

Interviewee: Nargis Fatima

Interview: January 22, 2007

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

Interview with: Nargis Fatima

Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi

Date: January 22, 2007

Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

UQ: Oral history interview of Nargis Fatima on January 22, 2007, at the interviewer's home, Houston, Texas, conducted by Uzma Quraishi of the University of Houston.

Why don't you go ahead and begin by just introducing yourself and telling a little bit about your background?

NF: O.K., my name is Nargis Fatima. I came to the United States in 1975. My husband was studying here so I joined him here and that is where I lived the last 32 years. I am a Houstonian, maybe Texan by now.

UQ: What about your childhood?

NF: My childhood has been just beautiful. I lived in Karachi, Pakistan. I have 5 siblings all older to me. I am the youngest of them. But I had a wonderful, wonderful childhood and even my teenage life was wonderful. I got married early, so I came back here.

UQ: So, you married in Pakistan?

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NF: I was married in Pakistan. My husband was studying here so I joined him in one year.

UQ: And you came here in 1977 you said?

NF: 1975.

UQ: What was your initial impression of Houston?

NF: It was a very beautiful place but I was very homesick because I came from a large family and it was just me and my husband in a small, one-bedroom apartment which just looked like my bathroom back home so I was kind of very upset about it and I didn't know how to react. But, in due time, I realized this was the way life was over here. So, I just did well and things went on from there.

UQ: O.K. Did you make friends quickly?

NF: Well, actually, I had very few friends because there were very few Pakistanis here and since I was new here, I was more comfortable with my people. So, there were just about 8, 10 families and I did mix with them real fast. I became friends with them. And then slowly as I started having kids, my circle extended, and we went forward from there.

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UQ: O.K., so when you say there were 8 or 10 families, do you mean 8 or 10 families that you knew but there were many more or in total, there were just 8 or 10?

NF: In total, there were about 8 to 10 families in Houston. That is all there were.

UQ: Of Pakistani origin?

NF: Of Pakistani origin, yes.

UQ: And how was your interaction with people of other ethnicities?

NF: I never had a problem because I went to British school back home so I was very liberal minded, I was very open to meeting people and I have never had a problem with anybody. They were black, white, Caucasians, whatever - it never mattered to me. I guess I was just that nature that I would just make friends easily so it wasn't like who is white, who is black, religion, race - nothing mattered to me.

UQ: Did it matter to them?

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NF: No, actually, it did not. I think they accepted me very well and we became friends pretty fast. We used to go out for lunches and all. I don't think either of us had problems.

UQ: So, after your life here, did you start working soon or did you stay home?

NF: No, actually, after I got married, I did not work for a while. Then, I had my first baby. My parents took the first kid back home so I was kind of lonely, I was missing her so I started working in a bank but it was for a very short period of time. It was like for a couple of months. Then, I went back to bring my kid back. So basically, I really did not work that time.

UQ: Did you have good interaction with your neighbors as well, with people who lived close by you?

NF: Yes, I did. They were really nice people and they tried to help me with where the grocery stores were, what you need to buy and how you do things, so they taught me quite a bit.

UQ: So, you found that Houston was a very tolerant place back in 1975?

NF: Oh, yes. Definitely.

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UQ: No regrets?

NF: No regrets.

UQ: What would you consider some of your greatest successes during those early years?

NF: Actually, it was really very nice and I had very beautiful experiences with the people, with the community, you know, and my best experience was the first time I went to the doctor's office. I did not know how to react because it was very different in our country. So, it was like I had to wait there for a couple of hours because it was a gynecologist and they take about a couple of hours in the waiting room. And when I went in there, I was like, what am I supposed to ask her? If I was pregnant or not? I was shy because we never used to talk back home like that. So, I said, "I think I am going to have a kid," and she is like, "Oh, are you pregnant?" I am like, "I am not sure." So, she was like, "O.K., let's have all the tests and everything done," but I think that was the one experience that I have never been able to forget because I felt so dumbfounded. I looked like a fool, that you are going to a gynecologist and you didn't know what to ask her because we expected her to know that I am pregnant.

UQ: Just by looking at you?

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NF: Just by looking at me because see, back home, we never did those things. So, I am like, O.K., what am I supposed to tell her? I think I am having a baby. So, that was the most beautiful experience. I thought it was so funny, I have never been able to forget that.

UQ: Do you remember any particular struggles that you had after arriving here.

NF: Struggles? Actually, I think I can mold myself very fast with people and I really never felt a struggle until when my kids were born and they started growing up and that is when really the struggle started, was raising the kids here. Otherwise, in those days, I think I got along with everybody, I had no problems in any other way. So, I think it was really basically later in my life when I was facing the struggles of life.

UQ: O.K., so how was it a struggle to raise your children here?

NF: It is different because we are Muslims and we had to raise them in a very Islamic way which was becoming very difficult because life was going faster than I expected to. Though the kids went to girls' schools, private schools, it really didn't matter because there were all kinds of people there, so how do you stop them? So, it was very difficult when my oldest daughter, she came to me and she was only in fifth grade and she came and she said, "Mom, you need to sign these papers." And I am like, "What are these

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papers?" She said, "Oh, this is about sex education." And I am like, "Oh my God. You are crazy. I am not going to sign that." And she said, "Mom, everybody is going to this class." I was just shocked because it seemed like I was feeling shy to ask the doctor if I was pregnant and here, a 12, 13-year-old kid comes to you and tells you, "Mom, we are having sex education." It was very difficult. It really was very hard and I did not know how to react. I went to the school, I talked to the principal, I talked to the teacher, but it seemed like it was just another course, class in school. So, you have no choice but to sign it and let it go. So, that was the beginning of all the struggles I had to face after that . . . with the kids coming to the teens and drinking and smoking and boyfriends. Those were things that we never faced back home. As a teenager myself, I thought I had the most beautiful time because there were no hardships. We never had stresses. We never had peer pressure. But over here, it was just horrible because that was just the beginning of my struggle in America.

UQ: So, did you feel kind of uncertain of how to handle those things because of the fact that you had not gone through those same pressures?

NF: No, I wasn't uncertain because then I realized if I had to raise the kids here, I would have to understand what they do over here and how they do it. The only thing I did - I was 24/7 close to my child. I was the room mother. I was always on the field trips. I was always there by her side. So, I knew what was going on - who she was mixing with, who were the good kids, who were the trouble makers. So, I was there

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basically 24/7 around her. And it just seemed like I was fortunate that she was a good kid that listened to me. She did not rebel to it and, you know, she would always say, "O.K., mom, if that is what you think, I will do. " So, that really helped the situation. But it was like I was more stressed out than the kid was because you don't know how to really handle the kids. So, that is what happened. That is really where my struggling started.

UQ: So, after arriving here, nothing as far as the community or anything like that? It was all easy?

NF: No, really, it was very easy. Like I said, I think I can get along pretty fast with people. I don't hold things with them like, oh, they are black or white or any other race or religion. So, I think it is very easy for me to make friends. So, I really never had any of those problems.

UQ: What was the social activity like among those 8 or 10 families that were here originally?

NF: Oh, we used to be at each other's homes and we used to like – at Christmas – at our Eid [an Islamic celebration, similar in stature to Christmas], we used to eat together. One of the friends would arrange for lunch or dinner and we would all meet together and bring ... we would have a pot luck and bring our food with us and sit down and laugh and talk about back home and what all is happening in Houston. And basically, that used to

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be our gatherings. And then, in a couple of years, the community extended and we started meeting more and more people and now it is so out of hand that, you know, we can't even keep up with them. But I think personally, we had a wonderful time. And it was really stress-free, even with the kids growing up. But now it seems like we are catching up with time, we are catching up with what is going on and it is very difficult to handle it now.

UQ: Did you find that [one's] background within Pakistan as far as the ethnicity even inside Pakistan, the different languages, dialects that are spoken or even the religious differences, was that an issue?

NF: No, I didn't feel that. The only thing was, like I said, I was very open-minded to it so I was not one of those typical Pakistanis or coming from a background where people do care about religion, do care about their own friends, that they are Muslims. I did not ever feel that. I really think that I adjusted very well with it except, yes, I was very homesick in the beginning because, I came from a big family and it was not easy to handle that. But besides that, I did not have any rough times or any hard time or struggle with anything.

UQ: O.K., and were there any organizations established at that time?

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NF: There was Pakistan Organization but it was, of course, a very small group and it was basically run by students of University of Houston and it was a very small gathering and the funny thing is when I came to America, they had a function and I think it was Independence, 14th of August function. And I had just been married a few months. They came up to me and they said, "Oh, you know, we are having a modeling show and we want to show our clothes," and they knew I had the original wedding dresses and the saris and all and they said, "Can you please come and display those?" And I am like, wow, modeling was such a big deal because we could never do it back home. And I said, "O.K., sure. No problem." My husband never had a problem. And we had a fashion show. And I am sure they should have pictures out there. I don't even know who the president was at that time. We had a wonderful time. We did have a small gathering and they had the fashion show and everything there.

UQ: So, was that community separate from the 8 or 10 families you are talking about? Were there a set of students at U of H?

NF: There was a set of students and they invited the Pakistanis that were there [in the city]. And there were more students than the families. So naturally, it was quite a good... I think approximately 300 or 400 kids plus the families because we didn't know the kids because they were really just bachelors. So, we never found out where the kids were. They all lived in dorms, apartments. So, we basically only knew the families because we were all married couples. So, we socialized with our married groups.

UQ: So, these young people were mostly young men?

NF: There were a few girls. Very few handful of girls. But mostly they were boys.

UQ: Do you think that being a new immigrant affected opportunities for you here at all?

NF: No, I don't think so. I think there is a lot of opportunity. The only thing is I never took the stand to do anything really because I enjoyed being a mother and I was so involved with my kids. So, I never looked into it that, you know, I should do this or I should do that. But I see a lot of people and somebody or the other is doing something or the other over here and they are very happy with it. So, they feel like, you know, what they are doing here, we would have never been able to do back home. Like even the jobs that they are doing, working at stores or grocery stores, back home, it would not have been respected. Our girls especially are not allowed to do things like that. We are more overprotected there. But over here, it seems like you do anything, it is acceptable and it is fine. So, I think the people are very open to it now and say, O.K., they have to make a living, they have to make ends meet so they don't have any problem. And nobody really bothers about it anymore no matter where you work. So, that is the way it is over here.

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UQ: Did you find that you had a lot of explaining to do to people as far as when they would see you and hear you speak - where are you from, how long have you been here, those kinds of questions?

NF: Yes, they did. They did because, of course, I do not have an American accent so they always say, "You have an accent, where are you from?" And they would really welcome me. They never said anything bad. They never tried to put me down. They knew I was a Muslim girl and they did not really give me a hard time at all.

UQ: O.K., how about with your daughter, when she went to school for the first time?

NF: When she went to school, I think the only thing that helped me for her not going through that is I was so involved in school with the kids, with the mothers, with the faculty, with the principal that they could never think that she is somebody else. Because she was born here, she was being raised here. The religion was the only thing that was coming between us but that also, the way I think we tried to handle it, we were more open about it. Their religion is theirs, ours is ours. So, you do not bring religion between friendships. So, it never did affect her. Religion was never . . . I don't think any of my kids ever had a hard time with that. They were more open and acceptable but I am sure, you know, we are immigrants and we are different people than they are. So, I am sure there are some kids who have that in mind.

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UQ: So, would you say your closest friends back then were of the Pakistani community?

NF: Actually, it was both. I did not mind mixing with Americans because they were my neighbors. So, they were my friends, too. But then, of course, as we moved on in life, they moved on and, you know, my community became larger. I am a very, very Pakistani person. It is not that I want to put America down or talk bad about Pakistan. I think I have learned a lot here. What I have learned here, maybe I would not have been able to learn back there and I am open about these things so I feel it is easier for me to adjust myself here and I don't have any regrets about that.

UQ: What about your children? Did you find that growing up, they identified more with American children and found friendships closer with them or with Pakistani relationships?

NF: Actually, they did feel more comfortable with American children because out of 24 hours, 8, 9 hours, they are at school, a couple of hours at home where they are doing their homework or going to our community functions and then at night, they go to sleep. So basically, they were raised into Americans. So naturally, the mentality would be very American. No matter what you make them do - you can make them very religious - but in the back of their mind, they are American kids because they are born here, they have been raised with Americans. The only thing good about them is they have picked up the

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good things from the kids. And whenever I felt I was uncomfortable with kids who would be doing wrong things, I would tell my kids and I would guide them and pull them back and say, "No, this is not what I want you to do." So, it did not really . . . I don't think my kids went through a hard time with that. I think they adjusted very well and they were comfortable with the Muslim community plus the American but yes, they are more American, open-minded kids.

UQ: And their friends tend to be more or both?

NF: Both. But it is sad that our culture or the way we are, we are very closed-minded in a lot of areas and with the kids, me as an adult, I can understand that. But as kids, when they are being with Americans and they see the community, they are surprised because our kids are taught by the parents, oh, you know what - I don't like that family so don't be friends with them. And that is the sad thing because this is parents' grudges against each other. You cannot involve the kids. And mostly, people do that. So, my kids felt more comfortable with Americans because they said, "Mom, why are they against or why are they talking like that?" So, they feel more comfortable because these people are very open and blunt. So, they do get along with Pakistanis, too. Now, as they are growing up, they are more into our own culture now and religion. Maybe they are gone over the stage of being teenagers and having fun, so now they are more settled than they realize. But I still think they have very high respect for Americans as well.

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UQ: Going back to when you came here, how often did you visit Pakistan? What was your connection?

NF: I used to go every 2 or 3 times a year because my parents lived there. I think because I was so homesick, I was so spoiled. I think it was so funny. I went every 2, 3 times a year but then, my father had a stroke. He came here and then I stopped going. Now, it is like if I go in 3, 4 years, it is a big deal because my whole family is over here. So, there is really . . . I love shopping over there. That is the best place to shop and have fun but because of my parents [living here], I don't have a home to go to. I have friends but it is nothing like parents. So, I really don't go that often anymore.

UQ: O.K., so back then, you went frequently?

NF: Very frequently.

UQ: And your communication - did you call, did you write?

NF: Yes. I used to call my parents. At that time, it wasn't easy to get them because we had to call the operator and the operator would tell us, "We will call you and connect the line in 2 hours," so we had to sit near the phone . . . O.K., when the operator will call. It used to be such a hassle. But we used to write letters. I used to write to my parents. My father always preferred me writing letters because he could read it over and over

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again. So, he would not really want to talk to me over the phone. He would just collect my letters. Oh, you know, she has written this and this about the kids, about herself. So, yes, we used to communicate very often then, too.

UQ: Can you tell about your parents?

NF: My parents? Yes. My parents originally are from India. They are from Hyderabad Deccan. They come from the *nawab* family which is the royal families of India. My father, as a young kid - I think he was 12, 13 years old - he went to London. He went to Manchester University. He graduated from there. And yes, he did get an award from the Queen's father - I think it was King George. Most probably, you should know better - somebody. And he got an award for his good work. Then, he moved to Pakistan and that is where we all settled. Actually, he went back to India, got married, and settled in Pakistan. I had a very high respect for my father. He did the best. He was a very firm person and I think he was because the way he was raised was more British than an Indian, so I think that is where we get that open-mindedness, is because of my father because he was open, he was blunt. Religion and everything was in its own place but it wasn't like he would pick up on petty things or talk about petty things or would not allow us to do that either. And he did protect us. He was very overprotective with that. So, I do miss him. He did pass away about 20 years ago. But I do have a mother who is still living. She is 85 years old now. She is still living with us, with me, with my sister, with my brothers, so she is around. So, that is a blessing.

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UQ: What was your father's line of work in Pakistan?

NF: He was working for Pakistan railway and then he was working as a CEO in the motorcycle company which was Lamberta. And that is where he retired, from there.

UQ: And your mother, did she pursue an education?

NF: No, in those days, there was no such thing as education [for women]. My mom was a full-time mother, housewife, and basically, that is how her life was. But I think with 6 of her kids, she did not have time for anything else. But we were raised pretty well and we were kind of well-to-do so we all had our maids, we had our servants, we had a gatekeeper, so we lived in a very different world over there. I enjoyed that. That is why when I came here and I was in a one bedroom apartment, I am like, I am dead - I can't even walk! And I used to tell my father, "Dad, when I take two steps, the bathroom is there. If I take three steps, the kitchen is there." And, of course, my father was laughing and he said, "But you have to adjust yourself. This is married life and that is what America does, that is the way that people live there." But it was like I would cry and cry. I was so homesick. I would tell my husband, "Why did you bring me? This is not even bigger than my bathroom." And he was like, "You know, it is O.K. Someday we will get a house." But, of course, after one year or so, I just realized that everybody else was living the same way. So, I was just nobody different. But it was a shock for me

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when I saw the apartment. I am like, Oh my God, what do I do here? But then, you know, you start realizing, you grow up and you realize, O.K., this is the way life is here.

UQ: You mentioned that you went to British schooling, so did you read and write in English, I assume . . . did you also read and write in Urdu?

NF: Yes, I did. Actually, I did. Right now, I can still write in Urdu and I do speak Urdu fluently because I am mixing a lot more with the Pakistanis and some of those women - not some really, basically, a lot of the women, they do not speak in English so I do not want them to feel inferior when I am talking to them because I have been an English-speaking person. So automatically, when I start talking my language, I end up talking in English and then I say, O.K., what am I doing? I don't think that is nice, because people do get offended. They feel like you are trying to put them down. Even women of my own age group, they feel like, you know, she is trying to show off and I really don't mean to but it is just sometimes the way you are. So, I do speak Urdu, I do speak English, and I do write but really not as much because I am completely out of touch of writing in Urdu. But yes, I do, and unfortunately, my children don't. They do speak Urdu but it seems like now actually, they are trying to learn more Urdu than they ever thought of doing it. But they will catch up, I think, one day.

UQ: So, you said that you actually did write letters back home to your father, in Urdu?

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NF: No, but I did it always in English. I always did in English. With mom, I used to talk to her over the phone because she would not speak in English so I was not very good at writing in Urdu although I did write but it would take me forever to write so I was like, O.K., make it short - let's talk on the phone. But with father and with the rest of the family, I always wrote to them in English. So, we never had problems communicating that way.

UQ: Do you have any of the letters by chance? Do you keep them? Are you that kind of person?

NF: Actually, really, no, because I moved quite a few times so I really do not have those letters.

UQ: When you came here, did you find that maybe keeping a diary or something like that of your experiences helped feed that loneliness?

NF: No, actually, really, that was not a way of thinking then. You know, diaries and all . . . when I hear my own granddaughter talks about a diary, I am like, we never thought that. Actually, I don't even remember we knew about diaries because that was just a different lifestyle then. So, we never cared - whatever happened, happened. So, you know, we remember those things.

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UQ: About when would you say you remember the community really started to change from the 8 or 10 families that you knew?

NF: Now, this is in 1975 when there were 8, 10 families. From 1975, take about 5 years . . . by 1980, it started growing and it started growing. And in 1990, it seemed like Houston was full of our people. And every where you would go, you would see a new face. First, it was like we were 4 people and we could hardly see each other unless we would meet each other. But now, no matter where you'd go, which store you'd go to - grocery stores, shopping malls - you always found our people there. I mean, it just seemed like I don't know where they came from but now, Houston is full of our people. It is a very, very large community now.

UQ: So, you are saying maybe by 1980 we got . . . when was your daughter born?

NF: 1977.

UQ: So, by the time she was born, would you say there was a . . .

NF: Yes, it started slowly growing. Yes, it did start growing. And yes, as she was growing up and, of course, the community was growing. But now, it seems like there is no end to it. They are still growing.

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UQ: So, she had some friends of Pakistani origin to play with when she was little?

NF: Yes, because my friends, most of them were my age group so they were having the kids at the same time as I was. So, the kids were growing up together.

UQ: Do you have any photographs or anything like that that you kept through your very early days here in Houston?

NF: I am sure the only photographs I remember are when my first daughter was born and that was the one thing that I think I always had the camera ready to take her picture, with every step that she did.

UQ: Just out of curiosity - the families that were here, did they welcome you when you first arrived here because you were newlywed and in such a small community.

NF: Yes, they did. Of course, I think, at that time, we all were new here and we all were missing to talk to our people, we wanted to talk in our language, we wanted to have common things but naturally, with Americans, we couldn't. So, it was like we would be really excited to see each other whenever we had a chance to. But now, it seems like we try to run away from the Pakis because there is so much going on that you can't keep up with it. But yes, I do have the early stages of my life with my kids. I do have those photographs.

UQ: O.K. Is there anything else you would like to finish up with?

NF: I think we are very fortunate we are over here. We should take advantage and learn the good things of America and we should encourage our children to be professionals because those are the things . . . nowadays, girls do need to become something. In my days, I remember it was like you do high school in your time to get married and go away. But nowadays, even the girls do not want to stay home and get married. They want to have a profession - doctors, lawyers, whatever their interests are. And I think that is the best thing that they can learn from here which they are and they are progressing in. So, I think it is really nice if we can really learn the good things from here. And we are fortunate to be here. We have our own freedom of speech, the way we live, nobody bothers you, nobody says anything, you run your own life. So, there are really a lot of good things that we can learn from Americans.

UQ: O.K. One last thing that you reminded me of. You talked about getting married. Since you were in Pakistan, your husband was here studying - how was that marriage put together?

NF: O.K., I did have an arranged marriage, I did have my engagement and then I had my *nikkah*. *Nikkah* is the wedding actually but after the *nikkah*, he left for Houston to continue his education and I was living with my parents because that is the way we do it

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over there, unless there is the formal way of giving away the girl, which took place in Houston. It was actually not even mine . . . I didn't even know them . . . it was my brother and my husband who knew this family, the Kazi family, and that is where actually I had all my [formal] giving away ceremonies take place. And, like, they took care of me like their own little sister and they gave me away to my husband. And that is how, we got married and then he took me home.

UQ: So, the marriage took place in Pakistan, the actual wedding ceremony and you knew him in Pakistan or did his family know your family?

NF: Actually, he was my younger brother's friend but mind you, the way back home, we do not mix around with guys. We were not allowed to be around guys and it just seemed like I was more liberated than he was and they were a more conservative family so there was just no way I could even talk to him. I was just told that this was the guy you need to get married to and that was it. That used to be the final word of the parents.

UQ: So, there were no conversations, getting to know each other?

NF: No, no, there was no such thing. Not at all. We would see each other from a distance. He was more shy than I think I was because he came from a different background than I was. But definitely that marriage did work very well. And it was arranged by the parents. I think they did make the right decisions. So, I had no regrets

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on that. I was kind of scared because I was a little outgoing, more modern, more open-minded about things but he never gave me a hard time with that. He never said, don't do this and don't do that. So, that really worked out very well.

UQ: So, when you came to America, did you come by yourself?

NF: Yes, I came by myself. It was a long flight. It was not fun at all. Of course, you don't know what to do in Customs and what you answer people but you have to have your visa. And I am like, O.K. So, I had all the papers. And the only thing that was good - that I could speak in English - I think that has helped me a lot because now since I am working with the Pakistani organization, I see some people coming in who do not speak English. They have such a hard time at Customs and Immigration. And then, the Immigration people do start thinking that, you know, there is something funny about these people - I don't think they are the right people and I don't blame them but yes, it does make it very difficult for them. So, that is one thing that was good - I could speak. So, I think I got away, though I didn't do anything wrong, but they are asking the questions, "Why are you here?" "How long are you going to stay here?" whatever. Things like that. And I had all my paperwork so I really had no problems with that.

UQ: Where did you arrive in America?

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NF: New York. It was the flight from Karachi to New York, from New York to Houston. So, my immigration was done at New York and everybody scared the hell out of me that New York was hard and they question you. Actually, I was not guilty of anything. I wasn't trying to do anything wrong. So, my father said, "You just go ahead and answer them truthfully whatever it is." And that was really the best way out. There was nothing to really hide. So, I had no problem with Immigration. And everybody . . . "what happened?" I said, "Nothing. They didn't give me a hard time. What are you all talking about?" I even bought some frozen food from back home for my brother and my husband because they did miss the food there and the desserts and all. I had everything planned and I thought like maybe they will throw it away but they did not. They did not bother me with it. They said, "O.K., that's fine." So, I really didn't have a hard time at all.

UQ: And applying for a visa was easy to do?

NF: Applying for visa was the only thing is you have to be at a certain age. They do not give it to very young girls. They feel like they are going to go and never come back which used to be the case, of course. So, that used to be . . . we had a little hard time getting the visa but my father said, "That is the only way you are going to get it. You have to be honest about it, whatever your age is." And I think it really was a miracle to get it because my father was sure that I was not going to get it.

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UQ: Were you just too young? What was your age?

NF: I was only 17, so I was too young.

UQ: And what was the age . . .

NF: I think it was like 18. So, he said, "Maybe you will not get it but we'll try." And it worked. So, it wasn't a problem. I got the visa. That is when I came.

UQ: Did you know of young girls who had ever left Pakistan and not returned?

NF: Those are the stories I have heard. I personally do not know any of those but I did hear the stories that, you know, people go there and they don't want to come back and they live illegally. And I think in those days, it wasn't really that difficult because they were very easy-going about immigration and people coming from other countries. Yet now, it is very difficult. So, that is how it is.

UQ: So, first you had your marriage ceremony or *nikkah*, then after that, you applied for a visa?

NF: Yes.

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UQ: Then you came here and then you finally were able to live with your husband?

NF: Yes.

UQ: What were your feelings on the flight over here? Nervousness?

NF: Actually, throughout the flight, I was very sick. I was feeling very drowsy because I do not like heights, basically. I was sick and I was very homesick. So, throughout the week, I was crying because I wanted to be back home. And the minute I arrived here, I was like, "I want to go back. I want to go back." And my brother was like, "You are married. You are not going back." But yes, I think we don't realize when we live with the parents how you are attached to them. Even being at that age . . . I think being the youngest one in the family, I was pampered a lot and I was very close to the family and I realized it once I left Pakistan. When I got on the plane, that is when I really realized . . . because of 5 brothers and sisters I have . . . we all lived together. So, it wasn't one kid was more important than the other and when you are away, then you start realizing that you were given as much love as the others were. And that was a very, very hard thing for me to do.

And the sad thing is when I called back home after 1 month and I told my dad I wanted to come home, he told me not to. It tore me apart. And I was like, "Baba, how come you are not letting me come?" He said, "No, don't come right now. We are waiting

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for *Eid* or something, then I'll call you." Then, after another couple of months, I said, "O.K., when am I coming?" And then, he said . . . he made excuses. And I am like, I am thinking, O.K., it is not a financial problem. I know my parents can afford to send me a ticket. I know my husband would somehow manage to do it on a credit card so why was this happening? So finally, after 1 year, I visited them and I was very upset at my father and I said, "Why did you do this? Why didn't you let me come?" And the thing he told me, he said, "That was the time you needed to work [on] your marriage and if you would have come back, you would have never gone back," because he knew I was not comfortable with the apartment and the lifestyle was not what I was getting there. And he said, "If I would have called you [here], I know you would have not gone back."

So, I didn't realize it and I was like why is he always saying not to come and I know he loves me so much, but it was . . . these are the things I have learned from my father, that when children get married, it is their time to settle down, let it work it out between themselves. They don't need anybody to say . . . and as parents, now my daughter is married and I realize that you do get emotional - if you see your daughter hurt or you see her being upset about something, you jump on it because it is just a natural reaction. And that is when I tell my children, "Do you know what my father did? I hated it at that time but he did the best," because most probably, I would have not come back because I was very homesick, I came from a big family with so many brothers and sisters - we were always fighting and laughing and having fun and good and bad times - I was very lonely here. So, that is what I teach my kids - that, you know what? It is the time for you to make your marriage work and that is the best way to do it. You keep away

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from in-laws, keep away from parents. Especially the parents will get emotional so you keep away from all these things. So, it was very difficult. It was very difficult.

But now when I sit down and think back, I have learned a lot, what he taught me, how he taught me. Things that kids say, "Oh, mom, you are being mean," but you know, we are being mean at that time but when you sit down and think later on, "Oh, you did the right thing for me." So, that is what children are supposed to learn from the parents. They should not just jump to it and say, "Oh, you know what? My mom is being mean," or "My dad is being mean." Because later on when they mature, they grow up, they do realize you did the best thing for them, because I do not think at all that any parents would hurt the child unless they really are psycho. I don't think any of them can ever do that. Yes, it is hard for the children because they just want to jump and do it and we try to hold them back but when they grow up, they realize, like my daughter, oldest daughter says, "Mom, I never realized what you were doing. I hated it and I told you I am not going to let my daughter do this, I will let her do this. And now, I realize you were the right one, you said the right thing." So, you appreciate it. It takes a little time but you get appreciated later on.

UQ: You had one brother here when you arrived in Houston?

NF: Yes.

UQ: And he was married?

NF: No, he was not married. No, he was not married.

UQ: Did that make it a little easier to have someone?

NF: Yes, but like I told you, we were raised so differently. We never interfered into each other's problems. He would watch me very closely and actually, he would side with my husband more than he would side with me because, see, that is the way marriages work. If you side with your sister or your brother, you know, it really tends to break and worsen it than make up the marriage. And he would always tell me, "No, you are just jumping to conclusions. Don't worry about it." But he would keep a distance and watch me closely and guided me. But he was never a part of little ups and downs and arguments. He never was. So, I think that was a good thing that I appreciated of him that, you know, as an older brother, he watched me but did not try to get upset at my husband and have a hard time. I mean, you start disliking each other or you have your own opinions about people and he never did that.

UQ: Did you have some particular hopes for coming to America? Once you found out that you were coming, was there any specific dream that you may have had?

NF: Actually, to tell you the truth, back home, we [girls/women] are not raised to have dreams. We really are not, because we live the way we live and that is the moment we

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live in. We are never told, "Oh, when you grow up, you have to become a doctor or a lawyer or a business woman." You don't. I was never raised with any of those things because a couple of times when I was in my first year of college, somebody gave me a job to do and they asked me if I could model for their silk company. And my father was like, "I will disown you. What do you all think? What are you going to do, go show off your body?" Because that was the mentality then. That is how they protected us, that our girls cannot do it. And we were never allowed to work. So, I never even thought, oh, I am going to go to America and just become a star. That was just not in our mind. So, we were like O.K., you know, you need to get married, settle down, have a family life and that is what basically we are taught. As girls, we are taught that.

Yes, for boys, the parents tell them become a doctor, become a lawyer, become an engineer. Those are the things that the boys are taught. But in those days, no, there was no such thing. I did not have a dream like that. I knew I was married. O.K., so I am going to be married and I am going to have kids and I am going to be a housewife. Basically, that is how I was raised. And I had no problem with it. But now, you know, we encourage our girls. I encourage my girls, "O.K., make a profession. Do something. At least get your college degree because for any good job, you have to be a college graduate." So, yes, now I encourage it but I don't remember my parents ever doing that. Even if I would have been a dropout in high school, they wouldn't have cared because our thinking of our girls - girls are supposed to get married and settle down. So, basically, that is how our life was back home.

So, there were really no dreams. But I think I learned a lot. As you grow up, as you mature, as you have kids - you go through the problems and struggles and raising them and teaching them and getting into fights with the kids. And then, of course, all the threats the kids give. "I am going to run away. I am going to leave home. I am 18 and I can do this." So, this is one thing that I do not agree with the American law. I am very against it because 18, they are very young. They are very young to be given the right. At 21, they say, oh, they are legal age to drink and I am like, yes, at 21, you can go drink and kill people because they are kids. They are not all that grown up. And that is my only complaint that I have. I wish they could change the laws because they are hurting their own people. They are. It is scary when I tell my 20-year-old son, "I am sorry, you cannot go out on the weekends," because I don't know who the hell is going to drive into you. There might be drunk drivers out there. There might be kids with guns. And I don't know how they have so much freedom of getting all these guns. I don't know where these kids get guns and they threaten each other. So now, it seems like it is very scary and I don't know why the rules don't change. I think they should change the laws. I think instead of 18, they should keep 21. I mean, at the age of 16, the kids are driving. How much sense do they really have? And when people get hurt, who is supposed to question that? So, that is sad. That is the worst thing that I am seeing now because, you know, the kids are just on the street doing what they want to. They are not scared of the law. They don't care. They have the money. They have the guns. They have the cars. And they are the legal age.

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So, at the age of 18, if you are a kid in a school, he or she has a right not to let the parents know what the progress report is. And actually, my son who is now of course, 20 and he messed up his two years because he went to the Marine Academy, which he really messed it up back there, I found out that I cannot get his progress report until he signs the paper. And I was so upset. I threw a fit in the counselor's office. I said, "Excuse me? What did you say?" He said, "Oh, he is over 18. So he has to sign and release the information to be given to you." And I am like, "Can you please call him from his class?" I was really, really upset. I was like, I am trying my level best to get this kid graduated, work with this kid, meeting with the counselors, and then I hear, "Oh, I am sorry, I cannot give you his report card?" And they did call the kid. I was really angry. I was very upset. And I said, "Amir, can you please sit down and sign this paper right now?" And, of course, he is scared of me anyway, he did sign it. I said, "Did you tell them not to send it?" He said, "No, Mom, I didn't know about it," which he did not know because these are the rules of school. So, kids don't care what it is. He didn't know about it. And I said, "I am going to be so upset at you if I ever find out that I am not supposed to know," because he can skip classes and I will never know. They can be out over there smoking pot or doing wrong things - I would never know because he is over 18. And I am like, I will make sure how the hell I will find out what you are doing in school. And that is when they started giving me the information. So, those are the things really I think - we are giving too much freedom to the kids at a very early age. And I really hope they could change the laws. If I could, I would really be there to do anything to change the laws because these kids are too young to be out there. We are giving them too much

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freedom at a very early age. Except for this really, basically, I don't have much complaints and this also I feel now because my kids are at that age, so I am seeing what they are doing, what is happening. So, that really bothers me.

UQ: Did you have any involvement in any of the cultural organizations, the starting founding of the Pakistani cultural groups or even the religious groups? Any of them at all?

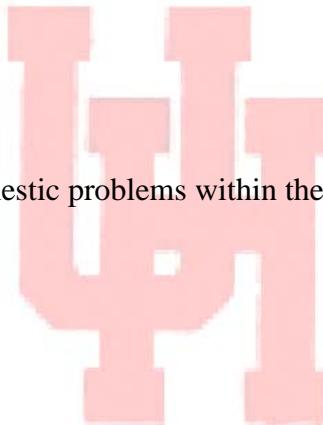
NF: Actually, not in the very beginning but right now, I am working with the Pakistan organization of Greater Houston which is PAGH and I am the joint secretary there. I was the chair person for the women's committee in PAGH which was 2, 3 years ago, and then they brought me up to the joint secretary and we do all volunteer work there. Ghulam Bombaywala is the president at PAGH. And we work hand-in-hand. And we have been trying to help a lot of people with all different issues - from marriage to divorce to separations to family abuse to family violence - you name it and we have it on hand. And it is sad to see these things happening but we try because we cannot take the law in our hand, we can only try to do the best we can. And then, we do recommend the lawyers so they can go through the legal procedures.

(End of Side 1)

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that is one thing that we are doing. Even in Ramadan, the month of fasting, we go ahead and deliver food for people who cannot afford to get groceries for that month.

NF: Yes, like I said, we try to help all these people and most of the things that we do, nobody even knows of it because there are families who don't want to be talked about because they feel ashamed that they are poor and what people will talk about them. So, we do this on the side with only a few bunch of people that we work with as volunteers. Whether it is cold, hot, rain, sunshine, it does not matter. What we have to do, we still go ahead and do it.



UQ: So, PAGH helps the domestic problems within the community?

NF: As well.

UQ: Did they used to do that or is this a new . . .

NF: No, this is something very new that Ghulam started and yes, we were very interested in having a Pakistan center, a cultural center that we did not have for all these 30 years I have lived here. We never had an organization build their own center which Golam did. It is almost near completion. We have worked very hard on it. It is a \$1.5 million building. We have worked very hard to get this thing started. It should be ready by the mid of 2007, and we will be having a grand opening for it most probably on March

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23. But we are not sure about the date yet because we do want some dignitaries to come and be a part of it.

UQ: What would you say the main focus or function of PAGH is today?

NF: Basically, honestly, what we want to do is we want our kids to be under one roof. What is happening is our kids don't have a center location to go and socialize. Our kids, our girls and boys both, what is happening is they are having outside marriages. They are getting married to Christians, Jews and blacks and it is not that I am against any of that but when we do have a religion difference, it does matter in the long run. People think, oh, you are being prejudice. It is not a matter of being prejudice. I think they are as good people as we all are but the thing is, it doesn't work in a long-term relationship because as you grow older, then you say, "Oh, my religion is better," "Your religion is better," and what happens? You end up in divorce and who suffers the consequences? The children do. Is it really worth it? Is it really worth doing this?

So, we do want our children . . . and our children tell us, "You know what, we don't have a place to go so naturally, we cannot find another Pakistani boy or a Pakistani girl, so we will just go ahead and marry whoever we come across." So, for one reason, and as a matter of fact, Islam does not stop us from letting the children socialize. No. With boundaries. Yes, and we do have the boundaries, we do have the chaperones. There is nothing that will be done out of line. And we do watch them very closely. And, again, we are trying our best to do this. We had a New Year's party. We had a band come in

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and play because, yes, the children are very much into music and we had a band come in and there were like 1,200 kids. 1,200 kids at New Year's Eve at Pakistan Center. I think this was one of the more successful function we have had a PAGH. We wanted our kids to be off the street, off clubs, off drinking, which we achieved. That was the biggest achievement and we felt good. The kids were dancing and singing but you know what? There was no drinking, there was nothing happening, there was no hugging, kissing because we had everybody watch the kids. And we felt good. And, you know, maybe some kids might have liked each other and maybe later on, they can get married to each other. So, I think that is the most important thing, is to have people under one roof which we have not been able to do for 30 years and now, we have come to a point where we are successful in doing that.

UQ: What was the earlier function and focus of PAGH before this phase now where you are working on Pakistan Center? The earlier, when you first came, do you know . . .

NF: Really, what it was, it was PAGH from day 1, I came to the United States but they never did anything, they never had any functions. All we used to hear is everybody is fighting to be the president there, for a name, which people do not get it (the opportunity to make a name for themselves] back home. That is just the fact. So, they were fighting and it was just known as one of the really bad organizations because these people don't know anything but to fight with each other, curse each other and this had to change. And it did change with Ghulam's reign. He did change a lot of things. And, of course, as an

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organization, there will always be an opposition and there will be always good and bad talk out there no matter what you do. So, we knew one thing - as much as we were criticized and put down and pulled back from making Pakistan Center, with the opposition, it helped us go forward with it. We were like, O.K., you know, they think we cannot do it - I think we can do it. So, that really helped us. Actually, the opposition helped us because they pushed us to try to defeat us and said, 'Oh, you all are losers and you can't do anything,' and now we feel proud because we did it. It is there. You can see it. You can feel it. It is right there. It is a reality. So, people will talk and will always talk. So, that has really never come in our way.

UQ: So, prior to this . . . do you think that change came with Ghulam Bombaywala coming into power but prior to that, there wasn't so much of a social focus?

NF: No, there was never anything happening. There really wasn't. We knew there was an organization, we knew there were always some little fights going on but basically, we never had any function. Now, out of 12 months, we have 12, 14 to 16 functions. We have Women's Committee, we have Youth Group, we have Senior Citizens and Senior Citizens have the most fun because they have their luncheon every first Sunday of the month. And you should go and see them. You will love it because they are all older people. They are sitting, they are talking about their sons, their daughter-in-law, their son-in-law, even their own problems, their health, and they have a blast. They socialize more than the younger groups do. And it is so sweet to see them together. And I think

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this is one thing our parents need because, you know, they stay home, they are not very educated, they don't work, and they are old and they have their own hard times, their own problems - with the son-in-law, with the daughter-in-law, which is very natural, and that is the only outlet. They look forward to the first Sunday of the month. And they all will be there. Rain or shine, they are there. And I am like, O.K., I think they really want to have . . . and I think they deserve it, they really do. I mean, after all they have done for the kids, I think this is the best that we can do for them. So, we get thrilled seeing them . . . they have little musical evenings. Sometimes, they have some poetry over there and, you know, they have their own little thing.

UQ: So, you have something going on for the senior citizens, you have something going on for the youth . . .

NF: And something for . . . a women's committee. We have speeches, we have speakers come in, we have talks. We talk about health.

UQ: You also have health clinics as well, right?

NF: We do have health clinics as well, yes. So, you know, we take the kids to sports - the Rockets games, you know, baseball games and we take them once or twice a year. And we plan that every year. And we have been doing it for the last 4 years. So, so far, the kids have achieved a lot from us. They like to come to our place. They give us

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suggestions. "Auntie, can we do this?" "Uncle, can we do this?" And we went to the Rockets game. I was in charge of the teenage boys and I was like so confident that I could handle them because I am very open to the kids. I laugh and joke with them. They said, "Auntie, we want you to be in our group," and I am like, "O.K." So, I know they would try to play games with me. I was like with these kids and we had different groups. There were some small kids, all age groups, and we all had chaperones and everybody, the leaders, and while everybody is going up, they see all these cheerleaders. And naturally, these are teenage boys . . . "Auntie, can we please, please take a picture?" And, you know what they wear! They [REDACTED] are barely wearing anything. I am like, "You guys are going to get me into so much trouble." And I know because I have kids. I know kids enjoy for at that moment. "Oh, that is so bad." I know that is how our mentality is supposed to be but I am not . . . I know this is a phase they go through. "Auntie, please can we take a picture?" And I was like, a couple of times, I told them no. The third time, they looked so cute to me, I was like, these are just kids. This is the age they are at. I said, "O.K., do you know what? Go there fast, take a picture. I am standing right here. And come back." Oh my God! They got such a thrill out of it. I mean, just standing with the cheerleaders. It is not like they were hugging. They were just standing with the cheerleaders and they wanted to show off about it. And that was the end of the party, the cheerleaders go on home and the kids go on home. They just wanted a memory - they are going to remember, oh, we had fun. And then, of course, I heard a lot from everybody else . . . "What the hell were you doing over there?" And I am like, "You all gave me the wrong group! They knew who they could _____ and they did." But, you know, they

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were safe with us. We came home safely. They went home safely. That was the biggest thing. And all these little things happened on the way, you know, but we had a wonderful time.

UQ: So, what is the membership of PAGH?

NF: It is \$10 a year.

UQ: I guess I mean the number of members.

NF: We have about 1,500 members. That makes about 32 because you add wife, husband and, 2-3 kids.

UQ: Per member family?

NF: Per member family, yes.

UQ: O.K. Do you know about how many Pakistanis there are in Houston offhand?

NF: What I hear from other people, it is about 50,000 to 60,000. So, I am not really sure count-wise how many there are.

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UQ: O.K., but about that many.

NF: But I am sure there are.

UQ: And growing.

NF: And growing and growing, yes.

UQ: And Indians, do you have a lot of interaction with the Indian culture?

NF: I think Indians are approximately almost the same but I am not really sure about them.

UQ: O.K., does the Pakistan Cultural Group do anything with the Indian cultural organization?

NF: As a matter of fact, we have recently started doing it. We have been inviting the Indian singers or Indian speakers, Indian ambassador whenever he is visiting, to come to Pakistan Center and, you know, whatever functions we have. So, we are going hand-in-hand and trying to do more and more as time passes by.

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UQ: And your own personal life, when you first came here, did you have interactions with Indians?

NF: Yes, I did and there was no problem with that.

UQ: So, just because Pakistan and India cannot get along doesn't mean that coming here, there were any problems between individuals?

NF: No, it wasn't then and even it is not now. Again, I feel like it is all how a person personally takes it. Some people, even Indians, are very prejudice of Pakistanis and some Pakistanis are very prejudice of Indians. And I don't see it that way. I basically take them as human beings first. I have never bought the religion between me and them and maybe that is the reason I get along with people - because I feel religion is something very personal. What I do, what you do is nobody's business because we all have to answer to God. So, if they are doing something wrong in their religion or following the wrong religion, it is not our business. And unfortunately, we all try to take that on our hand and be the judge for everybody. That, we are not supposed to because we are not God. He is the one who is going to judge and I feel like there might be somebody who is not of the same religion as I am, might be a lot better and might go to heaven than I would. So, who am I to sit and judge people and say, "You know what, oh, she is going to go to hell because she wore a certain dress." I feel personally . . . yes, I think everybody knows their own religion, what is right and wrong. Like me myself. I know

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hijab [the Islamic injunction for a woman to dress modestly and cover her hair] is a must in our religion - I respect that, I don't do it. That is my personal thing. And I am not ever going to justify and say, oh no, it is wrong because some people do tend to do that. Even our own Muslims. [They say] that "No, no it is not said this way and you are interpreting it wrong," which is not true because basically, *hijab* is a must and we don't do it. That doesn't mean I am going to sit and say, "Oh, you know what, Uzma? You are doing *hijab* so you are a bad person, and you are wrong." You just cannot do that to people. I feel if I am wrong, I know I am wrong, I accept I am wrong but, you know what? I have to answer God and some day, God will give me the patience to do it. Some day, I will be in a position to do it which, at least I have that in the back of my mind but I am not going to sit and put anybody down because of *hijab* or because she is a Hindu woman, she worships idols. I don't think God has given us the right. So, we should always say, do you know what . . .

As a matter of fact, my father had told me that I still do it and maybe that is why God is by my side helping every step of my life, is always at the end of the day at night, I always pray for forgiveness, that you do not intentionally try to hurt people and if somebody has hurt you, instead of having evil feelings for them, try to pray and say, "God, please show them the right path." And I do that. I do it religiously because that is subconsciously in my mind. And I am like, you know, let's not hold things against people because I feel like everybody, Uzma, nowadays, have a very hard life. Everybody is very frustrated, very stressed out, in a lot of ways. In marriages, in wealth, in health, with children. Everybody, every one of us are going through a difficult time. What is it

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to sit and argue and fight about things or put each other down? But there are people who brainwash people and they do get brainwashed. And that is where all the trouble starts. If you stop a person and say, "O.K., do you know what?" Like some people came to me and said, "Why did you call this woman in your party, you know she backbites you?" I said, "You know what, she meets me know she talks about other people so I am sure she talks about me but do you know what? Knowing it also, I know one thing: she meets me very nicely and I am not going to hold it against her. If she is backbiting me, she has to answer God, not me." So, I think it differently. I wish our people thought it differently. We have to leave people alone. [REDACTED] We have to let them live their own way. They know religion. It is not that they don't know. They all know everything. So, why are we judging? You should just keep the friendship as far as they are fine with you, you are fine with them, you respect each other, that's it. They are not bringing food on your table, you are not bringing food on their table. What is the fight? There is nothing. So, but people do it and I guess they will do it until the Day of Judgment so we won't be able to stop it.

UQ: Probably so.

NF: Yes, probably so. So, if you try to keep that open mind and always to let go, let go. My kids are like, "Mom, why do you always say it is O.K., it is O.K., mom? It is not." And I am like, "Don't worry. Do you know what? God knows your intentions. You can try to do everything to prove to people, they still will not believe you. If they

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don't want to, you cannot make them believe. God knows your intention. He is the one who will help us. So, you don't have to go out trying to prove yourself to be a better person. You can't. You have to be normal just the way you really are. And it will show you. And people do make out, oh, this is a good person, this is a bad person. Just the way you communicate with people and you talk to them and you show yourself. The way you present yourself."

UQ: O.K., I think we are going to end it here then.

