

Tacoma Community History Project  
University of Washington Tacoma Library

Aida Mohajer

May 1, 2020

**FILE NAME:** chp2020-03\_interview1.wav

[Shadyar Omrani]: This is Shadyar Omrani. and it is May 11, 2020. I am interviewing A. Mohajer and I need to have her consent. A., do you know, and do you give me your consent that you are being recorded transcribed and will be published by me for the University of Washington library.

[Aida Mohajer]: Sure. Yes.

[Shadyar]: And are you aware that this is a class activity.

[Aida]: Yes.

[Shadyar]: Please tell me about yourself, introduce yourself, tell me about your name, where you are from and how old you are.

[Aida]: So, [I am] A.. I am 42 and I'm coming from Iran.

[Shadyar]: What do you do in the United States?

[Aida]: Right now, I am working in a food court as a simple laborer.

[Shadyar]: Where do you live?

[Aida]: I live in North Carolina.

[Shadyar]: How long have you been in the United States?

[Aida]: Since 2013, the end of 2013

[Shadyar]: And you are now a US citizen.

[Aida]: Yes.

[Shadyar]: So let's go to you and your background. Let's go back to the time you were born. Where were you born and tell me about your family history.

[Aida]: I was born in Tehran. My father was born in the north of Iran, Gilan. His father was the mayor of one part of Gilan, Astaneh. And they were kind of like not completely religious but very, kind of like classic family. My mom family were working, all of them were working with the Queen and King system. My mom originally was from like I believe Tabriz. They could speak Turkish also, but they'd been living in Tehran forever. I'm talking about her father and her mother. So, she was born, not in Iran [Tehran]. I don't remember which county because my father, my grandfather was kind of like working in that county. But yeah, they were living in Iran [Tehran] for a long time. So, my mom was from Tehran and she also was working with the King and Queen's kind of like system. I don't know exactly what they were doing. I mean, I did not go to the details with them, but mostly my family from my grandfather to like Uncle and Aunt and those people were all kind of like involved with the previous King and unfortunately, Queen's system.

[Shadyar]: You mentioned about the religion and you said that your father comes from sort of a traditional religious family. What religion specifically are you talking about?

[Aida]: Islam. Shiite.

[Shadyar]: Shiite Islam? And then can you tell me about what is that tradition, how far if you practice it you would be called religious?

[Aida]: Yeah, my grandfather's family were not that much traditional because even my grandma and my grandpa's family also after like Reza Shah order to just like not wearing Hijab [Kashf-e hijab: The law to ban Islamic veil militantly enforced by Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1936]

[Aida]: My grandma and my grandpa's family voluntarily just did not have hijab anymore. So it was not like completely transitional. They were kind of semi transitional just practicing like Islam or praying at home or going, I don't know, Ashura Tasuaa [The two Shiite religious days with rituals commemorating the legacy of Shiite's 3rd Imam and 72 members of his family's martyred in Karbala, Iraq]. Some of those kinds of things, but they were not actually like really extreme about it or sensitive about religion. My, my uncle, my and my father, none of them practiced anything at home. But my grandma, my grandpa were kind of like just praying at home. They were not that much traditional I can't say that.

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[Shadyar]: Did these traditional customs affect your life, also?

[Aida]: Actually, I can say people with that background were kind of confused like they did not know they are kind of like following Islam rules or do you want to be participating to the kind of like really modern Western culture, did you not know which one it's their favorite they wanted to be completely up to date in this society and in the other parts they were grown religiously. So, they did not know what they're doing, exactly. Yes. That kind of like confusion affected my life

also because even though my father did not want to practice extremist Islam, he believed in some patriarchal system which is coming from his religious view.

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[Shadyar]: OK. And you talked about your mother's side and both, your father and your mother's side. They were themselves immigrants to Tehran originally, so was your father, born in Tehran or in Astaneh?

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[Aida]: My father was born in Rasht [near Astaneh] and then they moved to Tehran when he was very little.

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[Shadyar]: What was their experience of immigration before getting married. Do you have any idea what they came through?

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[Aida]: As I said that conflict between being religious or kind of like following West kind of idea of being modern, and made them to move from Astaneh to Tehran. My grandfather did not want any of his kids to get married within Astaneh or Gilan because he did not like the culture. He thought like the Patriarchy system or all the kind of like religious conflict types is going to affect their kids so he moved to [Tehran] pursuing a better future for his kids he was traveling between Tehran and Astaneh. He had the kind of like business in Astaneh and my grandmother with his all kids were living in Tehran. So, I can say that one was also coming from that conflict, they did not know which one they want to be like, religious, [or] modern. So they moved to Tehran pursuing kind of like different style of life and in that view, my uncle, my uncle they joined, kind of like a different kind of path with my father and other people, like my father tried to be a businessman after his Mandatory army kind of serving was dawn. When he finished his Mandatory army service. One of my younger aunts, she was a journalist and my uncle was working in some sort of organization that was kind of like servicing Kids. They tried they tried to be different, but I don't know if that that happened because of the immigration, but yeah.

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[Shadyar]: Let's go to your parents. Now they're grown up in Tehran. And they meet each other and they get married. Tell me what happened?

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[Aida]: Unfortunately, they met in a very disgusting event in Iran. Even though, for some people who believe in monarchy system it was a kind of like fancy event Jashnhaye 2500 Saleh [2500 Years Ceremonies]. As they told me as I heard they met each other there. My father was serving the army, mandatory service, and had to go there and my mom was kind of, as I said, my mom's family were part of like monarchy system. My father was a Army guy like generally army so they met there and they started dating my mom had three kids before my Father. So, my father was single never married but they got me. I mean, after I don't remember how long they told me before Iran Revolution, they got married.

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[Aida]: After my mom was pregnant with me, my father's conflict about a religion and modern life became a kind of like a challenge for my mom. They had so much of the fights. They did not know what they were doing. They would go to bar, dance, do this, do that. And then they come home, they would fight. So, my mom was born and grown in too much freedom and not having any responsibility and any sort of principle toward her life, but my father was in the middle, some sort of responsibilities and some sort of like religious view about some of the things. So, it was not a successful marriage and then they even practiced Erfan [spiritualism]. So, they tried. But they were not successful. So as the story has lots of evidence, my mom cheated on my dad that with the person who was working for my father. the accountants of my father's company. So, then it became a kind of like really huge problem that my father was always carrying that kind of trauma with himself. My mother tried to kill my father to take over the custody, because according to the law my father had the custody and my mom was not able to see me so she tried to kill my father and that one was the kind of like the most challenging stupid crime she has done to work my life so I cannot never, ever forgive her about that.

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[Shadyar]: When Iran and Iraq War started about a year and a half after the revolution. in 1981 you were a kid, probably getting ready to go to school. How did that affect you and your life. Do you remember any?

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[Aida]: Revolution itself affected my life a lot because most of my family were kind of fired from the system, those members of the family, they were working for the government. I'm talking about my father's family. Aunt, Uncle and everybody there. And then my father. My grandfather was a mayor. And my grandma was always afraid that they're going to come and arrest all my uncles and aunt and they do something about it. If you remember, it was a huge execution. Everybody who was involved with the government, they would execute them with no reason. I remember that my grandma was always, always, always worried about it so me hanging out a lot with my grandma I remember that anxiety and then after that, we had family members that they were kind of like very leftist communist. After like two or three years, I remember the government were pursuing those people like to just put them in the jail. I remember that anxiety of my grandma, my father, my aunt. That they were kind of like they're going to arrest this person, this cousin, these family members. So I clearly remember those kind of things but about my mom family, while they were separated, my mom's family, a couple of them end up in the jail and they were tortured with the system and they tried to flee from Iran and they went to Denmark and different European countries, my grandpa never went back. He abandoned like the house and everything he had, because he was afraid of execution.

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[Aida]: Then Iraq. Well, it was, it was horrifying because I remember we used to live in Tehran. My mom [her step mother] was taking a shower. It was me and my sister and my little brother, we heard something. That was sounding like the window is just like breaking down and we thought it is the wind. It's kind of like hurricane coming or something like that and my mother [step-mother] is in in the shower, naked and she opened the door. And she said, "the window was

open. That was wind?" and I was like, "I don't know". We went checking but the window was not open. The second time was more terrifying. My mom came out of the shower naked. Just grabbing a towel and putting something in and grabbing us like running from the third floor to take us downstairs. And in the same time, my father was calling home. My mom did not answer the phone after the bombing was done and the sound was over. So, he called and he said, "Just have one suitcase put whatever you need in there and we're going to North of Iran". Because it was kind of like Iraq was attacking Tehran, bombing Tehran. So we had to leave this school with leave everything and go to the north of Iran staying there for two, three months or I remember that was kind of like impossible sometimes to move to the North of Iran, we would go [...] the basement. We would go stay there with all the neighbors. Think about it. We were kind of in one apartment six households, staying in the basement and cooking there, sleeping there, eating there. It was bad. It was bad watching neighbors dying sometimes because I remember in one year. We used to live in Rasht. They bombed the neighbor and we went over and we saw the everybody was dead and the house was destroyed. It was always fleeing and going somewhere, you remember that. So, it was bad. It was sort of like exciting as a kid to be with neighbor hanging out with all the family and neighbors and in the same time. like watching those neighbors who died or the places where kind of like bombed and destroyed the houses that they didn't never exist anymore and the family crying and being kind of like afraid of bombs. So, it was bad. It was a bad memory. And you remember that the same Iraq was attacking Iran, we had lots of executions by government also. So, thinking about those execution, my family had several people leftist in the fear of government arresting them and killing them, they had to flee. Some of them went to Turkey, some of them other countries. They were kind of like immigrants with the bad situation with no money. And then my family being related to the previous system even my father's family because my grandfather was like mayor, so it was it was bad. It was always a fear if Iraq is going to bomb us or government is going to is going to put someone in the jail or kill them or show something is going to happen. It was it was a bad fear the side all the fight my mom and my dad had about everything and it was not a very peaceful situation for kids to grow up there.

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[Shadyar]: Now, tell me about your middle school, your teenage time, which was after the war and the new system, you know, it was after Khomeini's death. So, the second era of the Islamic Republic and things changed. But how did it affect you? What happened to you? What decisions did you make in your life as a teenager?

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[Aida]: After the [peace treaty between Iran and Iraq] my father's business went bad. Because, well he owned the business. After that peace kind of like situation everything was changed, prices started to changing and lots of people in business started like committing suicide and lots of things happened people gave up their life and he had to file the bankruptcy. See, so I remember that challenge. And then he became a partner with a guy that a couple of years later, he committed a fraud. Also, it was not really pleasant. It was a challenge with the business and challenge with me growing up, understanding that I want to pursue art. So, think about it. I don't, I don't remember anything about my mom, and I did not know anything that my mom's major was art. She loved art. So, I'm a teenager, I want to pursue art. I love theatre. I love music I want

to go to the piano classes; I want I draw pictures of my favorite singers those all just like, reminding my father piece of my mom. So, my mom used to paint too, my mom just used to draw, my mom used to play piano. She loves theatre. She loved art so me not knowing her but going the same path. It was going kind of like hurting my father so he did not try to fight with me about it but he sort of like did not let me to go there, like me getting all the good grades. I'm begging my father "Dad, I need piano. I want to go to piano classes", and my father was able to afford it. He did not want me to do that so it was always like, why I'm learning some things why he doesn't let me go into the kind of like drawing and painting, kind of like classes. I want to go there and learn art. He was like, "no, not now. When you are older, I'm gonna let you go. Next year, get good grades. That did not happen until it was the end of like Middle school and I had to choose the major like which major. I want to go to the high school for I have freedom to choose my favorite kind of like major, I went for art when this school was giving people tour to go choose their kind of high school, I went to all the art high schools. So, my favorite part was theatre and I wanted to learn everything about the art, music, everything so when we sat down, talking about which high school, I want to go, he told me "you know there is a better way to go to the art major going from science, why the art High School. No, it's not good. That's bad. Bad girls go to the art High School, not the good girls. The good girls go to science or math then for university they choose to go to art. Well, you know, we don't have permission to choose. It's the father's kind of decision and you have to follow it.

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[Aida]: He did not let me to pursue whatever I wanted to pursue, even though I was really good. So then dating started in them high school so dating is bad. It's not something good girls do so. I fell in love with the guy I went, I don't know. I was like, I'm in our was like 16,17, something like that. The guy was fired from university because he was a political activist, my first boyfriend and he was also an artist, playing guitar, knowing how to just like play piano singing, those kinds of things. And the political guy and the guy. I mean, you know, that's the kind of like favorite guy. So yeah, my mom told him about my dating situation and it was bad. He hated me for doing that. I left the house. I went to my aunt's house for a month. And I told him I'm not going to go back. I want to go back to my mom. It was a time that they started like my mom came back when I was 15 and I rejected her. Then when I wanted today, I was like, okay, my mom had much more freedom. I'm going to go there. So I tried to make my mom and her family and understand if I can have my own kind of like freedom in that part of the family. They were not having kind of freedom, they were kind of having too much freedom. It was not the freedom I was looking for. My definition of the freedom was like going to classes choosing my stuff going to some of the birthday parties, hanging out with my friends, dating couple of the guys, talking over the phone. And my mom's freedoms was like EVERYBODY IS SLEEPING WITH EVERYBODY, cousins, they were all sleeping together. So, it was like, oh my gosh! I don't know, but it was kind of like bad. I did not want to hang out with them. I was like, oh my god.

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[Aida]: My father tried to make me to go to university of Tehran, even though I wanted to go to the University of Tabriz as I did not care where that university would be. I just wanted to go far away I got to the point I was like okay, I'm going to study science. If you let me go to the north, or to the south, I don't know, the West, wherever it's not close to you and he told me, you cannot travel, you cannot go to other kind of university, you have to go to the university of Tehran. I did

not want to go for science beside. I know that was kind of like the fight it started actually was a very bad fight, but we were fighting.

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[Shadyar]: Oh, you did not go to university because you did not want to do what your father was telling you to do.

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[Aida]: Yeah, because I had good grades all the family were expecting me to go to a very good university, I was like, okay, that's your dream. So, I'm not going to take any test. I did not want to be graduate from science or anything like that. So I started fighting with him in the way I was fighting with my future actually.

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[Shadyar]: So, let's go to the decision you made as an alternative to going to university. What did you do, you didn't go to university? So, what did you do?

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[Aida]: It was after that Iran and Iraq peace. My father's businesses started going down, and then we try to move to the north of Iran, so it was cheaper [and] was better for starting over. So my father started business and I started working in his store in his business. Then I became too good. I had my own store managing, selling, buying, doing everything. So, I became a businesswoman. I [was] always very successful going to Tehran. Bride[']s clothing, wedding kind of like store. So, I would buy everything by myself. I'm sell them by myself and I did not need his help at all. I was managing a business by myself. It was so much of the money coming through that business. It was so much of the money and it was very successful. My father was terrified, like, are you kidding me! So, he took away my business. And then he wanted me to be married. My father wanted me to be married with one of his friends' son. So, they talk to each other, because they were friends and they made a decision that I'm a good kind of candidate to go to either Canada or [the] United States getting married [to] one of the sons that I confirm. But I was dating. At that time, my ex-husband and I was like, why would I get married to someone, I don't know.

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[Aida]: When I told my boyfriend, he was like, do you want to? I was like, no. So, I introduced my boyfriend to my father. And my father knew. I want to flee from home, and he was like, you can go, you can go do whatever you want to do. You always wanted to go to like Europe to pursue whatever you want to and you hate it here because you didn't have that freedom. I was like, Yeah, not that way. And my father asked me, Are you dating anyone. I was like, yeah, this is my boyfriend. So, I never wanted to be married to my boyfriend. I did not have a picture of getting married. I was too young. I was trying to find myself in business, or I don't know, somehow, going back to the university for art. I was in the middle of like finding some way of making my future. So, he told me one day you either get married or you go the way I am telling you to go even with your business or whatever you want to do. You're going to be under my control, which one do you want to do. I was like, I'm gonna get married to my boyfriend.

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[Shadyar]: What year was that?

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[Aida]: I don't really remember I was 21, 22, I believe, very young. It was kind of couple of years after I was finished with my high school.

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[Shadyar]: So, it was the year 2000 or 2001. Tell me about that marriage and your first and only child.

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[Aida]: Yeah, the marriage. and he was a boyfriend. I had a boyfriend before in Teheran and after I mean in high school and after high school I had so many boyfriends and I never had sex.

00:58:16.740

[Aida]: With him, I started having sex, and one of my fear not going to Dubai and getting married to those brothers was like, I'm not virgin, they're looking for some virgin sending them to Europe. Many of my friend told me. Okay, get married. Go there and have your freedom and choose whatever you want to do. I was like, No, I don't want to do that, I want to fall in love with my first marriage or first love. The second feel was like, I'm not virgin, why would I go to Dubai what the guy is going to tell my father.

01:01:20.550

[Aida]: We [I and my boyfriend to whom I got married] did not move with each other. I was just like, legally married and I was living in my mom's house and he was living in theirs. So, we didn't have the [wedding] party yet.

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[Aida]: For the first new year, we were in a party and he started beating me up. So, I wanted to be divorced after a month, I was legally married to him because he changed his personality. His character was completely changed as soon as we got married. I told my father and at the same time, my father beat me up so bad, like, because I said I want [get divorced]. He told me if you want to get divorced, I'm going to kill you.

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[Aida]: After three months I was getting ready to fill out the application for University. I was pregnant and I was not even able to go to the classes because I was always sick and nauseous and started getting bigger and bigger. I was terrified having a baby because I did not want to be married to that man and I did not want to be a housewife. I did not want to be a mother. I was not ready for that I was planning for a future. I was too young. But I'm a mother. Now I need to make another person. How do I do that.

01:10:57.480 --> 01:11:07.350



[Aida]: So I started working in the cosmetology, nobody knew that. I started tattooing eyebrows. I started clicking and selling a stuff, because I expected myself to be independent. So, I was making a lot of money. Even I was making a food for home. I was also making food to sell.

01:12:39.840

[Shadyar]: So you left the country. In what hear?

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[Aida]: Learning about others woman's life and how they are suffering even much more than me, not having any rights, made me to saying how bad they are living that life even mine was painful days was kind of like portraying me how they're dealing with that situation.

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[Aida]: And I started like working and helping them with different kind of situation, taking them to the doctors, finding lawyers for them. And then I started being curious why women in Iran don't have any sort of rights. I started reading. I started researching. I started learning. I started understanding that I need those rights to help myself [and] help people.

01:15:10.800

[Aida]: It was the first year of the one-million-signature campaign. I was reading about it through computer and online reading a little bit, learning a little bit. I saw one of them [members of the campaign]. I was like, Are you a member of the one signature campaign. I want to come to a meeting, and she gave me a very small notebook that bill on to the campaign. And I started reading about that might be the laws that it was about women's rights out in the law.

01:17:30.870 --> 01:17:41.040

[Aida]: So yeah, and then I he started, like I said, gathering signatures. Some sort of being involved at the 1 million signature campaign. Nobody knew that I had almost like I think 10, 11 of those notebooks and five, six pages of the papers to gather signature. And then I started working like that and in other ways, like hiring lawyers, talking to the people.

[Aida]: 2009.

01:26:59.340

[Aida]: When the green movement started well I was involved. I was in different kind of demonstration with going out with the guys I knew. They members of Mousavi's campaign. So, they took pictures of me and they gathered a lot of documentation together. And a couple of my friends got arrested and they were looking for me because they saw me with a couple of them.

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[Shadyar]: I need to know how immigration affected you and your daughter especially and most importantly, I want to know about the COVID-19's impact. In 2009 you left the country. You went to Malaysia.

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[Aida]: Being [an] activist, being against the system, demonstrating, talking about it, so then I made a decision. I'm going to Turkey, I'm not going back to Iran. I went to Turkey.

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[Shadyar]: So you landed in Turkey in 2011.

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[Aida]: So, I had a strong case. I went to the United Nation. And I applied there. It took me two years. It was bad situation, you know.

01:36:02.760

[Aida]: In Turkey, I broke up with my ex-husband. He was sending money and supporting his daughter and I stayed there for two years and then we came to the United States.

01:37:13.740

[Aida]: Me coming to United States with a little bit of English, it was impossible to find a job.

01:37:31.410

[Shadyar]: As far as I know you went through the process of the resettlement program so the United States was not your choice, but was chosen for you, as the country to resettle. Am I right?

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[Aida]: Yes, all my cousins, all my family, they're all living in Europe. When I went for the interview, the country interview they call it, so I told them, [but] they told me okay it's the United States.

01:40:02.160

[Aida]: So, they chose the country for me and they called me over the phone, and they told me we sent your documentation to the United States Embassy. And I was like, no, I have a right to reject the country you give me and they said no, they already did it.

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[Aida]: I came here with \$1,000 money. I had the no support coming from Iran and when I came here, they gave us, I remember, \$1,000 or \$2,000 I don't remember exactly for buying this stuff for that house, the furniture and paying some for the rent. They told me to get yourself a job.

01:42:43.260 --> 01:42:50.580

[Shadyar]: So, what year is that? And it was in Oregon. Wasn't it?

01:42:50.880

[Aida]: Yes, the end of 2013 a month before Black Friday. I bought everything on Black Friday for the new life.

01:43:12.840

[Aida]: I started a new life. The first thing it was so terrifying and electricity bill \$300. So, it was winter it was cold. I did not know what to do. I went to my caseworker and I was like, how do I

pay \$200 for, like, there's the, I don't have money. I don't have a job. They're not giving me money. So, she introduced me to some sort of program they paid for my electricity and I had to live in the cold because then I was terrified how I'm paying for electricity. So, looking for many jobs, I found a job threading eyebrows. It was a big saloon. So, I was good about that. I found the job paying \$10 an hour and a lot of tips. So that could not be a job that would afford for my baby's future. And I had a dream of going to the university. I started taking classes, studying [and] working at the same time. So, I received financial aid, going to a financial aid was not paying for everything, you know that better. So, I had to work at the same time I was going to school and then I had to leave my baby alone at home. I was not able to pay for a babysitter, and learning English as a second language, you have to pay for your classes.

01:49:30.180

[Aida]: I moved to North Carolina, because one of my African American friends used to live here. He was about, like, we'll get back to his family, he was gay. And we were kind of like really close and I came here I checked the prices. I checked the school district. I went to the different kind of school. I love the school system. The school system was awesome because of the segregation, they were kind of like pushing to improve the school system. If you were living in the poor area, you would get the good school districts, because the school bus system was kind of like different, they would offer you even more than four miles five miles of drive. And it was much better for Yasmin to go to school, so I moved here.

01:51:11.430 --> 01:51:25.230

[Aida]: Then coming here I have to work, I have nobody. You don't know anybody in the south and then you have to go to school and then you have to work, so I made a decision. I'm going to find a shortcut. Dental Hygiene and here they told me it's going to be three years program, so it's not going to be even two years. So, I was like, not even a year is gonna change my situation. I don't want to work [and] at the same time like going to school. It's the very bad style [of] life I had to leave Yasmin. I used to work in Walmart. I came to South working in Walmart. I had to leave Yasmin at home. Even though I told them I want to work day shift and have the night shift with my baby, they scheduled me for all the night shifts. It happened for me and Yasmin that we did not see each other for three days and I would send her to school in the morning. And then I would go to school coming back home. She was not home I would eat and get ready to go to work I would open the doors, she would come in and I would go to work, then come back home, she was asleep, getting ready to go to school.

01:52:36.720

[Aida]: Yeah, I learned Yasmin would go under the table hiding herself crying, thinking about committing suicide not seeing her mother, sometimes three days in a row.

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[Aida]: It was a terrifying style of life because she had no conversation with no body for three days for four days just School, home, not seeing mom and those kind of situation with the past, and the trauma she had.

01:53:06.420

[Aida]: I quit from Walmart working with African American that they were reproducing the violence against me as a woman of color with a very thick accent.

01:59:53.730

[Aida]: So, they offered me a biopharmaceutical technology which is two years program, requires a lot of chemistry, math, different kinds of things. And it was my father's favorites kind of major. So, I hated it.

02:00:56.040

[Aida]: I've tried so hard to get in the Costco and not even going to school because it was so much pressure on me, dealing with Yasmin, school, dealing with this university, I wanted to just quit from college and leave everything [and] just go work and be home with her hanging out with her taking care of her school she had problems going on.

02:01:40.950

[Aida]: Costco did not hire me because I was not able to speak fantastic English. I don't know. They did not hire me because I needed a full-time job. I did not want a part time job with any reason, but I've got hired with different company in the Costco.

02:27:22.590

[Shadyar]: So, you were saying that the whole job duties and responsibilities changed through COVID-19 [pandemic]. What happened to your job? Were you laid off?

02:27:37.230

[Aida]: Oh, well, I started like working on the floor with those people, even though I had to do the my manager [the management duties]. Most of the managers started doing office job and they did not move from the office. I started working on the floor with people so by the time I was leaving there, people started loving me because as a management department, even though I was assigned to the office, I would work with them. I would help them. I would give them the break. So, yeah. One day I was in the office, my managers, called me and told me they want us all to be in the conference fall. So, join us and it's going to be that time the president of the company laid off everybody. And they told us not to tell anybody for at least 24 hours until we get the complete information, we had to tell people that they are laid off and what kind of benefits they might get from the government. It was bad. And there was no promising. We had to reapply for the job. Then they told us apply for unemployment, I would get like \$280 or \$300 according to the money I was making from the state and \$600 from the federal and staying at home, but because of unemployment situation and the credit card was not able to accept that then Costco that refused to hire me as a full time person. They told me as soon as possible. I was laid off. They told me, we're going to hire you, because they saw me five years working there as a very hard worker.

02:29:41.790

[Shadyar]: Did you accept their proposal?

02:29:45.150

[Aida]: I had to.

02:29:47.040

[Shadyar]: Now you're working for Costco.

02:29:50.850

[Aida]: Yep. Starting from their food department. They told me it's the only available position right now so we

02:30:01.260

[Aida]: We suggest you to take that position because it's got an open other doors for you and I love Costco, because it's almost semi socialist company. You get a very good benefits and the fair minimum wage, many more were just starting from 15. And if you work seven hours, you can get health benefits. Very nice health benefit and retirement and also each year you can buy a fair share of the company with the money they offer you. It's very much different with all other companies and already the United States of fast huge overcrowded company. It is a very difficult work to do, but it's not like Walmart to work the difficult job but they don't respect your existence. You don't get benefits; you don't have any rights to that company. They pay the good amount of money. It's starting from \$15, Sundays you get \$22. If you're a starter one and half of your money and then there are people working there. They're not even educated. They've been working for, I don't know, five years, six years, 10 years, they're making \$22 and think about it, those people working [on] Sundays, they make probably \$30 something \$40 an hour. So, with the fantastic health insurance and leave off the absence. They gave people not us, because we are just hired here on 90 days probation, but people over the age of 60 they got two weeks off the leave paid, not the vacation time they take. It's just the Coronavirus two weeks and then they expand that that to four weeks pay that and after that, they have an opportunity to not come to work and stay at home, they are not. I'm not sure if they're paying them or they can use. I don't know, short times disability, or something like that. But I know they're treating their people really good. Then there are people that they have to have surgery and leave the company for, I don't know, six months, seven months, eight months and they get 65% of their salary and they love working in the Costco.

02:32:39.810

[Aida]: You see people with bachelor come and work there. Do you see people with education comma work there and they don't want to go to other companies on when I asked them, nice. They say, well,

02:34:52.080

[Aida]: No, I'm not happy, but it is better than working in Walmart or working in Target or working in the department that they don't pay you a fair labor basic salary. I can't say that.

02:35:15.750

[Shadyar]: Okay, the last very quick question. It is last but not least, it's about your feeling today. As an Iranian American single mom who's been through several immigration in the past, the life that you shared with us, I want you to share one more thing with me: the feeling and the situation

that you have had since COVID-19 started and where do you think it's going to take you? How optimistic are you about your near future?

02:36:15.180

[Aida]: I believe the patriarchy masculine system of the world changed my path and my way of the success too many times since I was born from my father from my father paths to my father future to an ex-husband to the system of Iran supporting my father and my husband, then being a refugee, the system of United Nation [for] choosing the country [on my behalf], coming to the country that women don't have equals rights and then being an immigrant and [not] having an equal opportunity I was suppressed many, many times. Like many times and COVID-19 [and] the system that was not able to protect and provide for the society and I was hurt. I lost the job that I was supposed to be a manager. I had an opportunity to be a manager and I lost the status. I worked for that so far. I'm always afraid that I'm going to get sick.

I have to deal with the daughter who is at home who is always bored and in the situation with their school being shut down, not having enough education and enough opportunity to finish the school with good grades. I don't feel safe in that society that's such a patriarchal society that suppresses me [and] has been suppressing me for a long time. So, with the last situation [the pandemic] I was again the main target of the system. The system was not able to keep my position safe, keep my life. If I'm working in the first line and the company which never shut down and had people to work in the normal hours to provide for people who were in current crunching and common do their shopping. So, I had to work in the first line. So how do I feel? I say there was no choice for me. So, I don't feel safe. I feel betrayed with the system.

02:39:05.640 --> 02:39:15.510

[Shadyar]: I see. Thank you. I thank you for being a part of this history and the voice of those who are unheard.