

Interview 10

This interview was conducted by The Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center (MEMEAC) of The Graduate Center, City University of New York (June 2002 – March 2003)

Gender of respondent: Male

Age: 38

Q. Okay, I'd like to ask you a few questions about yourself first before we start talking about September 11th. Where were you born?

A. Cairo, Egypt.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I grew up in Yemen for a few years, until I was five, then I grew up in Cairo until I was ten, [so] from five till I was ten.

Q. And when did you come to live in the United States?

A. When I was ten years old.

Q. When was that?

A. 1974.

Q. And where was your father born?

A. My father was born in Riyadh, Yemen.

Q. And your mother?

A. She was born in Saigon, Vietnam.

Q. What is your ethnic background?

A. Arabic.

Q. So you identify yourself as an Arab?

A. Yes.

Q. Was your mother Vietnamese?

A. Half. Her mother is Vietnamese.

Q. So you're part Vietnamese...

A. A little bit but ... and then the rest is Arabic, from Yemen.

Q. And what is your religious affiliation?

A. What I call the master race. (laughs). Muslim.

Q. How old are you?

A. [38].

Q. Are you a U.S. citizen?

A. Yes I am.

Q. And what is your highest level of education?

A. Kindergarten. (Both voices laugh). No, high school plus two years of ... it would be equivalent to vocational.

Q. Okay. And where did you obtain your education?

A. In the [military], in military leadership and management.

Q. What is your main occupation, your complete job title?

A. I have a couple. And because I'm in the [military] I'm also in the [removed]. But now I've been activated to active duty so when I'm not on active duty I'm a regional sales manager for a technology company. I sell Internet communications technology. Then in the [military] I'm a [title removed].

Q. What is your full title?

A. [title removed].

Q. Okay. And what is your marital status?

A. Single.

Q. And do you have any children?

A. Two. I have two children.

Q. How old are they?

A. [Ages of children]. I started young.

Q. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about September 11th. How did you experience it; where were you on that day around 9 a.m.?

A. I was in California, so 9 a.m. for us it was 6 a.m. and I was sleeping. I was awoken by a friend's call. You know? She said, "[Name}, you really have to turn the TV on." Can you hold it? I'll hold it. She said, "You have to turn the TV on." I turned it on and she said no more. I mean, it was all ... Pictures tell a thousand words. Right? Yeah. So I was home.

Q. So you heard of the attacks through a phone call?

A. Yes, because it was early, in California it was 6 a.m.

Q. And so what did you see when you first turned the TV on? Was it, like, when the first plane hit?

A. It was ... The first plane hit and ... I was watching, and I'm, like, what the hell ... and, you know, they were talking about it was maybe a small plane that went into it, all of the things. And the thing that was true that I tripped out on the way when the second airplane came. And I was thinking it was a rerun, and I was, like, wait a minute. How could it be a rerun if the building is still smoking? You know? And then it hit the second building. And so I went through the same shock as anybody, and disbelief.

Q. What was your first reaction?

A. My first reaction was, you know, Oh my God! What ... what's going on? You know? And then they talked about the Pentagon being hit. Then, you know, I was in shock. I didn't ... I really didn't start putting anything together. I was just in shock like anybody else for a couple of hours. You know?

Q. What about your reaction to the possibility that it could be Middle Eastern?

A. That hit, I'd say, either an hour or two after, because I was in shock. I was, like, what the hell's going on? You know? I really wasn't thinking anything about politics or Arabs or anything. I was just being ... I was just like any other American. I was thinking what the hell's attacking our country? You know? I didn't put any ... any ... any more into that other than going through the same shock as anyone else.

Q. As everyone. What would you say your most vivid memory of September 11th

was?

A. It would be when the ... when they were interviewing Arab-American kids that were being attacked in school and the children were ... there was a seven-year-old girl and she said that she couldn't walk to school any more because she was getting picked on and beat up and, you know, called names. That is vivid to me. It touched me because, like, I said, I was in shock like any other American when I saw what was going on. But then when our people started getting attacked, that to me was more profound because now ... You know, I was in mourning like anyone else. Now we were being defensive and I was feeling for our people. So...

Q. What were your feelings about what happened immediately afterwards, right after you were told, as you were watching the World Trade Center falling?

A. My ... I was in shock. Then the second thing was I packed my gear, my military gear, 'cause I knew that this is something that wasn't small, that it was on a large scale and it could have been anything. You know? So in the military you just ... you're always prepared. But I knew this was at a magnitude that it was going to ... we're going to go into action.

Q. Did you feel any anger?

A. Yes. I felt anger because they're hitting our home. And ... the last time we were hit was Pearl Harbor so it's never happened on our soil, I mean, other than 1993 when the World Trade Center got hit once. But, yeah, I was angry.

Q. What about pain or grief?

A. My feelings were ... I cried for thirteen days because of all the emotions, because of being angry at the perpetrators, being ashamed that I was Egyptian and, you know, half the terrorists were from Egypt and others were from Saudi Arabia. I was ashamed to be associated. I was...

Q. So you felt guilt?

A. I felt guilt, right, and I also felt disappointed and in shock that we were being attacked

as a people. So all those feelings mixed into one, it just ... just like anyone ... any other Arab, we all had the same emotions, that we couldn't just mourn and cry for our fellow Americans who died. We also had to ... to fight the guilt and also fight the oppression and being stepped on, looked like ... looked at as second-class citizens. Because all of a sudden we weren't Americans any longer!

Q. Have your feelings changed since the events?

A. About...

Q. The guilt and the anger?

A. Because I took action. I wanted to come out in the forefront and educate Americans about Arab-Americans; that there's a difference between the Arab nationals and Arab-Americans; that the terrorists were not Arab-Americans. They weren't the ones here pursuing their dreams to raise their children, you know, to live a free life, to ... and to one day, you know, die here. Because when I die I would ... the honor for me would be to die the Arlington National Cemetery, be buried there. That's the highest honor for a military man. It means that the country ... You've done something where the country recognizes you by burying you in the National Cemetery. That's where all the Presidents get buried. So I wanted to make a difference, to let people know that we're just as American as anyone else and that it was wrong for them to alienate us after September 11th. You know? It's ... We ... we were victims. We became victims all in an instant.

Q. What about your feelings of guilt?

A. I still feel guilty.

Q. You do?

A. Yeah, because it happened. And just like if you have a family member that goes and commits a crime whether he murders somebody or robs a bank or just some ... some type of horrific crime, you feel guilty because you're associated and that's your family member. You know? And that's no different.

Q. When Americans asked you about your ethnic background before 9-11 what did

you tell them?

A. I would skirt around it but I would always say I'm Egyptian because it seemed like ... I would never tell them I was Yemeni.... because Yemeni would, you know, trigger all these thoughts in their head that are incorrect.

Q. Even before 9-11?

A. Yeah. And so I would always say I'm Egyptian because everyone thinks of Egypt as pharaohs and, you know, so it was the safest thing to do. I would say I was Egyptian, which by birth, by nationality I'm Yemeni. So I always said I was Egyptian until September 11th. Now I let people know that I'm Yemeni. I was born in Egypt to Yemeni parents. I make that distinction.

Q. So immediately after 9-11 you identified yourself as...

A. As an Arab-American. You know? Before September 11th I did everything I could not to be Arab-American.

Q. Why?

A. Because of all the stereotypes and growing up discriminated against, you know, all the bigotry against me as a child and growing up as a teenager, as a young adult. You know, I've been called nigger on many occasions. You know? I've been called...

Q. This was in the United States?

A. Oh yeah, been threatened to be beat up, been threatened, you know ... relations that I've had, I've dated white girls with blonde hair and blue eyes, they've been threatened because of their association with me. And before 9-11 I would always take that as it was my fault. So ... so I did everything to try to distance myself and try not to be different so I wouldn't get the reprisals. But after September 11th, when it was focused on my people, the Arab-Americans, then I came out of the woodwork to say I am Arab-American because now I can take it. You know? Mentally and physically I will take the burden for our people where before that I didn't want to because it was just against me. So it's ... it's selfless dedication to our rights.

Q. Have your feelings towards the United States changed since 9-11?

A. No. They have not changed towards the United States at all. In fact, it's made me more patriotic because throughout history it's always ... always happened so ... there's not ... there's no perfect society. There's no perfect people. There's always going to be racism. There's always going to be bigotry. There's always going to be a class that thinks they're better than the next class. The only thing that we can do is educate our fellow Americans and those people who don't understand to try to have them understand us and make it a better living environment and a better country to live in. That's all we can do. So we can't fault our country because of the ... of the, I guess, things that aren't right or the way ... or things that aren't the way we want them to be. That's just part of society. It's ... You know? Families have the same thing, disagreements and so on, but you work them out. And I think as a people in America we can do that. We can rise above it all. And I think one day it's going to ... it's going to come together.

Q. What about your level of political awareness? Has it changed?

A. Yes.

Q. In what ways?

A. It's changed in the sense of following Arab-Americans in the political arena, in the political involvement, because the only way we're going to make a difference and have our voices heard if we make a change and put ourselves in positions where we can make a difference. For example, before 9-11 ... I've had many accomplishments in the military. I'm a good will ambassador to Australia, been in combat two times. I'm highly decorated from this country with the U.S. Marine corps, the elite force for the United States. But I never looked at it, before September 11th, to take all those accomplishments and give them back to the Arab community. I never looked at it that way because, again, I was trying to do everything I could to get away from it. So after September 11th [name removed], Arab-American Institute, she said something that was ... really made me think and she said, "Where have you been?" And what she meant by that was you've been in

this country all this time with all these accomplishments. We don't know about you. You know? We need all those accomplishments that you've done so we can profile them out into the country so people can understand. And that's what I believe Arab-Americans have to do is they have to get out in the political system and the involvement, not even in politics, just to make a difference in the community so people can understand and be aware of our accomplishments as Americans.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging to the United States?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you feel at home here?

A. Yeah, definitely. And...

Q. Have you always felt like this?

A. Yes.

Q. Even when you were growing up? You had mentioned that you were picked on as a teenager.

A. Right. Yeah.

Q. How did you feel then?

A. I took it as there was something wrong with me and not wrong with the people that were doing it. You see, there's a difference. You know? I thought I was the one that was ... that had something wrong. You know? I thought that I had the disease ... so to speak, so I never looked at it as it was ... I was being oppressed by America or ... I thought that it was something wrong with me.

Q. And now what do you feel?

A. And now I love this country. I love ... I serve this country. I'm willing to die for this country, but I finally realized that there's nothing wrong with me. And again, you take that on a ... on a macro vision and there's nothing wrong with Arab-Americans. And I think all of us have went through that.

Q. Do you think there's been a change in the way people from the Middle East have

been treated after 9-11?

A. Oh, definitely. There's been over seven thousand attacks on ... on Middle Easterners and Asian-Americans that are perceived to be Middle Eastern. There's been deaths attributed to September 11th, innocent people getting killed. Myself, I've had three incidents of ... of bigotry and racism directed towards me.

Q. Can you talk about that?

A. The first one I was in a ... a restaurant in Glendale, California, and I was in a Marine Corps uniform and I was with a couple of my Marines, 'cause after September 11th we wanted to show the Americans ... 'cause everyone was scared of attacks so we were out in uniform to show people that the presence of the military so they could feel strong; that they're ... that they're okay. We wanted to tell Americans we're okay. So we were in a restaurant and we were talking to the manager. And of course I don't look Arab. I look Spanish more than anything, right? So everybody thinks I'm Spanish, especially in California. And we're sitting, talking, and the uniform attracts all kinds of attention. People always come up. You know? And the manager came up and started talking, you know, "my cousin was in the Marine Corps," and all this and we're talking. And of course, September 11th ... this is right after September 11th and she's said, "Yeah. He's ..." In Glendale, there's a lot of Persians and a lot of Middle Easterners, a lot of Armenians. And she said, "Our customers, clientele has been ... You know? A lot of them don't come in any more. Because of September 11th they're afraid to come out." And so we were talking about the terrorists and everything. She ... and then she ... she made a remark. She said, "Yeah, all those Arabs, they're all knuckle heads." You know? And I looked at her. And ... and my two Marine friends, you know, they're ... they expected me to come out and really be brash. But I just looked at her and I ... and I said, "Are you ... are you related to Timothy McVeigh?" That's what I told her. And she kind of stepped back and looked at me and she said, "I see what you mean." You know? And I didn't have to get into it to ... Now, the second incident we were in uniform again, and again

people come and talk and say hey. And this woman came up an, you know, she's asking me questions, whatever, and of course they say where are you from? And I said, "I was born in Egypt." You know? And she stepped back, she goes, "You're a terrorist?" and I'm in a Marine Corps uniform. And in that instant I cursed her out. I told her ... I told her off, you know, said some swear words at her and basically told her get away from me. Again, the uniform. You know? The third time was two and a half months ago. You know? Right now it's July, this was in March and I was in Tampa, leaving to go to LA to pick up my orders, pack my gear and go report to active duty in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. So en route to duty, wearing this hat, okay, the same hat...

Q. Were you in uniform?

A. No, just this hat. And I'm standing in line, there were a bunch of us standing in line waiting to get on the airplane. And you know where they search you, a random search? Well, this guy looks at me and he says, "You'd better be careful 'cause they're going to ... You'd better watch ... Yeah. You'd better watch out. They're going to come get you next" That's right?

Q. This was someone who was working there or just someone standing on line?

A. No, just in line, and ... and the whole line got quiet. People were, like, wanted to hear what I was going to say just ... so you could hear a pin drop. And I looked at him and I said, "Yeah, the joke's going to be on you when they come get you." And everybody was, like, the nervous laugh. You know? So I defused the situation. But about thirty seconds later he pointed at two, and they weren't even Arabic; they were Spanish, he pointed at them, that's how ignorant he is, and really loud said, "they need to go get those two over there. Those ... they're terrorists," like that and I did the old Marine Corps, right into the fact, and I said, "That was not funny and you need to apologize." You know, and kind of stepped back. And he goes, "Okay. I'll apologize." But he didn't apologize. And the irony of it is, what if there was a security guard that was trigger happy that would have acted on those words because he said that and ... and these two innocent Spanish males minding

their own business at another gate, sitting down just talking, would have got apprehended or searched or whatever, and their civil rights being violated. And the other thing is, what if I went up to the gate and said, "I'm uncomfortable with that man riding with me on the aircraft." They probably wouldn't have done anything. But had he went up and said I'm uncomfortable with him, I would have probably been ... You know? That is the crime of it all.

Q. Has a member of your family experienced backlash September 11th?

A. My uncle, yes.

Q. Can you tell us about something that happened with him?

A. He works for one of the big three auto manufacturer companies in Detroit and he's been with them for thirty years. He ... he's a foreman. He has twenty-eight people that he supervises and these are people that he's worked with for years. And after September 11th the twenty-eight people turned their back on him, went to his boss and said we don't want to work for him any more. And he was really, really just hurt by that because what it told me and told him, and probably all Arab-Americans, is that they didn't understand him. Even though they've been around him for years, they didn't go out of their way to find out who he was, what he was about. So their lack of education, the lack of understanding, created them to be bigots. Okay? So what he did is, he called me and asked if I could send him a picture of me in uniform. So, I sent him the picture. Because what he wanted to do, and this is sad but I think all of us have to do this and it's just ... it's a product of the environment that we're in, is he had to prove his patriotism to this country by putting my picture in his office to get people to talk to him, to say there's nothing wrong with me. You know? And so I sent him the picture and he put it in his office. And it took a few days but one person came up to him and ... and he said, "Who's that in uniform?" He said, "that's my nephew," and they were shocked that he had, you know, that ... 'cause now to ... to that person that was a bigot to him, you know, and turned their back on him, finally proved to him that my uncle was okay just because he had a nephew in the military. And

that shouldn't be the case. We should be taken ... looked at as just like any other American,, you know, but it wasn't the case. Huh?

Q. Do you think Arab or Middle Eastern or South Asian organizations have been effective in handling this backlash since 9-11?

A. I know one particular organization, Arab-American Institute, has. They've ... they've gone out of their way to make a difference on Capital Hill to the President and the Secretary of State.

Q. How have they done that? What have they done to handle this backlash?

A. They've ... Education. They wanted to educate America and they ... and the result of it was President Bush when he came out on TV and said, you know, "Islam was hijacked. We cannot blame the religion or the people of America ... Arab-America for this incident." and ... and he encouraged everyone to get involved, to understand Arab-Americans, to understand the Islamic religion. And you could see that on TV. I mean, more people both before and after September 11th than any time before. And also in television, like, headline news, every day for I don't know how long they were doing about a five minute segment on ... on Arabic... on Arab-Americans and Islam. And also the Ad Council did this ... that poster, right, that was on TV so Arab-Americans too in conjunction with the Ad Council, they did the "I'm American," the commercial, the campaign, where you'd see black, Indian, Arab and just ... all the faces were changed. They'd say, "I'm black and I am an American," "I'm Arab and I am an American." So those things yes. Arab-Americans Institute went out of their way to help, you know, kind of bridge that ... that gap and try to have Americans understand.

Q. Do you think these organizations have managed to organize the Arab community politically?

A. I don't think they've done enough. There's a lot ... a lot to do. When I went on a six week speaking tour throughout the country, and again, my organization is also one of those that has also gone out of their way to make a difference ... In fact, September 11th is

why my organization started because to educate America about our contributions. "Cause what I ... what I learned from my uncle's experience is that my picture is ... in uniform was his protection and to prove his patriotism. So I wanted to do that on a national scale where ... APAAM, the organization, is that picture that was in my uncle's office and my uncle is actually the Arab-American community. So...

Q. Can you talk a little about your organization?

A. When I started APAAA, Organization of Patriotic Arab-Americans in the Military, was because of that incident with my uncle. I wanted it to be the picture for our Arab-American society. So that way Arab-Americans can see it and say wait a minute. If they have a segment of their population that's serving this country and they're patriotic Arab-Americans, they're Americans, then maybe that understanding, you know, that dialogue could be opened up. For example, that one employee or co-worker with my uncle, that picture opened up a dialogue for him to start asking questions. And in hopes of doing that on a national level, that's what APAAM was founded for, to educate Americans about our service to this country. We fought in every war in the twentieth century since World War I. every campaign we fought for America's freedom. And we want to let Americans know that as Arab-Americans when they alienated us after September 11th, that we became a separate race from America, that there's Arab-Americans that are fighting for their protection, fighting for their liberty. And even though we might not agree with what they believe, we're protecting their right to believe the way they ... they do.

Q. So what do you do in your organization?

A. I do e-mail campaigns. I do newsletter campaigns. I have other members in their respective communities, Detroit, Washington D.C., New York, Chicago, LA, to go out and also spread the word about our service to this country. I use the media. I use contacts in Congress and the Senate to spread the message. And now the Marine Corps, the U.S. Marine Corps, believes in what I'm doing and is proud of what I'm doing and so they're now getting me national attention. That's why I'm here in New York, to do a documentary

that they've set up for me. So it's ... it's really snowballing to get the word out. Because our government and the Department of Education, the ... the Marine Corps, the President, understand that education is the only way you're going to overcome bigotry. And it only helps all Americans because five years from now, ten years from now, and it's sad to say, but it's going to be somebody else's turn. But hopefully from our experience we can circumvent and head off those negative, those, you know, feelings or peoples' actions for the future.

Q. How many members are in your organization?

A. I have approximately three hundred.

Q. And they're all in the military?

A. There's three ... three categories: either are serving in the military or have served in the military or a family member of an Arab-American who has served or is serving in the military.

Q. In your opinion what is the nature of the relationship between the Arab or Muslim group in the United States and other groups at this time? Do you think relations are more tolerant or more strained?

A. With the American public?

Q. With Americans ... Like, between Arabs and Americans or other groups?

A. I can tell you what I've learned and this is just from ...from being American is you have to separate church and state. I firmly believe that. You know? And so with my organization, Association of Patriotic Arab-Americans in the Military, people will listen because it's ... it's patriotic and we don't involve religion whatsoever. My members are Christian, are Muslim, and I have some Jewish. Okay? It has no ... Religion has no basis for our organization and because of that Americans are listening to us. And I think if we keep it on our contributions and not impose the religion on individuals in America, we have a better chance of educating them and them listening. Because the minute you say the word Muslim ... Yes, there are certain organizations that should educate America

about the religion so they understand it, but I don't think we should push our religion ... religious ideals into American society. And I think that's where we lose the attention of people.

Q. So how do you think our community gets along with ... how do we perceive Americans or how do Americans perceive us? Do you think our relation with each other is more positive or negative?

A. I think it's strained.

Q. It's strained?

A. I won't say it's positive or negative. I think it's strained. But I also see positive results coming out of ... For example, the article in the San Diego Times Union. I've received so many emails of encouragement from Americans, from fellow military members, from civilians that aren't even Arab-American.

Q. Can you talk about that article for ... What was that article on?

A. The article was on the organization, and my uncle, and starting it. And they published it on July fourth, the patriotic ... our Independence Day, and it was a tear jerker for me because that just reinforced in my mind that they told me that I was an American 'cause they put the story out on American, on Independence Day for America. And it had an overwhelming response so they reprinted it on Sunday and then again they printed it on Thursday. And I got a lot of response from Americans saying thank you for what you're doing. Thank you for, you know, wanting to educate Americans about your service because it's not only going to effect just Arab-Americans but it's going to improve our society as a whole to understand one another as a people. Because, you know, some people ... You know? The negative responses I get, people say why can't you just be American? You know? It's fine and dandy to be American until September 11th when the same person that says why don't you be American is the one that alienate us, saying now you're not American. Okay? So it's a convenience for them to say we're not being American. That's incorrect. America is a conglomerate of about a hundred and fifty

different cultures from different, from parts of the world. And we're all American but yet we all bring something to this country. You go into a mall anywhere in America and you get the flavors of the world and that's America. You get pizza, you get Chinese, you get hamburgers, you get hot dogs. You know? It's all from all different parts of the world. You get Greek, you get Middle Eastern, you have Mongolian. You know? You go to any mall you see all these flavors and that's America. So there's really no such thing, I don't believe, as just American. What American is Arab-American, Hispanic-American ... we have to be proud of our ... our heritage because that's what makes America so unique. We have all these cultures melting together and it's only going to make it a better place if we learn to live with each other.

Q. So if the situation is a little strained, what do you think members of the Arab community can do to improve it?

A. I see fault with both communities, Arab communities and American communities. When I went on my six week speaking tour I spoke to Americans and I spoke to Arab ... Arab-Americans in both communities. And it's a lot easier to educate Americans to understand Arab-Americans 'cause they're open minded. On the other hand, the Arab-Americans, what I've seen is that they're angry. They're angry that on September 11th we were alienated and all of a sudden told we're not Americans. They're very angry and they have every right to do so. But on the other hand, you cannot let understanding or ... or progressing until you get rid of hate from the heart. And I think ... that's what I've talked to them is to try to tell them that we have to bridge the gap. We have to close the gap of understanding. So that way we understand ... both communities understand each other, Arab communities and ... and mainstream American communities. And they have to drop the ball of say-- ... We have to overcome September 11th is what I'm trying to say and we have to say, you know, yes, it happened but let's get over it and let's move on and let's try to make it ... work together to make it a better place.

Q. That's at an individual level. What do you think organizations can do to improve

the relations?

A. To reach out. What I've seen is there's Arab communities that don't even get along with each other in different cities. There's an organization ... In every city I've been to there's the same organization in that city, but yet they don't know about each other. For example, there's a ... a business association of Chicago. There's a business association in Orlando, a business association ... association in Detroit, and those leaders do not know about each other in different cities. So if they don't understand or don't want to reach out to each other ... Because, again it goes to the pride factor. Everybody wants to be king of the hill. You know? And they have to reach out to one another and also, you know, swallow their pride in reaching out to the American communities as well. Because I think that's where the stumbling block is. There's a hurdle of people not wanting to swallow their pride. You know? It's ... it's hard for someone to say, yeah, it's me. I did it. Or, okay, I'm wrong. Now, since I'm wrong, let's just move on. I think that's what we have to do on both sides.

Q. Given your understanding of the status of Middle Easterners or South Asian immigrant groups in the United States after 9-11, would you encourage these people to emigrate to the U.S.?

A. Definitely. This country is the greatest country on earth or I ... I don't think any of us would be here. It has freedom. You can do whatever you want here. You can practice your religion. You can practice your politics. You can practice no religion and you can practice no politics. Whatever it is, you're practicing your will and your ... and your dream and there's nowhere else in the world you can do that.

Q. We've talked about some negative consequences and some positive consequences. What would you say would be some of the positive consequences of 9-11?

A. It made our country look inside itself; that our country was not a perfect country; that we have a lot of problems. We have a lot of issues that we have to resolve like any family has to within America. In a household you have ... you have arguments. You have issues

that come up. You have family members that don't speak to each other. You know? It's no different. It's just America is just millions of families becoming one and I think that's what we are. So you have the Arabic family, the Chinese family, the white family, just all not get along with one another. And I think 9-11 made us look into each ... into ourselves a big deeper. And if you look at television before 9-11 everyone was so interested in shows like "Survivor" or like, you know, "Friends," things that took them away from America, from the pains of America, I think because people just didn't want to deal with it, deal with the pain, deal with the true issues, the real issues of what's going on within America. After September 11th, now people are watching the news more. They're watching documentaries more. They're watching all these shows because they've realized that the reason September 11th happened is all of America slept. All of America slept 'cause no one was taking the time to understand the world, to understand what world policy does to America and why we were hit. And I think people are realizing that we have to, you know, look inside and understand us as a people to be able to improve ourselves. So I think that's what ... the positive thing that has come out of September 11th.

Q. Would you say that there's been more of a visibility or an improved understanding of Arab-Americans or the Arab world or Islam in the United States after 9-11?

A. I think it's improved in some sense. But on the other hand, it's also regressed with some Americans. In other words, still looking at us as the perpetrators; still not defining the difference between Arab-Americans and Arab nationals and tying us all into one and ... and wanting to do harm to Arab-Americans. There's ... So I think in that respect, yes, there has been improvement. But I think there has been just as much equal regression back in the other direction.

Q. Why do you think the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon happened?

A. A lot of ... Many reasons. And, you know, being in the military we have the luxury of not being political. And it happened because of our ... our world policy. And I think if you're a dominant power ... It's like anything else. People run for politics, you're going to have half the people don't like you and half the people like you. I mean, you can't be liked by everyone! And I think that's the same way it is for ... for the United States is you have some countries that feel that we're oppressing them or our policy is being force fed down their throat and that was their way of saying, you know, we don't like your policy. But again, America also does positive things in the world. We're ... We give more money to countries than any other country in the world. We give more aid to more countries than any other country in the world. We want democracy for the world. We tore down the ... the communist wall, you know, in the '80s to make the world a better place, a free enterprise system. So people from other countries are not always going to agree with us, but the result of September 11th was because of people having a difference with the United States.

Q. Do you think Arabs or Muslims in the Middle East hate America?

A. I think ... Yeah. I think that's pretty true.

Q. Why? Why do you think they hate America?

A. Because growing up in the Middle East ... Because it all stems to the Jewish issue, the Israeli issue, and it's all tied to that. Until that's resolved and until our country does something to resolve that, then it's always going to be that way.

Q. What do you think the U.S. can do to resolve the problem of terrorism directed against it?

A. That's ... that's a hard question because terrorism ... it's ... it's ... coming from the military, terrorism is an enemy you can't see. And when you can't see an enemy it's hard to fight. So all you can do is prepare yourself and train and adopt strategies and policies that hopefully will prevent it from happening. But I don't think that's going to happen. I think it will happen again so that's why it's a tough question to answer.

Q. Are there any other issues or points you'd like to comment on that we haven't mentioned in the interview?

A. I don't know. I think we ... we hit everything. It's just ... If this is heard by Americans, you know, I'd like to tell them is we are Americans. Arab-Americans like anyone else. we are here for the same hopes and dreams. We are your coworkers. We're your children in school. We are your children's friends in school. We're your doctors. We're your lawyers. We're your employees, you know. We're the person that drives by next to you in the red light. We listen to music just like you. And all we want is to enjoy the same freedom as you're enjoying because we all have the right to share the same country.

Q. Well, thank you very much for your cooperation.