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Oral History Conversation with Yasmin Alkhal

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FROM CRADLE TO CRADLE:
Oral History Conversations with Iraqis & Syrians in San Diego
By students in PHILOSOPHY 111-07: Philosophy of Human Nature | Fall 2017

YASMIN ALKHAL
(born in Syria)

Conducted by Elona Bebla and Nick del Mundo

I'm Elona Bebla at the
University of San Diego. Hi I'm Nicholas

00:00:04.400 --> 00:00:09.680
Del Mundo. I am a senior at the University
of San Diego. Hi My name is Yasmin Alkhal.

00:00:11.760 --> 00:00:17.500
I'm a new immigrant to the United States. I just
moved three years ago. Nice meet you

00:00:17.510 --> 00:00:22.160
guys. Nice to meet you, too. So we kind
of want to start to just kind of get

00:00:22.170 --> 00:00:28.400
a little more background about your time
in Syria like maybe growing up. Could you

00:00:28.410 --> 00:00:29.560
kind of share with us

00:00:29.570 --> 00:00:34.320
a memorable story or a good memory you
have from Syria maybe something you tell

00:00:34.360 --> 00:00:37.740
regularly to people you know your first
meeting like that are from America and want to

00:00:37.750 --> 00:00:44.730
learn more about Syria. Yes.
Like what kind of memories?

00:00:44.940 --> 00:00:48.920

Anything. Kind of the first
one that pops into your head would be cool. It's

00:00:48.930 --> 00:00:54.720

a beautiful country. I
love Syria. We grew up in

00:00:55.010 --> 00:01:01.420

a safe place. Beautiful. We
had beautiful childhood

00:01:02.440 --> 00:01:09.140

but I had this decision to move to
United States of because of my kids'

00:01:09.150 --> 00:01:15.740

future here. How many kids do you have? I
have two kids. Boy and girl. Nine years old and six

00:01:15.750 --> 00:01:21.850

years old. Oh that's wonderful. So they came
with the right time. Adam was

00:01:22.580 --> 00:01:27.360

six and Talia was three. Do you
want to tell us about your kids

00:01:27.370 --> 00:01:34.230

a little bit? Adam is very
smart very smart and he's hard

00:01:34.240 --> 00:01:41.180

boy to convince about anything.
Always wondering and asking him to

00:01:41.190 --> 00:01:45.190

want to understand everything and then even when we moved here he had

00:01:45.200 --> 00:01:52.030

a lot of questions. He was he was
six years old he asked me like

00:01:52.080 --> 00:01:58.800

a very very important question about religions about culture about yeah.

00:01:59.100 --> 00:02:04.730

You can't imagine. None of my friends' kids would ask the same questions, but I'm

00:02:04.740 --> 00:02:10.930

happy I answered him. And because

00:02:11.660 --> 00:02:17.740

you have to prepare your kids-prepare yourself at the beginning to fit

00:02:17.830 --> 00:02:19.460

a new, into

00:02:19.500 --> 00:02:26.440

a new country new culture then to prepare the new generation. I agree it's totally

00:02:26.480 --> 00:02:33.090

for them it's more than more than us it's easy. But

00:02:33.100 --> 00:02:38.960

for but also as well because some some families immigrants.

00:02:40.300 --> 00:02:47.150

What I see from my friends experience. That of the family lead their

00:02:47.160 --> 00:02:53.330

kids like fit in their community, in the country, in the new culture by themselves

00:02:53.370 --> 00:03:00.210

without is little bit of guidance let's say. They were separate

00:03:01.380 --> 00:03:08.130

from their families, but I'm not saying that they have to live like back in

00:03:08.140 --> 00:03:14.680

Syria or wherever they are. No, I'm saying
it's the balance because the balance when

00:03:14.720 --> 00:03:21.660

when we make the balance in
the kids' personalities it's

00:03:21.670 --> 00:03:28.460

much easier for them for us for us and
they will be more stronger because

00:03:28.470 --> 00:03:34.040

they will be proud of who they are. So what are kind of like your hopes for

00:03:34.050 --> 00:03:37.910

your children in the future? So you told
that you came from their

00:03:37.920 --> 00:03:41.180

future, what do you kind
of envision the future to be for them?

00:03:44.500 --> 00:03:51.000

Adam should be a lawyer. He
should be. He knows that. They tease

00:03:51.010 --> 00:03:56.970

a lawyer or whatever it happened in the
house or whatever like by example something

00:03:56.980 --> 00:04:01.920

from I don't know I can't remember but it's
something from the government something

00:04:01.990 --> 00:04:08.860

happened yeah because of my papers
because it was pending case and he, Adam,

00:04:08.870 --> 00:04:12.790

is very sad and always like it's

00:04:12.800 --> 00:04:19.740

a problem for him to be honest. That
at the beginning I didn't explain to

00:04:19.760 --> 00:04:25.380

him because you were too young that we
came here and we applied for asylum case.

00:04:25.390 --> 00:04:30.120

We didn't think me and my
husband it will take that long.

00:04:32.970 --> 00:04:39.130

We did the first interview, were happy, and
then we explained to Adam after maybe

00:04:39.460 --> 00:04:45.420

almost two years this interview because he
would he kept asking, "When we're going to

00:04:45.430 --> 00:04:52.200

see our relatives? When we can
see our grands?" Then I said

00:04:53.050 --> 00:04:59.980

there are some papers we are waiting when
we get them we can leave and visit like

00:04:59.990 --> 00:05:05.700

Turkey or whatever place we can
see them. And after the first

00:05:06.320 --> 00:05:10.290

interview and they ask us for

00:05:10.330 --> 00:05:15.950

a second one. So he kept asking when
we're going to leave and I said it's

00:05:15.960 --> 00:05:21.890

pending mama, it's pending. Who is not
giving us this paper? And I say it's

00:05:22.180 --> 00:05:28.740

immigration. Sue them. Yeah he kept

00:05:28.750 --> 00:05:35.570

always saying "sue them", so I
said you have to be a lawyer.

00:05:35.580 --> 00:05:42.350

Yeah. If you would be so kind, would you mind walking
us through what you were thinking and

00:05:42.360 --> 00:05:48.250

feeling when you decided
to come to America and what that was like

00:05:48.260 --> 00:05:51.080

for you and your family. It was

00:05:51.090 --> 00:05:57.580

a hard decision. Let me
tell you, because I have

00:05:57.620 --> 00:06:04.550

a sister in law who lives and forty years
ago are not thirty years ago or almost

00:06:04.560 --> 00:06:06.200

she is now in Tennessee I have

00:06:06.210 --> 00:06:13.080

a brother last maybe twenty
years ago here so my

00:06:13.090 --> 00:06:18.360

husband, his family, most of them they
visited the United States

00:06:18.420 --> 00:06:24.830

except him. He went to all Europe
when he was young and then

00:06:25.670 --> 00:06:30.390

when we moved to Qatar we applied
for a visa because he wanted to visit

00:06:30.430 --> 00:06:31.650

his sister. He wanted to see

00:06:31.970 --> 00:06:38.720

the United States. It was a dream for him. I
wasn't that curious like him, but he

00:06:38.730 --> 00:06:44.490

was because his family lived and visited here, so

00:06:46.730 --> 00:06:53.380

he had the idea to get the visa. Two thousand and ten it was my

00:06:53.390 --> 00:07:00.160

last visit to Syria. Every year
when I lived in Qatar, every

00:07:00.170 --> 00:07:07.070

year they... I mean

00:07:07.110 --> 00:07:13.870

we used to visit Syria every
vacation every summer. Two thousand and

00:07:13.880 --> 00:07:20.040

ten it was the last time. Two thousand and
eleven I get pregnant with the Talia, so

00:07:21.330 --> 00:07:26.830

where to go because I delivered Adam in Syria. I went to my family. Then I went

00:07:26.840 --> 00:07:33.710

back to Qatar. For Talia, he
said let's go and visit my

00:07:33.750 --> 00:07:40.000

sister in law and United States. Then we
came here I had Talia here in two thousand

00:07:40.010 --> 00:07:46.880

and eleven. And it
was beautiful. We visited

00:07:47.380 --> 00:07:54.040

we visited her and then we

came to San Diego. Then it was

00:07:54.660 --> 00:07:54.880

it's

00:07:54.890 --> 00:08:01.940

a beautiful place San Diego of course. It's it's

00:08:01.950 --> 00:08:07.050

for tourists, so we enjoyed

it. But it's different it's

00:08:07.060 --> 00:08:13.900

way different from vacation place in United States to place your living

00:08:13.910 --> 00:08:15.390

in. Especially as

00:08:15.400 --> 00:08:22.380

a starting for us. That time we didn't decide to

00:08:22.390 --> 00:08:27.460

move of course. We went back in two

thousand and twelve. We came as

00:08:27.470 --> 00:08:33.710

a vacation me and my husband. We left

the kids in Qatar. Then the third time we

00:08:33.720 --> 00:08:36.900

came also all together as a family for

00:08:36.909 --> 00:08:42.690

a vacation. Then two thousand and fourteen,

two thousand and thirteen, actually, this

00:08:42.700 --> 00:08:49.420

is interesting story. He was convincing me

to move here. I wasn't like, I'm happy

00:08:49.430 --> 00:08:50.390

there because Qatar is

00:08:50.400 --> 00:08:57.250

a nice place. It's stable. You
can make good money but it's not

00:08:57.570 --> 00:09:04.480
stable as much as you're looking
for as a Syrian let's say because after the

00:09:04.490 --> 00:09:10.980
war started in two thousand and eleven
things changed for us as a Syrian. Like my husband

00:09:11.040 --> 00:09:13.870
was thinking we have to think of Plan B

00:09:13.910 --> 00:09:19.160
if something happened because you have
no rights wherever you lived there, so

00:09:21.160 --> 00:09:27.940
he said if something comes up usually
when you when you left your job

00:09:28.100 --> 00:09:35.010
or they fire you in the Gulf area you can
go back to your country or you can change

00:09:35.760 --> 00:09:42.390
the country from Dubai to
Qatar to Kuwait or whatever. Now I mean in

00:09:42.400 --> 00:09:49.140
the war time if you moved
from where you were terminated

00:09:49.150 --> 00:09:55.670
from your job you can't you can't obviously
you can go to back to Syria. And they

00:09:55.680 --> 00:09:56.220
won't give you

00:09:56.230 --> 00:10:03.100
a visa to any country. The visas is hard
for so I think he was thinking well

00:10:03.110 --> 00:10:04.710

let's think of Plan B.

00:10:05.630 --> 00:10:12.580

If something happens, we have kids.

Two thousand and thirteen

00:10:12.750 --> 00:10:19.070

when we came here we visited the kids Museum.

00:10:19.070 --> 00:10:24.490

So my kids were too young

and they were playing.

00:10:26.430 --> 00:10:31.180

Even though they were in international school in Qatar

00:10:32.840 --> 00:10:39.580

but I saw things in kids museum and he was convincing me, trying to

00:10:39.590 --> 00:10:46.460

convince me all the time then I looked

at him if you ask him I said I need

00:10:46.470 --> 00:10:53.380

my kids to grow up here. In kids museum.

Yeah because this country it's not

00:10:53.390 --> 00:10:59.970

about me. It's hard or what I was

thinking it's hard for me and my husband

00:10:59.980 --> 00:11:03.700

in our age to get into

00:11:03.710 --> 00:11:09.550

a new culture. It's hard to new

start when we were already established for eight years.

00:11:10.700 --> 00:11:17.550

In a new country, I don't want

to move. But it's not about

00:11:17.560 --> 00:11:22.770

us. I was thinking of moving
for more than one and

00:11:22.780 --> 00:11:27.470

a half year in Qatar. Should I do it or
not? And he said I cannot make the

00:11:27.480 --> 00:11:33.980

decision by myself, you have to
help me. So at the last at the

00:11:33.980 --> 00:11:38.840

end of of taking my decision
I was thinking of one thing.

00:11:40.920 --> 00:11:47.730

Should I go or not? I was studying what's
the benefits and what's the difficulties.

00:11:48.150 --> 00:11:54.920

The difficulties on me, not my kids.
So should I be selfish?

00:11:56.240 --> 00:12:02.350

Because I'm having like good life there and I'm established.

00:12:03.250 --> 00:12:06.350

Or should I start

00:12:06.480 --> 00:12:12.280

a new beginning for them, so I took the
decision. I have to do it for them that's why

00:12:12.700 --> 00:12:18.500

when I saw the
kids museum, it was amazing. This

00:12:18.510 --> 00:12:24.260

country is made for the
new generation. Yeah.

00:12:27.650 --> 00:12:34.630

So we moved. So you

00:12:34.640 --> 00:12:40.630

kind of mentioned that it's hard. It
was hard the first year it was very hard

00:12:41.160 --> 00:12:46.820

I talk told you because maybe I'm not that
to young. Don't ask me about my age.

00:12:49.990 --> 00:12:55.700

But because me and my husband
we lived like very

00:12:55.710 --> 00:13:02.560

Arabic lifestyle. Let's say, it's
not the fast circle of life.

00:13:03.600 --> 00:13:09.280

Here it's something when you wake up
from the morning until the evening you

00:13:09.290 --> 00:13:16.050

keep running. No stop. There is no way
to stop. So this, in our age it's

00:13:16.060 --> 00:13:21.970

something that will happen, we will get to
it. But it takes time. It took

00:13:21.980 --> 00:13:28.790

time for us. For me especially. Like I kept sitting one year in

00:13:28.800 --> 00:13:30.030

my house in

00:13:30.040 --> 00:13:36.080

a culture shock. Even though my
husband was pushing me. "Don't sit."

00:13:36.750 --> 00:13:42.830

Go outside like communicate. Your friends
are only Arab. You don't have to do this.

00:13:42.830 --> 00:13:49.620

And I believe like he said "go take
some courses whatever whatever,

00:13:49.630 --> 00:13:56.170
volunteer, anything. Don't sit." I believe like

00:13:56.620 --> 00:14:03.460
because your kids as an immigrant, I
saw that in my in Adams eyes one

00:14:03.480 --> 00:14:09.410
time. When they kept asking
me "mama volunteer volunteer."

00:14:10.630 --> 00:14:17.280
The first year I didn't volunteer because
of something in my paper I don't

00:14:17.290 --> 00:14:22.130
know I can't remember but like I was
relieved that I'm not volunteering anyway

00:14:22.140 --> 00:14:24.070
because I was

00:14:24.080 --> 00:14:30.860
a little bit isolated myself.
Let's be honest. Then

00:14:30.870 --> 00:14:36.250
next year they kept asking you have to
volunteer. I said OK there's no way and my

00:14:36.260 --> 00:14:41.820
friends advised me you have to volunteer
at the kids' school. OK. I went there.

00:14:43.030 --> 00:14:47.140
My kids, their kids in Poway, so it's

00:14:47.150 --> 00:14:53.860
a very good district there that's
why we lived there. The

00:14:53.870 --> 00:15:00.780
community was very welcoming, nice
people but even though deep inside

00:15:00.790 --> 00:15:06.810
me, I feel, let me say, I was
isolating myself, yeah.

00:15:07.590 --> 00:15:14.380
He was very proud and very
happy whatever I do in his class.

00:15:16.070 --> 00:15:18.190
Then one time I had

00:15:18.200 --> 00:15:24.800
a neighbor. She's from England and
another from Mexico and other

00:15:24.840 --> 00:15:31.800
American and another Iranian.
And her friends they used to do,

00:15:31.810 --> 00:15:34.290
my neighbors, they used to do

00:15:34.970 --> 00:15:40.900
a movie night in their garage so Adam came in tell me "Mom

00:15:41.790 --> 00:15:48.700
they invited your for movie night for
kids." I said "OK OK I need time. So enjoy

00:15:48.710 --> 00:15:51.960
your night." So he told me that there is

00:15:51.970 --> 00:15:58.250
a lot of mothers. You have to
come and he kept insisting.

00:15:59.360 --> 00:16:05.680
I had my drink I went outside.
There were also her friends, mixed

00:16:06.430 --> 00:16:12.660
countries, sitting there and they
opened the conversation with me. "Where are you

00:16:12.670 --> 00:16:19.280
from?" "Syria." "Interesting. 'they start asking
about Syria and our war. I saw Adam

00:16:19.580 --> 00:16:26.350
like he is very proud when
he saw me communicate and telling

00:16:26.360 --> 00:16:32.980
people about my story and and
everyone was looking at me

00:16:33.150 --> 00:16:40.070
and I have the attention. I was telling our
story and how we moved and back

00:16:40.080 --> 00:16:47.010
in Syria and he kept coming to me and
hugged me and kissed me. So I

00:16:47.020 --> 00:16:53.570
felt like if I'm strong, they will be strong.

00:16:54.290 --> 00:16:59.930
If I'm isolated, they will keep feeling
in this country that they're strangers

00:17:01.820 --> 00:17:08.780
to the end of their lives. It's working on us

00:17:08.790 --> 00:17:08.960
as

00:17:08.970 --> 00:17:14.770
a parent more than them. They will fit.
They start laughing

00:17:14.780 --> 00:17:21.260
at my language now. Wow yeah that's great.

00:17:23.369 --> 00:17:29.280

So kind so it sounds like you're making steps to get more ingratiated in the

00:17:29.290 --> 00:17:33.730

community here and things like that, so kind of like thinking back to you know the

00:17:33.740 --> 00:17:40.340

community left in Qatar you, so you left Qatar to America? Yes.

00:17:41.470 --> 00:17:46.770

Are there people that you left behind in Qatar or Syria that

00:17:46.780 --> 00:17:48.530

you're still close to and have you had

00:17:48.540 --> 00:17:53.540

a chance to like communicate with them at all? In Qatar? Yeah yes sure I'm communicating.

00:17:53.550 --> 00:17:55.470

I have a sister in law there and we have

00:17:55.480 --> 00:18:01.210

a lot of friends, so we're communicating with them. It's hard to over there right now.

00:18:01.670 --> 00:18:07.080

There are terminations from there it's you know it's hard. So my husband

00:18:07.090 --> 00:18:13.050

two days ago heard about news in the Gulf area and said "See we took

00:18:13.060 --> 00:18:19.280

the right decision all right." I think you should listen to me.

00:18:20.400 --> 00:18:24.410

And then you kind of went over it a little bit

but if you wouldn't mind. Can you tell us about the asylum

00:18:25.300 --> 00:18:31.970

process? I know you came here and I had views
to interviews and still pending I didn't

00:18:31.980 --> 00:18:37.790

get that quote to. All graduation
on the approval I didn't.

00:18:39.800 --> 00:18:45.130

Get it get approved it. So it's been think
whenever we called them my husband went

00:18:45.140 --> 00:18:51.750

to every. Wednesday maybe they
said it's pending and also

00:18:52.060 --> 00:18:57.170

many times they said it's it's very close
some of them because they knew have.

00:18:59.660 --> 00:19:06.410

You will you will hear the good news very
closely but wouldn't you think it is not

00:19:06.420 --> 00:19:12.920

pressuring you are like of course.
A lot. Sometimes it's frustrating

00:19:13.130 --> 00:19:19.550

sometimes it's for Adam and sometimes I
ignore it I just ignore I want to forget

00:19:19.560 --> 00:19:26.070

about it but the problem is OK I'm leaving
here anyway I'm leaving. But the problem

00:19:26.080 --> 00:19:27.930

is the main problem is.

00:19:32.910 --> 00:19:38.240

That. I want my kids to see relatives.

00:19:40.770 --> 00:19:47.700

Aunts Uncles Grant parts grandma whenever
he heard about any relatives he's

00:19:47.710 --> 00:19:50.450

going to visit weekend for

00:19:50.460 --> 00:19:56.190

a little bit he gets on that whenever.
Like I don't have and you would you know I

00:19:56.200 --> 00:20:02.080

don't have crackpot parents I don't
have uncle or aunt to spend time like

00:20:02.680 --> 00:20:09.260

it's very very my husband when. We had

00:20:09.270 --> 00:20:15.240

a conversation about like Kip his personality
you know I was telling him it's my

00:20:15.250 --> 00:20:21.560

husband's name is Isa So.
I said there is part it's

00:20:21.570 --> 00:20:28.480

missing in our kid's life like when we used
to get mad from our parents when I just

00:20:28.520 --> 00:20:34.850

used took care to collect my my stuff and
run away to my grave beds with it with no

00:20:34.860 --> 00:20:35.080

with

00:20:35.090 --> 00:20:42.450

a plastic bag. My clothes say my mom's
when you go I'm going to my. So

00:20:42.460 --> 00:20:48.880

this part in their lives in their personality
they feel strange I remember that I

00:20:48.890 --> 00:20:55.520

feel strength because of my grandparents
because they they blame my parents

00:20:55.780 --> 00:21:02.740

don't do this. So it's give
us something my kids does and

00:21:02.910 --> 00:21:08.210

it. Doesn't. So I want them at least just.

00:21:13.040 --> 00:21:19.680

I'm mature enough to
understand that this is this

00:21:19.690 --> 00:21:26.570

circle of life and. This time
I'm going through seven years I

00:21:26.580 --> 00:21:33.500

didn't see my parents seven years they
didn't make my my daughter so I know it was

00:21:33.510 --> 00:21:39.120

hard decision because of my kids'
future. But they would think.

00:21:40.450 --> 00:21:45.350

So now but now you know and they're here
do you think that you are around him in

00:21:45.360 --> 00:21:51.290

Kandahar and Syria will also come to America
or if they get the chance of course

00:21:52.200 --> 00:21:58.870

I have never Phew I raised him he's like
my son he's now eighteen years old.

00:22:00.280 --> 00:22:06.960

He just going to read it from high
school he went to college. Now just so.

00:22:10.700 --> 00:22:17.000

I wish like this is from my dreams
so bring him here to me to live with

00:22:18.200 --> 00:22:24.630

because after he graduate from.
College he will go to the army

00:22:25.490 --> 00:22:32.100

there's no way you have brother so he's
going to be and I don't want him to be

00:22:32.570 --> 00:22:39.110

it's yeah you have to like I
wish I can I have anything

00:22:39.920 --> 00:22:46.790

I can give you. He's one
of the main people I

00:22:46.800 --> 00:22:52.080

want him to to to be with me more
than my parents believe it or not.

00:22:53.360 --> 00:22:57.350

Because because my parents
we advised them when

00:22:57.360 --> 00:23:04.150

Aleppo went very crazy in two-thousand
and thirteen I think we said "Please,

00:23:04.160 --> 00:23:06.210

please I have a sister
who lives in Dubai

00:23:06.220 --> 00:23:11.840

a brother in Turkey." So we tell them please
go out, you have to go out, there's no way.

00:23:12.830 --> 00:23:19.300

You stay there and it's very dangerous
in Syria. In Aleppo especially.

00:23:20.370 --> 00:23:27.110

So they said no we will not
leave our house, our bed, our

00:23:28.420 --> 00:23:34.750

memories. No. If something happened in our age,
let it happen. They won't leave their

00:23:34.760 --> 00:23:41.020

homes and also I have sister who is
married there with her kids. It's hard to

00:23:41.030 --> 00:23:47.780

to move for her and they said we can't
leave your sister. We'll stay with them.

00:23:50.880 --> 00:23:55.720

So you know it sounds to me like family is
very important to you, something you value a lot

00:23:55.820 --> 00:24:00.850

and so when you were
thinking about coming to America for

00:24:00.860 --> 00:24:05.490

your children, did you like
consult any family members to

00:24:05.970 --> 00:24:10.860

talk about your decision to them. My father knew. All of

00:24:10.870 --> 00:24:16.850

them are supporting. My husband,
I remember the last conversation we

00:24:16.860 --> 00:24:23.690

had in two thousand and fourteen
before I left. I was packaging in Qatar.

00:24:26.030 --> 00:24:30.830

Already I didn't see him from two thousand
and ten it was four years and I knew

00:24:31.290 --> 00:24:36.990

when I'm moving here with my case
it will take minimum two years.

00:24:38.660 --> 00:24:45.650
So I called him and I would cry. I was
crying and he said, "Why are you crying?" I

00:24:45.660 --> 00:24:51.370
said, "Because I'm leaving and I know
that I'm not going to see you for

00:24:51.380 --> 00:24:57.630
a while." I don't know what time and my
parents are not young.

00:24:57.670 --> 00:25:02.760
My father now is
eighty-three. So he said,

00:25:05.370 --> 00:25:11.580
"Either way, we didn't
see you since four years. Go.

00:25:12.360 --> 00:25:17.260
Don't look back. Build your kids'
future. Don't look back. We're fine."

00:25:19.670 --> 00:25:25.390
Yeah even
though my father is very attached to me,

00:25:25.660 --> 00:25:31.100
very, and my mother says I moved
here like every couple days she had

00:25:32.010 --> 00:25:38.930
a dream about me. Yeah.

00:25:40.040 --> 00:25:44.740
So like doing a transition
it's been hard and all that. So besides

00:25:44.750 --> 00:25:47.720
like your children, wanting to be

strong for them, what has made it

00:25:47.730 --> 00:25:52.340

a little bit easier to transition from
life in the Middle East to American life?

00:25:52.350 --> 00:25:58.600

I don't find anything difficult
because they're young, they're young. Yeah.

00:25:59.050 --> 00:26:06.020

I told you it's not hard. It was the
right time for them to move. It wasn't hard.

00:26:06.770 --> 00:26:11.340

Is it different for Talia than Adam because
she was

00:26:11.350 --> 00:26:18.210

born in America?
Different? Yeah. Different like what?

00:26:18.510 --> 00:26:25.170

Like what field? Do you see in your family
a difference because she born here and is a citizen?

00:26:25.180 --> 00:26:30.390

And Adam has always had questions that he's so intuitive? He recently

00:26:30.400 --> 00:26:37.390

just recently he realized that
she is American and he said why?

00:26:40.850 --> 00:26:46.500

Because you're born here. We couldn't
go to Syria because it was war in two

00:26:46.510 --> 00:26:53.440

thousand and eleven. He didn't
consider it an advantage for her and

00:26:53.450 --> 00:26:53.640

that's

00:26:53.650 --> 00:27:00.500

a good sign. I'm very relieved for this
because I always wanted him to be proud of who

00:27:00.510 --> 00:27:03.610

he is, so he didn't take it as

00:27:03.620 --> 00:27:09.830

a privilege, but he just want to travel. To see his relatives.

00:27:12.460 --> 00:27:17.310

So kind of pivoting a little bit, you told us, you
know, recently, you started working about

00:27:17.320 --> 00:27:23.870

a year ago but you've been here
for about three years.

00:27:23.880 --> 00:27:27.100

What led up to you beginning
working again? Let me tell you

00:27:27.110 --> 00:27:34.090

a story. I forgot to mention this,
very important. We came

00:27:34.100 --> 00:27:40.590

with good savings, me and my
husband, but we lost everything because with

00:27:40.600 --> 00:27:44.370

our pending asylum they
left us one and a

00:27:44.380 --> 00:27:51.230

a half year. Let's
say, the first two years

00:27:51.240 --> 00:27:51.890

there is one and

00:27:51.900 --> 00:27:58.800

a half year without work permits. We
couldn't work. Me and my husband, David,

00:27:59.080 --> 00:28:05.740

so we couldn't make money.
So we kept spending from our savings.

00:28:07.800 --> 00:28:14.610

In the third year,
stayed in Gap also without

00:28:14.620 --> 00:28:21.300

work permit for almost six months.
So from almost three years because of

00:28:21.310 --> 00:28:23.230

their one and a half to two years with

00:28:23.240 --> 00:28:29.560

no work permit. So once you got those did
you start working? Yes,

00:28:29.600 --> 00:28:36.550

exactly. At the beginning,
I was volunteering. I met with the

00:28:36.560 --> 00:28:41.650

Syrian people and there I occasionally saw

00:28:43.920 --> 00:28:48.020

friends mine
and they said there's

00:28:48.030 --> 00:28:54.100

a lot of refugees who's coming
to San Diego. It looks like

00:28:55.030 --> 00:28:59.960

San Diego is going to
have a big number.

00:28:59.970 --> 00:29:06.120

They said that they were
volunteering and collecting donations and

00:29:06.160 --> 00:29:13.130

stuff. Most went to the families who live in El Cajon and City

00:29:13.140 --> 00:29:20.140
Heights, so they went there from Syria. One Syrian family to guide them.

00:29:20.370 --> 00:29:27.270
They showed them to others. They said "Do you

00:29:27.280 --> 00:29:30.720
want to volunteer?" I said "Of course I want to volunteer, so I started collecting

00:29:30.730 --> 00:29:36.670
donations in my garage and I went there every couple weeks maybe.

00:29:38.380 --> 00:29:45.310
Like our cars were so full that you can't see in the mirror. So

00:29:45.320 --> 00:29:52.180
we when they're volunteering then we had realized there

00:29:52.190 --> 00:29:58.750
are needs way more than donations, first. Second,

00:29:59.560 --> 00:30:06.490
we want to know how many families there lived there because we felt like

00:30:06.750 --> 00:30:10.770
when we, from time to time, find a family after

00:30:10.780 --> 00:30:17.760
a couple of weeks maybe you feel guilty because they were sitting on the ground,

00:30:18.020 --> 00:30:24.860

they have nothing, and you don't know where they are, so we think

00:30:24.900 --> 00:30:31.500

that we have to find a solution. We have
to know all the families, all of them.

00:30:31.720 --> 00:30:37.800

Addresses. Like when they are
arriving, who is coming next.

00:30:38.730 --> 00:30:45.670

We contact one of the organizations, first a
Jewish family, then the other and there are four

00:30:45.670 --> 00:30:45.990

coming to San Diego.

00:30:45.100 --> 00:30:51.260

resettlement agencies here and they said like
all in all there is two hundred families

00:30:51.280 --> 00:30:58.200

And on the
following few months

00:30:59.120 --> 00:30:59.540

there are

00:30:59.550 --> 00:31:06.960

a huge number going
to arrive at the same time, so the

00:31:06.970 --> 00:31:13.690

resettlement agencies are responsible
for things. There are other things that

00:31:14.580 --> 00:31:20.570

when we sit with them like OK
they have to buy for them beds

00:31:22.040 --> 00:31:28.330

and some items for the
kitchen.

00:31:28.750 --> 00:31:35.650

Also there is government assistance. It's not covering

00:31:35.660 --> 00:31:41.890

the rent and these people from

00:31:42.840 --> 00:31:49.710

the place they come from, they stayed in camps, most

00:31:49.720 --> 00:31:56.720

of them for six years almost. And then most of

00:31:56.730 --> 00:31:59.020

them they have to work as

00:31:59.030 --> 00:32:05.830

laborers, let's say, but even the laborers need cars, transportation.

00:32:05.960 --> 00:32:12.230

They need a little bit of English to communicate language,

00:32:12.790 --> 00:32:19.030

so these things need time for them. The father

00:32:19.360 --> 00:32:25.900

cannot support his family and he don't have self-transportation and he don't have

00:32:26.250 --> 00:32:32.370

zero English, so we establish our organization as

00:32:32.380 --> 00:32:35.220

a nonprofit as a part of SC

00:32:35.230 --> 00:32:41.650

and Chicago under their umbrella.

00:32:43.040 --> 00:32:50.010

There is many amazing ladies in
our team one of them she did

00:32:50.080 --> 00:32:57.010
a big fundraiser, the others start
collecting grants from places,

00:32:57.420 --> 00:33:01.990
so we supported two hundred
families with rents.

00:33:04.350 --> 00:33:08.130
Most of them now we're closing
the cars issue problem.

00:33:10.580 --> 00:33:17.360
Furniture maybe sometimes used
sometimes new, it depends

00:33:17.680 --> 00:33:23.950
on the situation. Everything.
Everything. Financial.

00:33:24.750 --> 00:33:30.720
Sorry we're talking about financially
everything we support them. And so this is

00:33:31.320 --> 00:33:36.660
something you helped start? Yes, so
when I was volunteering I was looking for

00:33:36.670 --> 00:33:42.750
a job at the same time we I got to work
permits and one of the team she called me

00:33:43.040 --> 00:33:49.930
and I attended the meetings with
their organizations. Most of our team

00:33:49.930 --> 00:33:56.610
is volunteering, yeah, so but she said, "Yasmin I know that you are looking for

00:33:56.630 --> 00:34:02.820
a job and do you like to stay

with us as not volunteering as

00:34:02.840 --> 00:34:07.750
a case manager in El Cajon?" I said, "yes
of course I would love to." I started with

00:34:07.770 --> 00:34:14.580
a part time job. It was nonprofit.
It was nothing to support my

00:34:14.590 --> 00:34:21.110
family, but I accepted.
Many people blamed me

00:34:21.120 --> 00:34:25.909
because I need to support my family. It was

00:34:25.929 --> 00:34:32.860
a challenge for me, but it was

00:34:32.870 --> 00:34:39.580
a message for me because let me say
that because I back in Qatar, the

00:34:39.590 --> 00:34:45.929
war affected me very very very bad.
I stayed my maybe one year one and

00:34:45.940 --> 00:34:51.420
a half year like in shock. I was crying in the nights and my husband said there is

00:34:51.429 --> 00:34:58.370
no news for you anymore because it was, it
was very bad for me and he said you have

00:34:58.910 --> 00:35:02.170
little kids you can't do this.

00:35:05.840 --> 00:35:12.170
And I did nothing to my
people. Nothing to my country.

00:35:12.890 --> 00:35:19.520
Even donations, let me say, because to

be honest like there is so many good

00:35:19.530 --> 00:35:25.380

people, but there is so many. We
knew that there is so many people.

00:35:26.800 --> 00:35:33.480

If you donate something you can't guarantee
it will reach down there, you can't, so

00:35:33.490 --> 00:35:40.000

I am supporting my family of course
back in Syria. You have every Syrian

00:35:40.010 --> 00:35:46.800

man, every Syrian person, I
mean. Every Syrian person

00:35:47.180 --> 00:35:53.790

has a relative who was destroyed
by the war.

00:35:54.450 --> 00:35:59.420

He have to support every Syrian person. You have to support someone from his

00:35:59.430 --> 00:36:05.050

relatives there. So when you want to support
you always can find someone to support

00:36:05.060 --> 00:36:08.810

from your circle you know, but

00:36:12.910 --> 00:36:17.810

I didn't do anything in person,
you know, personally, so when I came

00:36:17.820 --> 00:36:24.350

here and started volunteering, I reach out with
these people who came fresh from

00:36:24.360 --> 00:36:30.840

war, from camps, from suffering
I feel very blessed, relieved,

00:36:31.470 --> 00:36:35.700
to help them, so when I took the
decision to work with the SC.

00:36:35.710 --> 00:36:39.390
And at the beginning it was
hard when I went there with

00:36:39.400 --> 00:36:45.590
a part time job it was the minimum.
It was nothing for me, but

00:36:46.530 --> 00:36:53.430
I need to support my family as well.
Most of my team, they

00:36:53.440 --> 00:36:57.860
volunteer because they are established
since they born here or twenty years ago.

00:36:58.120 --> 00:37:04.800
It's different for me. It was

00:37:04.810 --> 00:37:11.780
a message also for my son. I took him
many times to the store, to pick up

00:37:11.790 --> 00:37:17.600
stuff, to drop it to the families, to give
them aid, gift card, whatever. Whatever it

00:37:17.610 --> 00:37:24.180
takes I let him do it because
he have to see what

00:37:24.500 --> 00:37:30.940
what his country suffering from
how he can help. On many fields

00:37:31.610 --> 00:37:38.550
because on some level even he's Syrian

00:37:39.280 --> 00:37:43.370
but he wasn't raised in Syria,

so he can't feel his people.

00:37:46.250 --> 00:37:51.900

He feel the homeless people, by the way.
He feel the poor people over here, but I

00:37:51.910 --> 00:37:58.630

reach level with him that he didn't feel
his people what they're suffering. I don't

00:37:58.640 --> 00:38:02.150

know why, so I let him feel that.

00:38:05.770 --> 00:38:12.260

Wow. Yeah. So I think it's probably
going to be like our last question

00:38:12.920 --> 00:38:19.630

because we're kind of running low on time
but this been awesome. Thank you, your

00:38:19.980 --> 00:38:22.550

story is so incredible. So imagine I was

00:38:22.560 --> 00:38:27.950

a potential someone who was coming over
from from Syria or wherever or from Qatar to

00:38:27.960 --> 00:38:32.810

America. Is there some like advice
or motivation? You have kids or not?

00:38:34.960 --> 00:38:41.190

It depends. It's different. let's say
maybe like potentially both.

00:38:41.200 --> 00:38:45.600

Imagine I have kids
and imagine she doesn't.

00:38:48.600 --> 00:38:55.180

If you have kids. This is

00:38:55.190 --> 00:38:59.110

harder for you from single one, first. Second,

00:39:03.800 --> 00:39:10.540

Volunteer. Work. As fast as you can
because it's, I told you at the beginning,

00:39:10.550 --> 00:39:15.460

it's something that affects you. It's
reflected to your kids. When you get used to

00:39:16.110 --> 00:39:22.130

get into this culture of this country. I
was always I feel these people, by the way,

00:39:22.170 --> 00:39:25.470

the refugees because
sometimes when I meet

00:39:25.690 --> 00:39:31.700

a family that is suffering and the
father is in depression. He's in his sixties

00:39:32.310 --> 00:39:38.650

something like this and he
he said "Why they brought me here?"

00:39:39.550 --> 00:39:46.420

it's hard for him to get into, but I
always advise them. I tell them my story

00:39:46.770 --> 00:39:53.130

and I said it's not about you now. it's
about them. Your kids when they

00:39:53.420 --> 00:39:58.760

when they learn the language, the
culture, the everything, they will guide you.

00:39:58.800 --> 00:40:05.570

They will help you. Don't worry, it's not
going to be difficult as you see now. Just

00:40:05.580 --> 00:40:05.960

give them

00:40:05.970 --> 00:40:12.190
a few years. Your kids will guide you
later, so I feel them because I told you

00:40:12.200 --> 00:40:19.120
at the beginning I stayed even educated,
I went to another country, I know English

00:40:19.310 --> 00:40:25.930
so I know I'm strong personality, but
even though I stayed in a truck

00:40:26.380 --> 00:40:32.470
for more than one year. How
about them? So I

00:40:34.890 --> 00:40:40.390
advise them what I told you
right now from

00:40:40.400 --> 00:40:47.150
the first of our conversation. I told
them the same. I told them my story.

00:40:49.900 --> 00:40:55.570
It's important because it's
very very very important when you

00:40:57.570 --> 00:41:03.670
get into the system the culture that
the country here, you will build

00:41:03.680 --> 00:41:10.570
strong kids. This is my point. If they
saw you, because I saw many people, let me

00:41:10.580 --> 00:41:14.930
say, I was looking at the
immigrants

00:41:17.380 --> 00:41:24.140
and I met people that they
have been here since maybe fifteen to twenty

00:41:24.150 --> 00:41:30.750

years. The parents, their
English is nothing till now.

00:41:32.710 --> 00:41:39.320

I saw weak kids, yes. And of course the

00:41:39.330 --> 00:41:46.170

language is the key. Of course the
language is the key. For single,

00:41:46.180 --> 00:41:50.970

it's it's it's way easier because as

00:41:50.980 --> 00:41:56.460

a parents we have many many
things to think about.

00:41:57.560 --> 00:42:02.260

Life is hard you have
many difficulties but as

00:42:02.270 --> 00:42:09.240

a single you think about yourself to build
yourself. I wish, not I wish, I mean if

00:42:09.250 --> 00:42:15.860

I were I mean if I were single like my
life would be completely different.

00:42:17.430 --> 00:42:22.220

I would study college and I'm planning to
study, by the way, I'm planning to study

00:42:22.230 --> 00:42:28.450

when I have time. When my husband can stand up
on his feet to support us completely and he

00:42:28.460 --> 00:42:34.600

doesn't need me, I will study. And I will
study photography as well. Yeah this is my

00:42:34.610 --> 00:42:41.320

dream. I will do something
for me in this country. The beauty of

00:42:41.330 --> 00:42:47.350
this country it's totally opposite of
our country. I love Syria, but there is

00:42:47.650 --> 00:42:53.740
culture here. It's different but
when you reach like forty years old you're

00:42:53.750 --> 00:43:00.390
half dead. You're too old, but here it's
the beginning. Forty years old,

00:43:00.430 --> 00:43:07.170
it's the beginning. I'm not
forty don't ask me that, not yet.

00:43:07.180 --> 00:43:13.990
You can do whatever you

00:43:14.000 --> 00:43:20.990
want whenever the age you are. Yeah.
This country like this so it's

00:43:21.000 --> 00:43:26.220
not too late for anything here. I
mean this is the good side.

00:43:27.830 --> 00:43:33.560
Yeah. Awesome, so thank you
so much. No problem, thank you so much for

00:43:33.570 --> 00:43:38.850
having me guys. I hope my story, my
English, was helpful for you.

— End of Transcription —