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Oral History Conversation with Rabea Jouja

Luree Scott  
*University of San Diego*

Chloe Naquin  
*University of San Diego*

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Hi My name is Luree Scott. I'm studying Theatre and English and I'm a sophomore at the University of San Diego.

Software engineering?

Theatre

I'm Chloe Naquin and I'm going to study also theater and performance arts.

My name's Rabea. I lived in Syria. And moved to America.

Since two years and uh since one year and two months

Hi my name is Noora, and I'm going to be the translator for Rabea.

Could you share with us memorable story from your childhood in Syria, perhaps
a story that you find yourself telling Americans who you've met for the first time?

I lived in Syria with a beautiful childhood uh, life.

It was a simple life.

I remember of one of the stories.

When my father was employed by one of the companies

And we had

holiday parties there. It was so beautiful.

We were waiting for

Athid, which is a Muslim holiday, to come so we can wear new clothes.

My family was

a big family.

My mom and dad, um, have seven kids...six kids...

Seven?
Six boys and one girl.

00:02:34.970 --> 00:02:39.820
So, at that time, everyone
we are seven sisters and brothers

00:02:39.860 --> 00:02:45.060
want new clothes and that was very hard for
for us at that time.

00:02:49.510 --> 00:02:50.710
The beautiful thing is that

00:02:50.750 --> 00:02:54.540
every one of us should choose or
pick one thing only.

00:02:56.880 --> 00:03:00.120
Either a shirt. Or a trouser.

00:03:11.560 --> 00:03:15.810
So, we...I was waiting for my brother
what to pick, so

00:03:15.810 --> 00:03:17.610
If he pick a shirt I would pick

00:03:17.620 --> 00:03:21.260
a short, so...so he can wear the, you know?

00:03:21.280 --> 00:03:22.650
the full suit

00:03:26.240 --> 00:03:31.520
So we tried to, eh, choose
a size that fits us together

00:03:34.360 --> 00:03:36.310
So I order an eight, so we can wear

00:03:36.320 --> 00:03:37.740
the full

00:03:37.750 --> 00:03:38.520
So, eh, although we were poor we are a low income, but it was a beautiful moment. It was a simple, beautiful moment to remember.

I learned in in Syria I used to study in winter and work in summer.

I got my high school degree in two thousand ninety four? Nineteen ninety four.

and I entered the Institute of economy.

OK so I got a diploma... I got a diploma in how to filter the water and make it ready to use and drink.

And I moved to... Gulf countries to get some income and work there.
After I moved from the Gulf countries, I get back to Syria and got married in two thousand and one.

I had four kids in Syria. Three girls and one boy.

In two thousand and eleven when the war started, I had to move from my country because I was aware about my kids. I felt that me and my kids are no more safe in Syria and these countries.

So I move to Jordan.

So, uh, I got another girl. I got another girl. Her name is Miriam. Now, we have five kids at that time.
And, after three years and a half.

I got a phone call from an organization for immigration. Asking me if I’m willing to move to America or to travel to America. I was not stable that time. I was hesitating at that time because in Jordan I started my own business. And I started getting good money there. So, I have to choose between either going to America and start a new life or stay in Jordan and continue with...
So, at home we start voting.

Who wants to go or who doesn't want to go

So, the voting, more, goes to, "We want to go to America."

So we came to America in two thousand and sixteen.

And we got another kid.

He's a boy.

Now, we have six kids.

That's a great family.

Yeah

And when I first arrive to America I started thinking.
The resettlement organization, they settled
me in Arizona.

I put three choices. Offered three choices for me
First...
First, I have to get driver license.
Second thing, I have to learn the English language.
Third I have to find employment and as soon as possible.
I got the driver license
I enrolled in ESL, in adult school
and I got my first job as a driver in the airport.
But I found
He thought Arizona
it's not a place when I can invest business there or get some investments because of the weather.

So, I log into the Internet. And, I start searching which states it's good to work.

So, I found three states. Michigan

Boston

California

So, I found that San Diego.

The weather of San Diego it's more suitable with my family and it is the same exactly with the weather in Syria.

So, again we vote.
Michigan

Boston

California

So, California wins...the voting.

So, I came here.

I put three choices here.

I have to find a school that teach us English, me and my wife.

To find a business here. My own business.

I found a job, also in the
San Diego Airport

So, uh, we started to learn the language in English.

So, since a month, I started my own business.

Uh...It's a truck.

Yeah, it's just like a snack shack or food truck.

Oh, ok.

Ice cream, coke, cappuccino, um... coke, water

And search for places where my business can be successful

So, I created a company

Yeah, I just started

a company under the name Rabea.
I see the certificate.

And this is the registration.

So I start to develop this business to have more than one truck under my name.

Beautiful. It's beautiful. Life in America.

But, it needs money.

That's true.

So, I'm trying to make my family happy.
Maybe I'll be something in the future.

That they can remember.

And this video that we are taping right now may be in the future will be something important.

This is all about Rabea.

Well, I think you're somebody now, as well, I mean, that's amazing starting your own business.

A lot of people dream about that.

I didn't pass even the fifth month, this is my fifth month here, I didn't pass even the fifth months and I did all this.

Wow.
That's a lot.
That's

Awesome.

What did you know about America before you came here?

It's

a country were they create movies.

And

And create dreams.

Was it

when you did arrive here was it like what you thought?

Arizona yeah...uh-no Arizona, no.

Not in Arizona.

California Yeah
In California, yeah.

I arrive to Arizona at eleven thirty P.M.

So I thought they are taking me to a desert.

When I was in the car with one of the employees from an agency there.

I asked them, "Where are you taking us, me and my family?"

He said, "To your new house."

He said, "There's a new city here."

And, I said, "Where?"

"I don't see any city."

When I first arrived to California I came by myself. I think if my family...
If my family was still there in Arizona. So, first I came alone to California.

So, I taped a video and sent it to my kids there in Arizona.

And the kids asked him "Dad are you in America now?"

Because they thought Arizona is not in America.

Oh my goodness.

That...that's...

That's funny. I mean, we we kind of... I mean I've been to Arizona.

And I felt like I couldn't breathe there.

Yeah.

Uh...my son he was only one month
a year old and he got allergic in his skin.

The doctor told him, "Your son has 200 kinds of type of allergy... in your son."

Oh my god...

So, my kids every month go to take some medication.

In order not to, uh... to get allergic to it

And they never go out of the house a lot. Only to go to school.

Hot, very hot.

Yes.

I'm from Arizona. I know.

Could you describe your day... your typical day in America and how it's different from in Syria?
My life is all about work.

In Syria, I used to get up in the morning.

And work to

a company were they do the water filtering.

And, then go back in the evening to my house.

And after that, I go with my family or my kids to

a garden or a park.

And, this is exactly the same. What I am doing right now.

When I get back from work... from work to home... I

take family and go to the park

To the park or to the beach.

One hour, two hour...
When I get back to house, and then come back, I sleep.

00:19:59.790 --> 00:20:05.120
Do you still remember your very first day in America? Could you maybe describe that
to us?

00:20:05.130 --> 00:20:05.940
It was a night. Not a day.

00:20:13.890 --> 00:20:16.230
I was very afraid.

00:20:19.080 --> 00:20:23.460
Just like, I don’t know what the future is.

00:20:23.460 --> 00:20:26.550
And my shoulders...

00:20:30.070 --> 00:20:31.550
And I have kids I felt on my shoulders that I...They want to live. They have to
live.

00:20:44.300 --> 00:20:46.850
There’s a lot of barriers in front of me.

00:20:51.140 --> 00:20:52.500
First month.

00:20:54.340 --> 00:20:56.890
First thing is the house rent.

00:20:58.010 --> 00:20:59.980
To educate my kids.
How to deal with my kids in

a different country.

But finally I have to

So finally I, now, I know what's
the future for my kids.

I found a job so

I can pay my rent.

I solved all the problems that my
kids face in the school.

The first night, it was full of thinking, me and

my wife, keep thinking.

I always tell them that you choose.

I mean that’s very democratic way to
handle it.

I do have

a follow-up question. If that’s...ok.

Do you think it's harder
to raise your kids in

00:22:24.170 --> 00:22:26.510 America rather than Syria?

00:22:35.240 --> 00:22:35.990 Yes.


00:22:40.750 --> 00:22:42.750 The traditions.

00:22:43.670 --> 00:22:46.280 It's different from the traditions back home.

00:22:51.840 --> 00:22:55.330 The way they deal with the kids in the schools...

00:22:57.280 --> 00:23:00.830 It's different from the way they deal with the kids in Syria.

00:23:01.600 --> 00:23:03.710 But, here it's better.

00:23:04.900 --> 00:23:06.780 It's good. It's not bad.

00:23:09.630 --> 00:23:10.440 But we as the fathers, we have to be familiar with this. We have to...

00:23:16.920 --> 00:23:20.120 There's no problem
Oral History Conversation with Rabea Jouja

with the kids.

00:23:21.630 --> 00:23:26.370
And there's nothing wrong with the
with the teachers and the schools.

00:23:29.270 --> 00:23:32.330
But the--the--the problem
is with the way the fathers

00:23:32.400 --> 00:23:34.240
talking here in America.

00:23:47.440 --> 00:23:47.980
It's kind of

00:23:47.990 --> 00:23:53.260
acculturation, so they have the fathers,
when they come here, they should be...

00:23:54.080 --> 00:23:58.310
Yeah, the father's here when
they come to America, they have to be in

00:23:58.320 --> 00:24:04.510
acculturation and they know the culture
very well and be used to the traditions

00:24:04.520 --> 00:24:05.570
here.

00:24:11.800 --> 00:24:18.280
Without causing that,
the kids see we say something

00:24:18.470 --> 00:24:20.430
but we don't do it.

00:24:24.710 --> 00:24:25.220
Our words

00:24:25.220 --> 00:24:28.070
should be exactly like our actions.
So, the kid can accept any idea from the father.

First they should,

So in order to teach my son what's the right what's the wrong, my son should see it in me.

The fathers should change theirselves because their kids, they will learn everything but as a diff-- as a new culture, the fathers should learn their new culture and change themselves.

Me and my wife, we thought about this a lot and we discussed this a lot.

So we started taking lectures and trainings regarding this issue in organization. A WIC organization. The name of the organization?

Yeah, yeah. WIC.
We started it in Arizona, taking these lectures and we continue taking these here.

And we found a big difference with the way we deal with our kids.

Which is good for the kids.

So in order to raise our kids in a good or healthy environment we have to be just like, a good example for them.

The good father raise a good kids.

The bad father or not good father

Maybe their kids will be also.
I also have a follow-up question, uh

00:26:33.980 --> 00:26:37.200
Were you ever worried that your kids may not fit into like

00:26:38.120 --> 00:26:38.830
"Fit in" with

00:26:38.830 --> 00:26:40.490
all the other kids?

00:26:50.330 --> 00:26:51.290
No.

00:26:52.620 --> 00:26:58.020
No I don’t think about that. I was thinking only about education.

00:27:03.850 --> 00:27:05.690
I have four daughters.

00:27:07.440 --> 00:27:11.990
They are in school. I gave them their freedom.

00:27:16.080 --> 00:27:19.210
And, at the same time they ask me about anything they want.

00:27:22.460 --> 00:27:24.570
Even if they want to go to a trip or

00:27:24.580 --> 00:27:28.220
a tour. I tell them, "Ok. You can go."

00:27:38.880 --> 00:27:43.590
So, every time the daughters ask their Dad, "What is the wrong?" What is
right?"

00:27:45.775 --> 00:27:48.275
And all I do is advise them.

00:27:50.410 --> 00:27:52.500
My wife do the same, does the same.

00:28:05.240 --> 00:28:06.940
You did not ask me

00:28:06.940 --> 00:28:09.670
if I were in Syria, am I'm going to be

00:28:09.690 --> 00:28:12.300
a successful person or no?

00:28:12.950 --> 00:28:15.120
If I'm still in Syria.

00:28:16.200 --> 00:28:20.360
Well, would you be successful
if you were still in Syria?

00:28:27.240 --> 00:28:28.840
I think, yes.

00:28:30.270 --> 00:28:31.920
For one reason.

00:28:34.200 --> 00:28:35.680
I made a business.

00:28:38.400 --> 00:28:39.510
I create or made

00:28:39.510 --> 00:28:44.530
a business and the company, its
name is The Golden Group.

00:28:50.080 --> 00:28:51.320
This company is

00:28:51.360 --> 00:28:57.600
a specialized in filtering the water to all the houses in my town, Hance.

00:29:02.330 --> 00:29:03.630
Do you have a time so I can share

00:29:03.640 --> 00:29:05.200
a story with you?

00:29:05.375 --> 00:29:06.655
Yeah!

00:29:09.402 --> 00:29:11.122
When I started working,

00:29:17.090 --> 00:29:21.710
OK. When I started my work there, I used to look

00:29:21.710 --> 00:29:23.560
at the villages.

00:29:29.360 --> 00:29:35.000
So, I started to convince them to buy the machine

00:29:35.470 --> 00:29:40.470
that filter the water, so just kind of marketing.

00:29:41.740 --> 00:29:44.410
One upon...one upon a time?

00:29:45.830 --> 00:29:47.730
I went to a village.

00:29:48.510 --> 00:29:50.290
It's a poor village.

00:29:51.890 --> 00:29:54.890
But, their water there, its not good.
So they don't have a money to buy the machine.

They told me, "We really want to buy this but we don't have money to buy it.

And we really need it so much." 

"Please help us.

"Please help us and we will put this machine in the whole houses in the village.

And, there was a one hundred and twenty nine house.

So I suggested to the investor that send me the machines,

So, to make them, the payment, in steps, you know?

So, in order---sorry---in order for him to sell more, to make the machine in payments not on a one payment.
When this thing will make

00:31:07.550 --> 00:31:09.070
the other villages

00:31:10.040 --> 00:31:11.640
think the same.

00:31:16.830 --> 00:31:19.250
Because of this I was able to get married.

00:31:20.600 --> 00:31:22.610
And buy stuff to my house.

00:31:22.960 --> 00:31:23.500
And buy

00:31:23.510 --> 00:31:24.490
a car.

00:31:28.160 --> 00:31:30.460
And, I was able to enroll my

00:31:30.460 --> 00:31:31.020
kids in

00:31:31.030 --> 00:31:33.270
a good schools.

00:31:38.090 --> 00:31:44.270
And the manager of the big company
that I used to take the machines from

00:31:46.820 --> 00:31:51.630
He offered me to be his uh...to be his uh...

00:31:51.770 --> 00:31:55.320
just like assistant director in Damascus
in Syria.

00:31:55.780 --> 00:31:57.470
But, I refused.
Because I told him I have my own business and one day maybe I will have more money than you have.

And he said, "Ok. Good luck. We hope so."

This is story I would never forget.

We won’t either.

This is story, since fifteen years.

Really? Mm-hm. That was fifteen years ago?

Yeah.

My beginnings, my start. It was good when I first started.

That’s why I told, "Why didn’t you ask me the question because I want to say I would be a good businessman in Syria if I were there, still there.

Because I am able to get
used to any society any

culture.

And, understand what the needs.

Ok.

That's amazing.

That's incredible. We're both very impressed.

Ok, uh...Miss Nora, he's referring to me...I am his instructor at the

public consult.

And, she saw that in me.

And she said

"One day you're going to be something in America."

OK, one last question.

Ok, um, Suppose you were able to

return to Syria tomorrow. What story do you imagine yourself telling people back
home about America and why?

Uh, there’s two, sorry I’m... There’s two stories.

First I’m going to tell them my start my beginning here. How I started creating my business

And the second story how I said goodbye to America.

And, I’ll take my old business to Syria.

I mean. I think it’s... I don’t know how to say this.

How has the word home changed for you after living here in America?

This is really good

question.
In Syria,

Back home when I was in Syria, my family was related with...with my big family, so they are all together...my dad and my mom-

I have a small house and I have a big house.

I used to have two houses. I have two houses. One of them, me and my wife and kids, and the other house with my parents' house.

Here...

Here there is no big home. There's no parents.

Your question is good but it makes me sad. Because it remind me about my mom and dad.

My mother died. I didn't see her since four years.
My father is an old man and he's sick.

Maybe I'm not going to see him again.

This things really remind me about the past.

I always am afraid of what's in the future. That I may lose my dad as well.

Thank you so much for the question.

Well, thank you very much for sharing your stories with us.

We really appreciate it and we...

We feel very honored. I mean...

It's my own honor that I be interviewed by you.

Thank you for, uh, inviting me and to
listen to my stories.

00:37:29.210 --> 00:37:32.210
Because you are the only

00:37:32.210 --> 00:37:37.220
country that opened its doors
for me and my family.

00:37:38.980 --> 00:37:41.510
So we can
continue our life.

00:37:43.390 --> 00:37:44.510
I hope...

00:37:46.890 --> 00:37:50.330
I hope in the future I will listen
of good things about both of you.

00:37:51.540 --> 00:37:53.320
And, also about me.

00:37:57.310 --> 00:37:59.920
Thank you so much.
Thank you.

— End of Transcription —