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I think so.

[00:27:43]

[Interruption]

[00:27:50]

STRONG: I'll just pause it.

HASHEM: Yeah.

[Interruption]

STRONG: So I want to ask you, do you still have family in Bangladesh that you're in touch with? Do you ever travel back there?

HASHEM: I have some relatives, not too close, some relatives in, back home. But most of my blood relatives are here. And that's the, I feel so proud, you know, myself, and so happy, one day, 1990-- '79, when I came here, I feel lonely, I'm the only person over here, and few friends. And I was thinking maybe I make some money on it, and then go back home. But slowly, slowly, I see that I'm building up the only family, now I don't have anybody in Bangladesh. I have relatives here, there, and the children are going to this school, college, and those people are, they're established and doing a good job, but

they mention their family, and I'm so happy to see that they are very, you know, meditating their lives very goodly.

STRONG: How did your siblings come to join you here?

HASHEM: They came because after I got the citizen, you know, and I sponsored them, and slowly they came. You know? Brother and sister, all them, yeah.

STRONG: Did they come for school, for work, or?

HASHEM: Yeah, some people from the, my family, that goes to school, and someone finishing college or high school from the back home. So they started on a job here, and nowadays, they mostly have their own business themselves.

STRONG: Tell me about teaching your children about Bangladesh, their language, their culture, how did you teach them about that?

HASHEM: My daughters, they already finished the high school over there, and they came. So they're learning my language right there. So, they're not going to forget on that. But my son is brought up here, and he speaks Bengali, but he cannot write the Bengali, but he can read some Bengali, because he back to home on vacation, and he tried to learn some Bengali reading, and he kept at it very good, and he can read. But he cannot write it. But he speak in Bengali in the family.

STRONG: And have they, what am I trying to ask? How have their lives in Brooklyn changed your expectations of how they might grow up? How they might marry, how they might work, what is different about their life than your life was?

HASHEM: Okay. They -- my children, they live over here, around only one -- the elder one live in Staten Island, the other two living right around here, in the Kensington. And they, you see my life and their life is different, because I came here, I have some struggle to life, to get my foot right. And they came here, they find they love everything here. Because the time they came, their father is already rich in some stage, to maintain them nicely. So, they have own house, they're living on their own house, with their husband, and kids, and their father-in-law, mother-in-law. They're happy.

STRONG: Thank you. So I want to ask you, how do you think the Kensington community will continue to change and grow over time? What do you hope for the future?

HASHEM: I hope in the future, it's going to be better, because the days are now, we don't have no complaints, but everybody dream it to better life, and better community. So day by day, we had the grownup, the community is getting better. And also, our children is here, going to educated, right? And their mentality, completely American mentality, right? And with them, and the American people here, the children here, so they're going to get along, and it's going to be better life in a few [inaudible 00:32:32]. Though we are citizens, but we had like a background in Bangladesh.

But my son and others, my nephew, or my children over here, whichever they are going to school, college, and university, they're different from our mentality. So that's what I believe, so in a few, second and third generation, would be more close to the American people, and it's going to be a better community, they will do something jointly together in Kensington. And Kensington would be a great community one of the days. Now, it's no complaints, but it's personally, it's going to be a great community. We have a big Jewish community around here, we have different religions, people that live here. So, we have a very good relationship.

STRONG: How would you describe what you call the American mentality? What are the characteristics of that?

HASHEM: That's like, those are the foreigners, like from Bangladesh, and India, and Pakistan, they have their own culture, right, you know? It's, those are brought up in their own country. But the persons that are brought up here, and they're brought, they have the life here, and they're growing up here, so they are more American in style, and not the back home style. I mean that.

STRONG: I would like to learn more about your life before you came to the U.S. What did, what was life like? What are some treasured memories of your early days?

HASHEM: The early days before I arrived in this country, I was a student. So I just finished the college, and after that, I came to this country. So, I did not do any job or any business in the back home to get really any back home experience.

STRONG: But what was Bangladesh like, and how is it different now?

HASHEM: Oh, those days, and nowadays, it's a better life now. Because the countries is good enough, the education is good enough, and [inaudible 00:34:51] is good enough, and the people have more education, and it's a big difference.

STRONG: There was also political turmoil in the '70s, do you remember that?

HASHEM: Yeah, the 1970, we have deliberation for, that was fighting for the independence. But thanks God that the leaders who lost it, [inaudible 00:35:17] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman he is the great leader, and he's the one who was dreaming for Bangladesh, and he came to the Bangladesh. Now, he was dreaming to make a golden Bangladesh, and his daughter are the prime minister right now, and she's doing so great now. And a lot of things change, and country develop, and foreigners going over there to invest, oh, in my country. And day by day, it's getting more developed.

STRONG: What do you remember from before? What was it like there?

HASHEM: The before was, it's two part. East Pakistan and West Pakistan, and it was, is one is called Pakistan. But it was two part, east and west. So east, we are now in Bangladesh, all right? So the west is, right now, is called Pakistan. And there, the prime minister, or president, was in Pakistan. And a lot of things growing up back home in East Pakistan, and they get all the things, and bring it up to the west side, but east side people did not get any benefit.

So that's the way [inaudible 00:36:40] Sheikh Mujibar Rahman was fighting to get their own people, whatever is grown up here, what here, are the benefit here -- to get their own people whatever is brought here, what here are the benefits, here -- getting, spent here, for the local people. Don't take it to the other part. Whatever is the other part, you spend over there, we don't want it. So that's what is the beginning of the things, and the [inaudible 00:37:03] come to the independence, dreaming.

STRONG: How did that affect you, and your family's life, your parents' life?

HASHEM: It's, the time is 1970, because I was a student. So I wasn't affected really until the war, and well, the place I was living, I was born, is an island. So, it wasn't that much of the affected in the island. But the people went to the city, and the people went to the

learn, and the arms training, and all these, the fighting people, they had a lot of deserving, you know, and 30, like peoples died, and the Bangladesh, at that time, in Bangladesh, at this time, it's Bangladesh, is like it's carrying the, in the ground, they put it.

STRONG: Like the sky and the ground, different?

HASHEM: [inaudible 00:38:01] difference, yes.

STRONG: Yeah.

HASHEM: That time, 30, lots of people died, including the people, and all the places is destroyed, all the high rise buildings destroyed. So, it was -- the people in Bangladesh just started on the ground to build up today's, like in 43 years, so the original [inaudible 00:38:24].

STRONG: Thank you for telling me.

HASHEM: Yeah.

STRONG: What is something that makes you proud when you go back there? Something specific. Have you been to the island, and has it changed?

HASHEM: Yeah, it's changed. I'm proud of it, because if we don't independent, I did not get the passport to come to the America. Nowadays, my country people is come here, Bangladeshi passport. We're never going to dream it if we don't independent our country, we come to USA, with the green passport. Now we are citizens, and we have American passport. But the time we came, we had Bangladeshi passport. So, that is a big difference. And I'm proud that when I go in my country, I speak my own language, and own [inaudible 00:39:18] own [inaudible 00:39:19] and own people that, you know? If some -- like if you go visit somewhere else, and if you see your country people, you feel it to talk with them, it's a different feeling.

STRONG: You also mentioned that here in Kensington, you and other people have been able to build something very much like home, like Bangladesh. What are some things that are like home? Food, music, language, anything.

HASHEM: Like food, music, culture. The community, you know, community center, that the people comes, you know, together to learn our culture, and we can learn the different people culture together, to build it up.

STRONG: Tell me about places you like to go with your friends, locally, coffee shops, anything like that.

HASHEM: Locally, we don't hanging around to go to the coffee shop. And, because we have a coffee shop around here, usually some people they're hanging, but I don't have that much of the time to hanging. And especially, we are family oriental, in the weekend, spend the time for the family. We go out with the family for the dinners. We go with the family in the outside of the -- you know, New York, the different places, for the weekend. And they spend, over there, and bring the family. That's usually, we have a gathering in the mosque, that's where we have the people gathering. It's a special holiday, or especially, we'll invite people for religious ceremony so people will come eat together, or drink together, means coffee, tea, drink together, and sit down.

STRONG: What kind of food do people prepare?

HASHEM: We prepare, especially the mosque, is Bangladeshi food, is our country food.

STRONG: Like what? Give me an example of a particular dish you like.

HASHEM: Especially rice, and curry, goat curry. Or lamb curry. Yeah. Or the fish, yeah, fish curry, and [inaudible 00:41:32] or roti, the people who -- some people like the roti, we make the [inaudible 00:41:38] roti and sell this type of the food, like Deshi food, it's called country food.

STRONG: Have ingredients gotten easier to find, to make, you know, curry, goat curry, than when you were first in Brooklyn.

HASHEM: Nowadays, it's very easy to find every oil, because every oil has these stores, grocery, they're selling all that, you know? And even, every oil goes to the restaurant, it's called Bangladeshi, Indian restaurant. Or Bangladeshi, Pakistani restaurant. So you can go and buy it, it's so easy now to get it.

STRONG: Did you miss it in '79, when you first came?

HASHEM: Oh definitely, we miss it. At that time, if you have a special anything, the people's house, they invite oh, come, we make a special, cook something, you come to visit my house.

STRONG: And, you know, during the day, you had what, pizza? [laughter] What --

HASHEM: No, during that time, we had the pizza, but you know, we cook in the home, and especially we find out where is the halal restaurant online, and looking on it, and we go and eat where halal food.

STRONG: Yeah. And so, I'm just asking because you were encountering very different foods than you had before. Unless you were in somebody's home, right?

HASHEM: Yeah.

STRONG: So, what kind of foods did you encounter here that were new, and were they strange, or did you like them?

HASHEM: No, we liked the halal food, but that is -- especially, first of all, my country food. Those are called like Bangladeshi, Indian food. And besides this, we like Turkish food, we like a lot of Turkish restaurants is around here, and we online research it, which one is halal, and then we go to over there and eat different kind of food. Especially, whatever the food is, should be halal.

STRONG: Right.

HASHEM: Yemeni Café, right here on Atlantic Avenue, we go visit over there.

STRONG: Do you want me to pause for a second?

HASHEM: Yeah.

[INTERRUPTION]

STRONG: I'm curious about your memories of Atlantic Avenue. You mentioned the Yemeni Café.

HASHEM: Yeah, there's the Yemeni Café there, and sometimes we go, the family there. And they have a Turkish restaurant right here, on, all the way down to the Bath Avenue. And we'll go over there. So, in Brooklyn has a lot of restaurants, good restaurants, and sometimes we take it out to the family, and sometimes we go with friends, and eat the dinner, too.

STRONG: Atlantic Avenue is very different now than it was in the '80s and the '90s.

HASHEM: Oh yeah.

STRONG: Tell me what it was like in the '80s and '90s?

HASHEM: It's the second Manhattan right now. Right? Yeah, and it's blowing up, coming to the Fourth Avenue now. And Fourth Avenue, I remember Fourth Avenue, Third Avenue, those days it was broken buildings, damaged buildings. Now you can find every building is like a multi-story building. It's a big change. And especially also here, on Cortelyou and Coney Island Avenue, from Coney Island to, on Ocean -- back here, right there, it's a big change also. Oh, a lot of people from Manhattan, they move, they have a nice restaurant, and like a second town like Manhattan.

STRONG: What about neighbors, people who lived there? Many of them moved, many of the businesses have moved. I mean Yemeni Café is still there, but others have moved.

HASHEM: Yeah, a lot of people have moved, because a lot of people, they cannot afford to pay the rent, it's going high. Maybe their income is lower than their expense, you know? So, they always find to live somewhere else, so that they can feel comfortable.

STRONG: Do you think that will happen here in Kensington, or do you think your community will be able to stay?

HASHEM: The Kensington is growing up, is very expensive housing also. So, maybe sooner or later, if they have not enough income, maybe people will start to move to find somewhere, too? Who knows, maybe. [laughter] It's getting very expensive in the houses. I remember the day two family houses was 700, 800, now it's one families, 1.5, 1.3, 1.4. It's a big change, the houses market.

STRONG: Yeah. How are businesses locally doing? Are they thriving, are they changing?

HASHEM: The business is changing, it's growing up day by day, opening new business.

They have a couple of restaurants, the '90s, around '90s, now there's more restaurants, more Chinese, halal Chinese food. So all different kind of food in this area now.

STRONG: What about construction? Is it a good time to be in construction?

HASHEM: Construction this year is going very good, yeah, from the last years, yeah, people are busy now, and the community, those people, those friends I know, because they're doing good, yeah.

STRONG: How did your business fare during the financial crisis, during 2008, when housing markets kind of dipped?

HASHEM: See construction business is sometimes it's slow, sometimes it's very busy, right? So, the times we had some hard times, but we went in and somehow, to continue on it. Maybe instead of you're doing 10 jobs, maybe doing four jobs, but somehow you have to be into the business to maintain your expenses. You know? That's [inaudible 00:47:44] yeah.

STRONG: I guess my last couple questions for you would be about the Bangladesh Muslim Center. How do you hope that will continue to grow and improve?

HASHEM: Well we have been dreaming that we want an elementary Islamic school into the changes now, days [phonetic] what we have. But to do that, we have some paperwork need to complete it, and some construction work need to complete it. So, we are trying to do, from that, where once we have finished up the process completely, then maybe we apply for the board of education, to get some permission to turn it into the elementary school.

STRONG: How will expanding the school improve, or expand what you offer? More classes, more students?

HASHEM: Yeah, more classes. More classes, and at that time, we're going to admit more students also.

STRONG: How do you want the classes to be different? You're offering Quran memorization, and --

HASHEM: No, that's going to be like an American curriculum, or American syllabus to work on it. That's, we're going to change it on that. But Islam is going to be religious. Religious plus American. Both is going to be together.

STRONG: Oh, I understand.

HASHEM: Yeah.

STRONG: Why? What's the motivation for doing the integrated education?

HASHEM: Because, the children is going to be memorizing the Quran, we don't want only they memorize the Quran. The same time, they would learn English, and math, and everything. So the complete it through the, goes to the high school, goes to the college, and so, they can get the higher education. So they don't have a problem to get to the changing, the class. Or to get the higher education.

STRONG: Are there other Islamic schools in Brooklyn that you have learned from, or that you would like to emulate?

HASHEM: There are other schools, one is Al-Noor School right here on 20th Street, and then another school is on Third Avenue. But they have more of these schools. Yeah.

STRONG: And what have you been able to learn from them? Anything that might help you in the future?

HASHEM: Well sure, if we want to know something from there, how they started and what they did, they will help us. Because all [inaudible 00:50:17] Muslim brothers has the mentality to help the other people, so.

STRONG: Have there been opportunities for you to mentor others who maybe wanted to start a religious institution, or you know, reach out to local civic leaders? How do you teach people from challenges that you have overcome?

HASHEM: I don't get you, what is the --

STRONG: In the same way that you might reach out to Al-Noor to learn, how have others reached out to you as they try to start their own institutions? What do you teach them?

HASHEM: Oh, some people wants to know they can find it out, the website onto this, and in the community, people just like you are, somebody, my name on it. So somebody can tell somebody, displayed out the name, so they can come to the community and ask for it. A lot of people call me, "Oh I got the number from these people, I need help for my mosque, would you be help me?" Yes, we -- they come on Friday in the jummah we collected the funds. But the mosque, some people have cancer, and they cannot do the treatment, they need the money for it, they don't have medical cover, or something, we collect the funds into the mosque on Friday, and give it to them. We just try to help

them. Some people have a problem in Bangladesh, their families here, they come to us and apply for it, application for it. Some help, we collect the money into the mosque, you know, and some people has a problem in other country, like a flood, or rain, or disaster, something, we collect the fund in the mosque, and then we give it to the Red Cross to send it to them.

There's a few times it's happened already. We collected, one time we collected like \$50,000 to give it to the Red Cross, Red Cross team came to mosque, and we hand over the check to them. We tried to help the people not only locally, foreign people also -- foreign country, also. Like the Somalia, like Pakistan has some problems onto their countryside, we try to help the people on the -- Bangladesh is not, they have flood, [inaudible 00:52:49] poor people, we collect some money and send it over there.

STRONG: My last question for you is just, if you imagine somebody listening to this recording say, 100 years from now, what do you hope they will understand about your community here?

HASHEM: A hundred years after?

STRONG: A hundred years from today, way in the future.

HASHEM: Oh.

STRONG: What would you like them to understand about now, about your world?

HASHEM: Oh, 100 years after this community is gone, we -- today's dream, that time is going to come true, the dream. [laughter] I'll say that.

STRONG: Okay.

HASHEM: Yeah.

STRONG: Well, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything I should have asked you that we didn't get to talk about?

HASHEM: I hope we covered enough, but any time, you can call me if there's something in your mind, and I'll try to answer your question.

STRONG: OK, great. Well thank you very much, I'll let you get back to work.

HASHEM: OK, thank you very much for your coming, and for your time, and to spend all this about it.