

Interview 40

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 – June 2003)

Gender of respondent: Female

Age: 31

Q. I'll go ahead by asking you a few questions about yourself. Where were you born?

A. Bangladesh.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I grew up in Bangladesh. This is actually going to be confidential, right?

Q. Oh yeah. Don't worry.

A. Actually, I was actually born in Pakistan. So that's why...

Q. Oh, okay.

A. But you know there's a war so that's why, I say Bangladeshi. But I was born in Pakistan.

Q. How old were you when you came to the United States?

A. United States? Six. But I'm from Bangladesh. Like, I grew up here but my parents are from Bangladesh.

Q. Oh, okay. But you hardly have an accent.

A. Yeah. No. I was very young. And when you're six years old, you know, ... and in Bangladesh I went to school ... the first schools I went to were English schools. And in Bangladesh everybody learns English, just like in India and Pakistan. But, you know, if you stay there longer you have an accent, but I went to English schools, pre-school and Kindergarten. Then I started first grade in America.

Q. Where were your parents born?

A. In Bangladesh.

Q. So you would be first generation. And what do you consider your ethnic background to be?

A. Bangladeshi-American.

Q. And your religious affiliation?

A. Islam.

Q. How old are you now, if you don't mind?

A. Uh-huh. Thirty-one.

Q. You don't look it.

A. I don't know if that's good or bad.

Q. Are you a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident?

A. Yeah. I was [U.S. citizen] ... a long time ago.

Q. What is your highest level of education?

A. I had a J.D., Jurist Doctorate. It's a law ... law degree ... so it's a graduate degree.

Q. And in what country did you obtain your education?

A. U.S.

Q. If you can, briefly explain what it is that you do and your job title.

A. I am an attorney. I have my own law practice. As you can tell, I'm self-employed and that's my ... So I'm a practicing attorney.

Q. What is your marital status?

A. I'm married.

Q. Any children?

A. No, not yet.

Q. Now I'll ask you a few questions about how you experienced September 11th.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Where were you around 9 a.m. on September 11th and how did you hear of the attacks?

A. Ah, I was actually in bed. I had just come back from Michigan where my parents live, where ... I grew up there, on Sunday the 9th. And I was feeling a --I was sick a little bit so I ... I was sleeping. ... Also because I have my own practice I can have my own hours ... I had gone to bed. And my mother called me at nine o'clock exactly and said did you watch the news. My mother and my brother called and said, you know, there's been this thing. So I woke up and ... that's how I found out about it. I turned the TV on.

Q. What was your first reaction when you heard or saw...

A. The same as ... Even now I just can't believe it. Like, I know that sounds stupid but I just ... like, just dumbfounded, like, I don't even believe it. Like, I know it happened but I just ... disbelief.

Q. Did anything cross your mind; that Muslims might be behind these attacks?

A. Do you want me to be honest, no. I was just, like, ... I just couldn't even believe ... I couldn't comprehend how big the whole thing was. Do you know what I mean? It was so crazy. And I mean, like, not even crazy. It was so surreal, --surreal I think is a better word for me, -that I wasn't even thinking who did this, why did it happen? Nothing. I remember actually ... You asked me this question; it's interesting. When I was in law school the ... the Oklahoma City bombings happened and that day I went to school with a guy who's now a [name removed], he's my ... you know, he's a year older than me and he

was in my class. And he's a congressman, a very nice man. And he and I are ... are friends, were friends. And when I saw him in the library that day, the day that this happened, the first thing he said to me, this sent chills down my back, he said, and he's my friend, he said, "You'd better hope this is not an Arab." You know? He just kind of said it in a joking way like ... not like he was angry or threatening to me but he was, like, this is going to be so bad for Muslims or Arabs. And I was, like, why would you say that? Whatever. And yet that was so telling because at that time what did people immediately think? Mosques were bombed and people were upset because of that. So ... and it turned out not to be, thank God. So I ... I can understand why people normally do think these kids of crazy things. But ... for 9-11 I honestly ... I mean, of course when it started coming I that this is ... I believed it. Like, I'm not one of those people who thinks, Oh, you know what? There's some other plot or conspiracy theory. But certainly I just couldn't even believe it.

Q. What do you think is your most vivid memory of September 11th, something that will always stand out in your mind?

A. The feeling of just disbelief and despair. Like, just ... I felt so depressed. Honestly I felt ... I think it shattered my sense of the world. It really made me ... and then at that ... I mean, You're asking me immediately so that's my immediate ... Later I have ... I've had more complicated feelings that I'm sure we'll get to.

Q. Did you feel any anger, pain, grief or sadness immediately afterwards?

A. If you ... I'm going to focus on your word immediately, because my ... and I can certainly talk about it. My feelings in the beginning it's just ... the one word is just disbelief, like, dumbfounded. And it's ... it's not ... I wasn't even angry. I wasn't even sad.

Like, I just couldn't ... I just couldn't even I couldn't even accept it. Do you know what I mean? Like, it was ... I couldn't even absorb the whole thing. And it's funny because I am such a new junky. I read newspapers. I'm so interested in political events. I'm not ... and I don't make ... I don't want to make a stereotype, but I'm not some average Joe Schmoe who just watches sitcoms or is not interested in world events. I'm extremely interested in world events, very involved in it. But for whatever reason I just ... I just couldn't even comprehend what was happening. It was so surreal to me.

Q. Did you feel any type of guilt being a Muslim knowing that Muslims were involved in the attacks?

A. No. No. No, not at all because ... and the reason I say that is I personally didn't ... I think people tried to make me feel that way, absolutely, but I did not because for me I am so happy to be Muslim and I love my religion. I mean that sincerely. I'm not just saying that to be ... Because there's some people who are Muslim and they are Muslim by birth and they're whatever. But I personally actually really, really do love my religion. And it doesn't mean that I always practice it very well or that I'm even a very good Muslim. It's just for me; I have a very strong sense of what it means to be Muslim. And so there was in my mind no ... no at all tie between the two and so there's no question ... Like, if there's guilt involved in something then there's. To me guilt entails responsibility. You know? And in order for me to be guilty about something--even when there are some things like, in your personal life or your family life you feel guilt about but you know you really couldn't have done anything about but I think that we as women we tend to be more guilty? This thing I didn't feel any guilt because it was apples and oranges. This was not ... maybe it was done in the name of Islam but it was so un-Islamic that it did not even

register in my mind as something that I needed to be guilty about. To the extent that I was angry, I was angry that people, both Muslims as well as non-Muslims, or especially non-Muslims, use this to define Islam. You know? We had ... the two things that I was angry about was, first, people who mis--angry ... and I don't want to say angry in, like, Oh, I'm really, really angry. It's more actually sad than angry--is that how my beautiful religion had been really just misunderstood by ... by ... and I take responsibility for the fact that ... that we as Muslims need to do a better job I think of ... of knowing this is what our religion is, though I don't think it's just our responsibility. The two things is: one, I was angry and sad that people and society generally, and I think the media is the biggest culprit in this--flamed the fires of saying, Oh, this is Islam or Islamists or --you know--Islamic militants Islamic terrorists ... You know, they're terrorists, God darn it. I mean, they're just damned terrorists. That's one point. But secondly, there are Muslims amongst my friends, amongst educated professional people, who either were, like, two veins. They ... they split into two camps. One was becoming very, like, oh we need to reform Islam. Islam is ... Look at the crazy ... look at all these crazy people are Muslim. Some guy actually said to me, who I went to law school with, "Oh, we heed to convert Z?" You know? For me, he's, like, we need to start converting mockingly, and he's very educated, very--you know -- whatever. Another others were: like, oh, we need to have a reformation. You know? We ... the problem with our religion is we're stuck back in the Middle Ages and whatever. We need to reform. That's one ... one sentiment. The second sentiment, and neither of these I agree with, the second one is people who are like, [have] become more mullahs type in terms of ... I mean, like, more insular and more, like, it's us against them. It's that mentality of like ... we've got to be more Muslim and hate Bush and

hate, you know, every American, we accept that it was Islam versus America. And those people chose Islam in a way that was against America None of those are things that I believe.

Q. Have your feelings changed ever since the events?

A. Not really. The thing that has changed is that at first I kept telling you that I was feeling such despair and dumbfounded. What has happened to me is I'm the kind of person who, either I completely succumb to something and I become paralyzed and depressed, ... or else I really confront something head on. I'm like, this is a problem; what am I going to do about it? 'Cause I can't just sit ... and I can't say that this is a great thing. It's often gotten me into trouble because I get really frustrated or I waste a lot of energy. I'm, like, what am I going to do about it? So like, right after ... I don't mean to get too off track but it's something that actually will help you, I think.

Q. Yeah, of course.

A. In talking about my feelings towards 9-11 – the first month – ... actually not a month, the first two or three weeks I was just in bed, depressed. [Removed], as you know, is close to the [removed] and on the first Thursday ... I came to the office Thursday the first time, or came to this area rather, it was chaos. You know? It was Tuesday and on Thursday I came here. There were people wearing gas masks. There was the smell of just ... just fire and death. It was so depressing. And then there were, like, missing posters ... I walked by, where Lexington, where Baruch [College] ... the restaurants are. I went by 'cause they're Egyptian, [removed] and all these places and I saw missing posters and I saw people ... You know, the armory was right there and Bellevue Hospital. The first night I ... it was so scary. I'm really scared of hospitals ... and I couldn't for the life of me

get a bus back home to ... to where I live. I live on the Upper East Side. So I had to walk all the way down to First Avenue or Second Avenue and I saw ... wherever Bellevue Hospital is, the subway right--not subway--but station right in front of Bellevue. My luck would have it, I ended up there. And, it was so scary 'cause there was smoke everywhere, there were people crying ... It was just craziness that day, I mean, as it was, like, for a while. People were wearing gas masks and it's pitch dark. And I don't even know this area that well at that time. I had just moved into this office in September, or actually August but I was gone for a lot of August. And then September was the first month I was really here.

Q. Oh.

A. I was in [place] before, my office was. ...

Q. What a beginning.

A. Yeah, what a beginning. Exactly. September I had zero income. I mean, not that that's a big problem. But I'm saying it was a problem for me because here I've just started this new business and then psychologically, economically, everything. Anyway, so I go to this place and I just ... all around me was just such sadness. And the firemen--I remember this fire truck passed by and they said, "we got one," like, they thought they'd gotten someone who had ... a live person. And I went home to watch the news and unfortunately it was ... they really didn't get one. Anyway, so then I was really depressed. And then for about two weeks I was just, like [stayed] in bed just, lie [in] in disbelief. Finally, I was like, you know what? I'm not going to do this. I can't. I've got to be a part of, like, moving forward or else I'm going to be stuck in this depression. I got where I was saying I hate New York. I don't want to live here. It's so scary. The world is becoming

so scary, blah, blah, blah. Oh instead what I did was I start ... the first meeting I went to, I remember, was at NYU, AALDF – I don't know if you've heard of the Asian American Legal Defense organization ... the foundation – they started a meeting of just, like, people ... I was so happy that there were, like, hundreds of people at this meeting. And people were not just talking about helping the victims, which I'm very dedicated ... I've actually volunteered a lot at the City Bar. You know? I don't know if you know but the Bar Association did a lot of work for the victims and I did a fair amount of that work. I mean, not me alone, but I mean, I participated at that. You know? And so this was about ... talking about civil rights and backlash so it was the first time this conversation was being held. So I went to those meetings and then I ... the way I dealt with it was like, I knew as lawyer you know that these ... how these things affect peoples' civil rights and peoples' day to day lives. ... I had worked for a law firm in D.C. and I was a lobbyist so I know how important using the government is for any kind of social change. ... In this meeting we broke into sub-groups and I raised my hand and I'm, like, Hey! Who wants to lobby the government? Because I don't know if you remember, at that point they were passing some crazy laws, like the Patriot Act that people didn't even read. They were just, like, let's just round up those people you know – that kind of mentality. And nobody bothered to really read or even have the time, frankly, 'cause it was so long. I have to say what I started feeling at that point is there are good people in America. There are really good people who genuinely care, who believe in this country, and I feel ... Right at that time I ... Right after 9-11 happened I was, like, you know what? No matter what I say about being American, I'm not American because always people will look at me and think that I'm different. And I can tell you about some of the backlash that I face or people in my

family faced. It just reconfirmed to me that you always ... You know? It doesn't matter if I don't have an accent. It doesn't matter if I was born here. It doesn't matter if I'm rich or if I'm very educated. You're ... someone's going to look at you and they're going to think that you're foreign. You know? That's just the ... especially when something like this happens they can say, oh, you need to go back home or you, guys did this, or whatever. You know?

Q. When people asked you about your ethnic background before September 11th what did you tell them?

A. Bangladeshi-American Muslim.

Q. How about immediately afterwards?

A. Exactly the same.

Q. And now?

A. Yeah. The two are exactly the same. In fact, like, that's one of my problems. I'm very stubborn. I'm very stubborn and I'm very ... I really wear my heart on my sleeve. And the reason, thank God, it hasn't gotten me into trouble is that I think once you get to know me --and this is, I think, true of most people, honestly --there's nothing to fear. It's like we're all people. We're people at the end of the day. And I think that what I was going to say is that the thing that ... my feelings changed is that I realized that being American means being all of these different things and that there are people who ... I don't know if [name of person who referred her to interviewer] she's told you this, but I've been giving a lot of speeches ... since 9-11 and I don't know how it happened because it's not like I'm a professional speaker or ... somehow one thing led to another and in fact ... In fact, right before you called I had to get off the phone because someone just called to ask if I might

be ... they want to invite me to speak in a Jewish high school in Scarsdale. You know? And it's like ... it's so weird, because it's not like I'm this professional speaker ... but my point is, since all these things have happened I've seen people are really of good will and people do want to listen to you. People do, and that made me feel so much better about me as a Muslim, me as an American, me as someone from Bangladesh, all of these things. So to the extent that my feelings in the beginning ... were dumbfounded, sadness certainly, I don't want to not say sadness because ... that goes without saying. People, so many people died. A lot of Bangladeshis, a lot of people ... I know of clients, they got one of the first memorials ... in fact, not one of the first, the first memorial I went to was organized by the Bangladeshi community in a Bangladeshi restaurant in Jackson Heights for all the Bangladeshi, for everybody, 'cause I don't want to say for Bangladeshis, for everybody. For everybody. But then they also spoke ... some of the Bangladeshi victims' families spoke and they were just crying. And I remember watching the [TV] ... Do you remember how Bush spoke the first time, I think on the 15th [of September] or something? ... You know, at that restaurant we watched it. So anyway, that's how my feelings started ... of fear ... fear is the thing I forgot to say. After 9-11 I did start feeling fear.

Q. Have your feelings toward the United States changed in any way after September 11th, like your level of political awareness, towards domestic policies or foreign policies?

A. Well, like I said I've actually always been pretty aware, just because of the nature of my work and also my own personal interest. But certainly now I am more ... In fact, well,

actually, I should finish the story ... quickly the story. So out of this meeting I said: Hey! Let's lobby people on the Patriot Act.

Q. Yeah?

A. My heart was so warm. There was, like, eleven people who signed up. In fact, one woman who is not even ... she's white American, completely lefty crunchy granola liberal, she worked, in fact I've got to call her and thank her, she worked so hard for things that affect Muslim-Americans, that affect Americans who don't look like her, just because she believes in what America needs for standing up for civil rights. We had meetings in my office. At that time I didn't even had a phone because it took so long for my phone to get hooked up. We met right in that conference room. And we wrote letters, we wrote letters. She photocopied and drafted them. We called ourselves the [name removed], whatever. We wrote letters to congressmen, congresswomen, we wrote letters to everybody saying please be careful, we're worried about our civil rights. You know, not a single person there was Muslim except for me, and I did the least amount of work. I mean ... I'll say that honestly. ... That to me was America. So all my fears ... I realized then that America's what you make it. I mean, of course it has a lot of and may have a lot of crazyness in terms of people who think this is what America is and they don't want to enforce the rights of other people. But America as a whole, I think the system allows you to enforce your rights. And that's why I became a lawyer, actually. And to answer your question of how my feelings have changed, I am certainly not one of those flag waving ... I'm proud to be American ... not that I'm not, but I have actually become more aware of what it means to be American. I'm actually prouder of the values. And I always say

this and I mean it strong[ly], I'm a good American because I try very hard to be a very good Muslim. That's really my mantra.

Q. Do you feel a sense of belonging in the United States? Do you feel at home here?

A. Honestly speaking, right after it happened I did not. I did not at all. And it was funny. I married someone from Bangladesh and, I mean, I'm very happily married.... After I got married – even though he went to college here, but he grew up in Bangladesh – after I got married I remember thinking how American I was. ... I'm sure you know about the culture back there. But, I had a very traditional Bangladeshi wedding. I have the traditional family structure or whatever, and I was like, I'm an American. I can't deal with this mother-in-law stuff or ... even though I have a very nice mother-in-law ... but culturally I was, like, I am American. I realized that ... especially after I got married because I was married to someone who was from Bangladesh. So I was starting to get comfortable with my American identity. Then 9-11 happened. I felt like it was a slap in my face, like oh, you're not American. And then it forced me to reexamine what it means to be American and all of that. And so now, actually, what has happened is I have a different sense of my identity and I feel that I am American. And you know what? I'm going to enforce my American-ness ... and my right to belong 'cause I do belong to this society. You know?

Q. Do you think that after September 11th there has been a change in the way people from South Asian and the Middle East have been treated in the United States?

A. Absolutely. I don't know if this is the time because I don't know what your questions ... where they're leading. I'm going to actually give you some examples of backlash.

Q. Actually, that was going to be my next question.

A. Okay, 'cause I think that will help answer your question. That's why.

Q. Sure.

A. I can talk about my own family. Okay? You know, I'm using my family because it's what I know best ... everyone has their own stories.

Q. Right.

A. [Removed] ... and I say this because moving to New York, I see there's so many different immigrant groups. But in the '70s there were only certain [educated people] ... I mean, class is actually very important because if you're educated and you have more money, you have more access, you integrate easier, I think. You know? And especially if it's a place like [state] where there are no brown people, really, you become more American or white, or whatever it is. So we came in the '70s and in my family education was very important, being successful was very important, as it is in our culture. And we weren't all ... being different or being ... Yeah. We know we're Muslim. We know we're Bangladeshi, but we're here in America. We're going to make it kind of thing. And in fact, and I tell you that I'm so stubborn, my father didn't really like the fact that I was so into Bangladesh or so into Islam, even though he founded the mosque in [city]. My father, founded that mosque, and he actually is very active in the community. He's very profe -- but he's active in a very different way than I am. Like, he's not an activist. He's like, this is what my ... my cultural life is, but it's not really like he gets involved in it, whereas like, for me I'm like, I'm a Bangladeshi! These are my rights. Or I'm an American and so I can do all this, so that there was a clash there. But so we grew up in very upper middle class environment. I have three brothers. I'm the eldest. I have a

younger brother who went to boarding school, a military academy. Then he [went to the] Air Force Academy. You know how there's like West Point, Air Force ... My mother, she ... she went and met a Senator, met a Congressman, got him a nomination from everybody, went to the Air Force Academy, [he] is now a [rank] in the United States Air Force. ... I think he ... and he's definitely the highest-ranking Bangladeshi-American and he just got promoted to being Captain last July, actually, July before 9-11. My second brother went to prep school, do you know what prep school [is]? Well, he went to prep school in New Hampshire; he went to [school].

Q. Okay.

A. And then he is ... He's [now] at [university] and he's in law and he is there. And before he transferred --he was in a college in California at [name]. And then I have a younger brother who's in high school. Okay. I tell you these details because I want to explain how we are typical type of immigrant family and what happened to us.

Q. Right.

A. During 9-11 I had ... like I said, I was in Michigan. I was flying ... I flew back on Sunday. And my parents, this is stupid but my parents just bought a brand new Mercedes and it was being delivered that Monday, like, the ninth or tenth of September. So my youngest brother stayed to see the ... before college started he stayed with them to get the Mercedes ... see the new car whatever. So he stayed with them and so he didn't fly back. He was supposed to have flown back on Sunday. He didn't fly back to California. My older brother who was already in California, was staying in California and he'd been chosen, because he'd just got this promotion, he'd been chosen by his boss to get -- and I

actually don't want any identifying; you are going to get this tape; right? I don't want any identifying characteristics for this...

Q. Just don't mention any names.

A. Yeah. But even then I don't want any identifying things because I don't want to hurt my brother. That's why.

Q. Absolutely right.

A. When you hear the story you'll understand what I mean. He had been chosen by his boss to fly to a certain place to ... for some anti-terrorism training. On the Sunday before 9-11 he flew to this place, this out ... this other state, to ... for some training 'cause he had been chosen by his boss. The Sunday after 9-11 he was supposed to fly back because his training was over. When this happened he called me immediately. He's like frantic. He's like are you okay? You know? He was very worried. And I said, everything okay with you? He said ... he was in this class learning about terrorism in this different state. So the next Sunday he tried to fly back and he gets on the plane and nobody would fly with him. He ... and I'm telling you this because he is not just some ... he's not even you or me. Do you know what I mean? He is fighting for this country. He was ... he's been all over the world for America. And he gets on this ... do you remember how they shut down the airports and Sunday was one of the first days that they started flying people. And I don't know if ...you heard of it; I'm sure you did, but there were many people who ... Muslim ... Muslim looking men who were asked to get off flights. He was one of these people. He doesn't have a beard. He's six foot two. You know? I'll show you a picture. He's very ... He's brown but he's all American. You know what I mean? He's not like ... like, I'm very, I'm into my culture and blah, blah, blah. He's all American. He doesn't,

talk about politics. Nothing. And he got on the plane and there ... they made him get out one time, two times. A few times this happened. He calls my ... and you know how I found out about this is my Mom told me. My Mom was saying how sad he was. He was so sad that on this plane, and he was going to learn how to fight for this country. People would not let him fly. And the pilot was like you need to leave. So finally at one in the morning when there's nobody flying they let ... he flew back to wherever his base was. That's one example. And I told you about my brother who didn't ... who stayed home. He was going back to college. So he went to college, a small school, and he is waiting for ... and he is very, very fair and very stocky. Like, he played football at [school]. Like, he doesn't look like a typical Desi person. He looks more Arab. You know what I mean? Like, he's got dark brown hair

Q. Oh, okay.

A. And he's much ... he's very fair. You know? And his body type ... He looks like, I think, more like an Arab, even though nobody ? he has a beard or anything. He gets on the plane and he said to me, this is the Sunday again afterwards.... He gets home he said ... he called me. He's like, so depressing. He goes: "Everybody on the plane ... These two ladies sitting next to me holding their Bible and just staring at me, like, how dare you get on this plane?" kind of like just watching every move. And he felt like he couldn't even do anything, like go to the bathroom or do anything, on this long flight, because ... in case of any suspicion. Then he gets to his college and he'd ... in his college there aren't many parking spaces. You have to wait often a long time for a parking space. One day he's getting on ... waiting for a parking space, someone comes out ... He'd been waiting for an hour. He starts going in. This kid comes in with a BMW cuts him off, takes the parking

space. And my brother gets out and says, "I've been waiting for an hour. My class starts. What are you doing? You saw me coming in. Why did you cut me off?" The kid says, "Go back to where you're from. It's because of you this country's in the situation it is." Okay? That kind of stuff happens. College kids are jerks and they'll cut you off. ...That's not related to 9-11, but those kind of comments are not ... and I don't want to make light of ... this is a project about 9-11 and some people...I'm telling you this.

Q. Of course, go ahead.

A. Obviously ... obviously people died and a lot of horrible things happened.... I'm truly sorry for that. But ... these are issues that also need to be examined, the erosion of peoples' civil rights. Where's my brother going to go back to?...He's from America. He's American. ... Here he is ... and if you detect that I'm getting upset and angry, well, I am because ... it's frustrating because here he is and ... thank God, my parents really believe in education and they sent him to a school where only kings' sons go to. It's thirty thousand dollars a year for a high school kid to go to. That's not easy for most people. So ... my point is, here my parents are doing whatever they can and my brother, it's also not very easy to get into those schools, you know? He's been very, very smart and whatever. We think that we have made it in America. Do you know what I mean? What I mean by that ... I'm saying ... I'm not trying ... that's why I'm saying. I'm not trying to show off about my family's achievements, ... but I'm giving examples of how ... finally, we have our luxury Mercedes. You know? We all are *m'ashallah* have done very well in school. My father's successful. My mother's successful. Yet in a minute none of that matters. We're not ... we're no longer Americans. We're no longer part of this society. Do you understand what I mean? ... I'm not bragging, but I'm saying, I was blessed. I went to a

top-five law school in this country and what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. ... You grow up in this country, you think, at least my parents; I can only speak for my background, they said, "You just work hard. Don't worry about the fact that you're...." My Dad would say, "You're short.... People aren't going to take you seriously." But I worked hard. And when I applied to law school people didn't care if I was short or dark or whatever. I just had really good scores and I worked hard for that. The same as all my bro[thers]. In fact, I would say it was harder for my brothers because for me ... [at their work] they do care about all these other factors. And it was very hard for him because ... it's not just grade based. You know? It was hard for him to succeed in that environment so I really respect that. But ... but my point is that, the frustration is that in a moment like this someone cuts you off ... They do something wrong, or maybe you do something wrong; we're all human; we're not perfect, it doesn't matter that we're human or that ... whatever we are. At the end of the day what matters is that you look different. You need to go back to where you're from. ... As a sister it was painful for me because it was I wanted to ... I did cry. I was, like, how can I protect my brother. You know? He doesn't know. He was born in this country. He doesn't know anything else. Maybe I can go back to Bangladesh even though I really lived there, I mean, when I was very young. But it doesn't matter because you have no idea what ... you have no idea what can change in one second for you. Then let me tell you about some of my clients. You know, I told you I had no income in September. Most of my clients at that time--'because I think I told you that I started in [place], my practice, I was very lucky that I have a very amazing husband so when I got married last January I quit my job in February and started my own practice. So unfortunately, I had my own business and you don't always make a lot of money. So I

had ... but I had the luxury of having a husband who was very supportive of me, emotionally and financially. So I was struggling. So in September when ... a lot of my clients were from Bangladesh and from ... they're cab drivers. They didn't make any money because people didn't want to get in their cabs, or if they did they'd spit on them or not pay their fare or fight ... so those things I saw because these were my clients. So I'm telling you about my family and then I'm telling you about my ... my clients ... First of all, just on a personal level it affected them psychologically, racism or whatever, but also economically. I'll tell you about another client who's not Muslim, who's not even Arab. He's from the DR [Dominican Republic]. He drives a limo. He's one of my pro bono -- that means for free--clients. In fact, a lot of ... most of my clients are pro bono. And he ... right after 9-11 ... he's Latin, but I guess someone could think he's Arab. And I guess people do think he's Arab because he tells me that that, even though he has a very, very strong Spanish accent, half the time I can't even understand him, and yet people in this country who are very ignorant of people who are different, they just assume you're Arab if they think you're different. ... He said that whenever he had clients, they'd get in his limo and they'd say, "Where are you from?" And as soon as he would say, "I'm from the Dominican Republic." Then they would ... he said they would get really, like, tense, then they'd be, like, Oh ... like, they'd relax. ... And he says that [this] still happens to him now and this has been over a year [since 9/11]. He was telling me that right after 9-11 -- maybe a few weeks; maybe ... within the first month, I think, he drives a limo so he bought ... that's his livelihood. Someone from New Jersey ran into him by--I don't know if by accident or what-- but hit his car. So he got out of the car because he thought, let me get the insurance and let me file it, the normal thing. Right? The guy hit him. He gets out

of the car and the guy in the other car, in New Jersey says -- I don't know if I can say this on tape but you know you can sensor it -- "Mother fucker, you fucking get back in the car." He was telling me this. He goes: "You're on the wrong side of the law. If you don't get fucking in the car I'm going to call the police. You're on the wrong side, man. You're on the wrong side and no one is going to help you. The police aren't going to help you, you Middle Eastern, blah, blah, blah, 'cause he thought that he was an Arab. I mean, here is an example of how peoples' racism ... You know what? ... We Muslims we also need to do housekeeping because I know ... I'm sure I have a lot of racism. I don't want to and I really try not to and I know it's against my religion and even who I am as a person, but we have that to deal with. You know? That's just us. And not just us, a lot of groups have racism, I mean, especially Asian-Americans or whatever, we have to deal with that. So I'm not going to say that suddenly after 9-11 while Americans started becoming racist towards Muslims. That's ... but what I am saying is, after 9-11 our internal racism, which was not as okay before, was given almost free license to just come out. Like, there was no penalty. There was no need to check yourself. Like, now we can't blatantly call someone nigger. I mean, we never should have. You know? But the point is that we know that if you do it there are consequences in this country, right, ... as there absolutely ought to be. Now it's almost okay to be angry and to say ... and ... and there are always going to be crazy people. There are always going to be people who are Muslim who happen to do crazy, criminal behavior and we have to treat them like a criminal. You know?

Q. Absolutely.

A. And so what bothers me is when these kinds of incidences that happen, and as a lawyer, as a person they hurt me. As a lawyer they hurt me. And then I'll give you one

personal example, and I ... and I feel ... I even feel guilty to tell you these things because like in another day they're nothing. They can be pushed over. But the point is they are something when they're happening systemically, when they're happening to ... You and I start talking and I bet you, you can tell me something that happened to you or your family or somebody you know similar. And you start putting everything together, that's how erosion of civil rights happen. That's how employment discrimination ... And now I'm speaking as a lawyer, that's how peoples' rights to their work, to their livelihood, to exercise the freedom of expression or to vote, to be part of this society. That's how those things happen. The fact that people don't want to talk to you of this ... about this interview even though it's confidential, the fact that I don't want you to be public about me ... I don't want to be. I want you to know my story. I mean this pains me because ... especially because I have been giving speeches and saying this is what I care about. This is what I believe. And I try to relate to people on a person-to-person level. Yet it's almost painful because sometimes you realize that you can't relate to them because people have this fixed stereotype of what it means to be who you are and they can't seem to get beyond that. So I'll give you one quick personal example is that right after 9-11, in October or late September actually, I went to [school] to attend a lecture. And I was just attending. I heard about it on the Internet.... It was a historical perspective on civil rights and what happens after a disaster like this on 9-11. So this ended around eight o'clock and my husband was coming to pick me up. It was a Friday night. And I don't know if you know where [school] is, but it's right near [place]. Right? So I was at, like, right next door to [school], and I was waiting for him. He was going to pick me up. He was driving. And I'm waiting at the stop sign and I had just taken my cell phone out. And it was, like, eight

o'clock exactly and, like, hey, where are you? [I said to] my husband, where are you? I'm waiting on this corner. And he's, like, "Oh, I just took a wrong turn." ... You know, in New York if you take a wrong turn it takes you forever to get back. "I just took ... I just missed a turn. I'll be there in five minutes. Don't worry." I had the cell phone in my hand, I had just hung up, a police driver ... policeman comes by and he goes, "Hi! Can I help you?" And I was, in my Gucci purse and my ... I don't cover, obviously my just normal clothes. I had, like a shawl 'cause it was cold, ... wrapped around me and I was standing there and he's like, May ... I'm not jay walking. I'm not any ... I'm on the sidewalk. He goes, "May I help you?" I said, "No. I'm just waiting for my husband" And he's like, "Do you need anything?" He's, like, "do you need anything? What are you waiting for?" I'm like, "Oh, my husband is coming." He goes, "Did you call him?" And like, I had just called him. He just took the wrong turn. And he was like ... he goes, "You need to call your husband." I just called him. He's on his way. He's like, "Oh well, you need to keep a better leash on him," and he starts laughing. Meanwhile, a white couple walks by with a stroller, and he says nothing. I mean, and other people walked by and ... this policeman is laughing at me. ... I felt like, what the heck? You know? Why is he asking me why I'm waiting here? And he's not even ... trying to find out what I'm doing. Do you know what I mean? And that wouldn't have happened ... that wouldn't have happened pre-9-11. Yet at the same time, as an American ... I guess one should say, well, we want to be secure, not just what I want to say as an American. I want to be secure. I want to be secure. ... Maybe he thought I was going to bomb, God forbid, [New York]. ...I just thought of it right now as I was telling you the story. Obviously that's not even how... I don't even think like that. But my point is that ... There are two levels. You know? He probably

thinks he's just ... anything out of the ordinary, a proud person waiting on a street corner. What does she want? Is she plotting something? Or, like, people you hear all ... any Middle Eastern people taking ... looking people taking pictures of buildings they're plotting to blow--bomb them. [On] one hand I feel like that's horrible. On the other hand, what do we do?

Q. All these experiences that you've told me about, this backlash, do you believe that Middle Eastern or the South Asian organizations have been effective in handling this backlash? Have they been able to mobilize the community effectively?

A. Yes and no. And what I mean by that, yes, certainly they have tried. And when I say no I don't mean that in a faulting ... like, no. They've done a horrible job or they haven't done. They haven't done it. What I mean by no is, frankly, they're not prepared. You know? They're not ... It was just ... It was capacity. It's mind blowing. It's a lot to ask. And I think a lot of our ... especially our organizations and religious or cultural organizations, they're not ... they're not trained, they're not equipped to deal with these kinds of things so they have ... certainly I give them so much credit that they were on the media. There's so many people whom I've never even heard of who were on the news every day trying to deal with it at great personal cost, I'm sure, to that because, I'm sure, they didn't make a lot of friends going on TV and defending Muslims. So I really respect and applaud that. But unfortunately, I don't think it was as effective and I don't blame them ... and I hope that as we move forward we realize the importance of lobbying and the importance of having Muslim lawyers, not just Muslim doctors and engineers, all of that stuff.

Q. Have you joined any ethnic or religious organization ever since September 11th?

A. I mean, I've always been members of them so I have ... I mean, the Muslim Bar Association, and these are things I would have done anyway so I think I'm not a good example because I'm the kind of person who would have done these ... been part of these organizations anyway. But, yes. Certainly my participation is more. But I think what you're trying to get at maybe is I think more people have become more active.

Q. In your opinion, what is the nature of the relationship between your ethnic and religious group and others in the U.S. at the time? Do you think that the relationship after September 11th is more strained and oppositional or the communities are more tolerant of each other and they're more harmonious towards each other?

A. You know, you're not going to like this because, again, it's not a ... it's not a direct answer. I would say both. And what I mean by that is on a superficial level I think you can have people think, oh, it's oppositional because ... not even on a superficial level. To a certain level there is oppositional because of stereotyping and what people hear, they're Look at those crazy Muslims or those whatever those.... I think the fears of people come out in times of stress and crisis. Having said that, I myself ... Our next-door neighbors are Hindu. You know? First of all, I've always been close to Hindus and Muslims .. all religions. I feel very close ... You know? I don't have any animosity, thank God, to anybody. But since 9-11 it's almost like we've bonded as people of color. Like, no one's going to see her and think she's Hindu and I'm Muslim. They're not going to know that. Right? And so we're both subject to these kinds of things. So to some ... And I think if you can get beyond ... this is why I think it's so important to connect with people as human beings; if you get beyond the idea that, oh, you Muslims, you are the cause of this problem. And, and we're Sikhs. In fact, this is actually a good thing to tell you is that ... I

don't know if you know, but at the beginning of this stuff I've heard, I hope it's not a rumor because I don't want to be spreading rumors, I had heard from these sources that the Indian Embassy had said to Indians, to women, put a dot on your head [*bindia*]. You know? Men do this ... to distinguish you from these Muslims. You know? Or, like Sikhs were wearing signs on their cab drivers saying we're not Muslim. You know? And then luckily, thank God, someone got the brilliant idea to say you know what, it doesn't matter, 'cause a Sikh was killed. You know? He was one of the first people ... in fact, one of the few people who were killed on 9-11.

Q. Yeah. And many Sikhs were...

A. Right. And many were harassed. Right? And many, most of the people who were harassed were Sikhs, unfortunately, and they're not Muslims. It just shows that the ignorance and racism just goes ... cuts right across. The point is that the communities at that point, the Sikh and Muslim community decided to work together and said you know what, let's not allow people to divide and rule us, to play upon our prejudice. Let's work together and fight racism as it is. So that was a good thing and it brought communities closer. So for me, .. like I said, I've been giving some speeches. I spoke at a synagogue in [New York] and I spoke on 9-11 and spoke ... I did a prayer at [place] and it was really nice. You know? I mean, especially the rabbi. My husband was, like ... had never been to a synagogue, and he invited us to dinner and it was so heart warming. You know? It was so ... Jews and Muslims, we're not supposed to get along, and here was this rabbi inviting me to dinner. And I like him so much. He invited me to his son's [??] ... I consider him a friend. You know? That's something that unfortunately may not have happened, not because I didn't want it to happen, just because the opportunity of having that kind of

relationship. So I think the answer is ... [what is] powerful now is that ... I feel that people are building coalition and relationships.

Q. So going back to the oppositional side, what do you think that members of your community can do to improve these relationships between these other communities or just take away that oppositional part and just become more harmonious and tolerant?

A. I think it's impossible to take away the oppositional part completely just because we live in a wider world and there are politics and there's other is, and just human nature. I mean, we're just ... this isn't heaven. ...But I think, that ought to be a goal. And the way you do that realistically is you, again, I can't emphasize enough, you relate to people as people.... And this is what I say when I give a speech at [malls] or other places, I say you know what, for every time you scream or yell, Islam is not terrorism. Islam is peaceful. Actually, you know what's more and more loud or more effective is to live our religion. If I practice my religion the way it is and I don't go around saying ... I'm peaceful, but I act nice [and] behave ... the people in my office think well of me. I'm just giving [an example] ... even in this office, and then they later find out that I'm Muslim, then they'll realize, well she was a nice person. She kept her promises. She always paid rent on time. She was polite. She was clean. I mean, I'm saying these things 'cause I always say them. You know? I'm not saying it. ... Do you understand what I'm saying?

Q. I do.

A. And like, a stupid little example. You know, there's *habib* -- there's a saying in our religion that when you go to a place you should leave it cleaner than when you went there. Right? That is what we should be doing. We should be practicing our religion. We

shouldn't be worried ... Of course we grieve for what's happening in Palestine. I mean ... I feel very strongly about Palestine. But for me to be fighting and just parading and saying death to Israel is something I would not do. That is not effective. If you can say, you know what, being Muslim, this is who I am. Let people know what being a Muslim is and then talk about your pain. Who as a sister or a mother or a person, can't relate to the fact that this happened to my brother and I wanted to cry when people said to him go back to where you're from, when they didn't want to sit next to him on the plane. You know? That's a human thing. That's not like, a Muslim thing. Anybody would ... If you were a black person and you weren't ... and you weren't allowed to sit down, or you were a white person and this happened to you, people can relate to that. So my whole thing is how we can do that is we can have more dialogue, and I mean dialogue. And unfortunately, people haven't had enough. I take responsibility for this [that] people haven't had enough of a chance to know we as Muslims ... as Muslims because unfortunately I think, the immigrant population in America has often been insular. Like, we go to school and we do really well professionally, but we don't invite people into our house ... or we don't really go to their house. We need to do a better job of that. And I think once we do that ... once they see us and the ... then let the conversation start happening. Right? And then we have dialogue, and then I really do believe this ... is helpful.

Q. Given your understanding of the South Asians and the Middle Eastern people here after September 11th in the United States, would you still encourage these groups to emigrate to the United States?

A. You know, I think the answer would be two fold. One is economically I think this is the worst time. You know? I think we're under ... and that actually is something pretty serious because unfortunately because of 9-11 we tend to forget that we were already in a recession in March of 2000 and people were suffering even before. You know? I picked the worst time to get married. Like, I got engaged in 1999 in the fall when my father had just lost so much money in the stock market, as was everybody. You know? So my point is things were already going down. The stress level ... the people were getting And unfortunately, in times of economic need people become more ...the survival instinct is there ... They're less generous, in every way, jobs or their attitude, in every way so that's a serious factor. So that would effect what I would say to people of that. Secondly, as a lawyer I would say ... as lawyer I would say that this may not be the best time, because I've seen ... laws are laws on the books, but what happens is how people practice and enforce those laws. And I've seen people who have had their eco- their immigration identities questioned or trivial things being rounded ... Like, for example, the two guys doing ... the snipers. They're from—what were they, Latin America? Guatemala or somewhere in Latin America? They had nothing to do with the snipers. But because they're illegal, guess what? They're being deported. You know? I think before ... and yes. That's against the law and maybe you can argue that they should be. But I'm saying that there's heightened scrutiny of anyone who looks different. So I mean, obviously you shouldn't come here illegally. But even if you do come here legally ... the climate of fear and civil rights issues ... I mean, I don't want to say don't come here. You know? So those are the two answers, like, as a lawyer and from just an economic point. But then the answer as a human being, at the end of the day I am happy I'm American. And honestly

speaking, many of my clients who are Muslim and who are Bangladeshi ... and my husband, he's, like, God forbid if this had happened in Bangladesh between Muslims and Hindus, we would have killed the Hindus. He was saying that, or if the Hindus would have killed us. You know? We see that.

Q. Just like what was happening in Gujarat just because of the pro--

A. Exactly. Exactly. And so the point is that having said those two things, at the end of the day I'm so glad I live in America as opposed to anywhere else in the world. And so I am happy to be an American, and I can see why people want to come here. You know? And I think it's a great country. The issue is not forgetting what it is to be American and what America stands for. Don't let any ... Just like I won't let anybody define what Islam is for me. I will make sure to say, this is not Islam. Don't tell me ... You know? If someone asks me, a friend of mine, is Osama Bin Laddin Muslim, it's not for me to judge whether he's Muslim. It's for God to judge. But I can tell you what, his behavior is not Islam, that I can tell you without a doubt. So the answer is ... and the same thing is ... I'm not going to let ... as an American I'm not going to let other people who think America is bad or is Zionist or is this or that or against Muslims, I'm not going to let them define what America is. I am Muslim. I am anti-Zionist. I am an American and I'm proud to be an American.

Q. So far we've talked about the negative consequences of September 11th. Do you think that there were any positive consequences that stemmed from it?

A. Yeah, I do. Yeah. I think ... I don't know. I guess I wasn't clear, but yeah, I think ... I definitely ... One, there *m'ashallah* is a greater awareness and hopefully understanding of Islam. People want to know about it. But you have a lot of people like crazy Daniel Pipes

who think they know Islam better than Muslims and/or who have their own agenda that ... there's always that danger. Once there's more light on something, you can't control how it goes. Secondly and more importantly, people are exposed to it so they're going to at least see that Islam is a very deep religion, deep and complex or whatever. It's not just this, go kill Americans. You know? That's not what Islam is at all. And for me personally, I've really been heartened by Americans. I think people--as are all people around the world, but I think Americans have shown ...every time I've given a speech I can't tell you the amount of people who come up to me, especially, like, just Joe Schmoe American or, people--and I say Joe Schmoe because people who maybe I would not have had a chance to connect with or who are Jewish, or who are people you would think are not someone who would agree with me who come over to me and who hug me and who are so compassionate, who are loving and I think ... and one of my best friends growing up, she lives in St. Louis and she was telling me that after this happened her neighbor came over and said, she's Indian. She said, "You know, if you need anything, I'm here. If you face any problems or you hear about." And my friend said to me, "I don't know if I should be happy she said this or scared." Like, why would she feel this to be a threat? But ... but the point is there are people who are who are very supportive and I think it's brought the best in us out.

Q. Why do you think that the attacks on the World trade Center and the Pentagon happened? Do you believe that maybe the Arabs in the Middle East hate America?

A. You know, I don't know why they happened. I mean, why would I know. You know? I have ... I have no idea why they happened. I don't know why a lot of things happen in the world. The only thing that I can think of is that they're trying to use their twisted, sick

view of getting ... why would ... at the bottom line, they're trying to hurt America. And I don't know. ... I don't know what was going on in peoples' minds. But why do you want to hurt anybody? You want to attack them? You want to do something ... so I .. I don't know. They wanted to hurt America.

Q. What do you think the United States can do to resolve this issue of terrorism, which is directed against it?

A. Well, I think terrorism is directed against a lot of nations, not just America.

Q. I mean, but specifically, since...

A. You know what happened. You know, I just said that because I think it's important for us not to forget that because I think a lot of people just think suddenly now terrorism exists; always existed, but of course, it's different when it hits home. I think what we can do is that ... I think awareness. I think we need to become a member of the global community. We need to, as Americans, realize when ... that it's not just America, that we are in a world community and what happens around the world affects us. And if we don't ... and I'm not agreeing with this, but if we don't want to be a part of it guess what, someone may bring it home ... you know what I mean, in a very un-- not in a good way. So I don't know. I'm ... I'm a kind of person who I'm very strong believer in inter-faith [dialogue] and in coalition [building], in working with people. You and I can disagree about ninety-nine out of a hundred things, but I don't have the energy to talk to you about that. I have a lot of things just like you do. So I would like to work with you on the one thing we agree on. Do you know what I mean? And I think it's more productive. You know? Let our differences lie and let us work towards a respectful understanding of our differences. But I guess my point is as Americans we ought to find out more about the

world. I mean, think often we tend to be so insular because geographically we're ... we're not around a lot of other countries. And ... and because economically we're so strong we feel we don't need to know about other countries. So I think the one way we can do is become a better member of the global community.

Q. Are there any other issues or points that you would like to comment on which you believe that we haven't covered in this survey?

A. No. No. I think you guys did well. And I just wish you good luck. And I don't know exactly what the goal is other than I think you're trying to make a compilation of these issues for people to know.

Q. Just for better awareness. For people to read what's been going on after 9-11.

A. I think ... My hope is that this rings greater understanding.

Q. We hope so too.

A. And that we're all humans and that the pain ... I don't sit here ... I'm not cynical. I'm not bitter. I'm not even angry. I'm not even angry, honestly. I just hope that we'll move towards a better world for everybody and that we as Americans, as Muslims, as whatever we are, will live the best of what we are.

Q. Right. Absolutely. Well, thank you very much for your time.

A. Oh, you're welcome.