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**Oral History Interview with Yasmin Dwedar
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.083**

**Interview conducted by Amna Ahmad in the interviewer's home on March 20th, 2014 in
Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.**

AMNA AHMAD: [00:00:00] So today is March 20th, 2014 and I am Amna Ahmad from the Brooklyn Historical Society. We are here in my home in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. And this interview is part of the Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations oral history project. Now if you would, please introduce yourself.

YASMIN DWEDAR: My name is Yasmin Dwedar.

AMNA AHMAD: And you are an attorney at law.

YASMIN DWEDAR: Yes, I am an attorney.

AMNA AHMAD: Great, thank you. And for the archives, can you tell me your date of birth and where you were born?

YASMIN DWEDAR: [Date redacted for privacy] I was born in Brooklyn, New York.

AMNA AHMAD: Thank you. So to begin, why don't you tell me a little bit about where you come from.

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, I'm a native of Brooklyn. I grew up in Flatbush for the first five years of my life. And now -- and ever since then I've been living in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, which is also known as Arab Central, and I was born to an Egyptian Muslim father and a Filipina who was Catholic at the time and converted around my fifth birthday, somewhere around then.

AMNA AHMAD: And just for the information of those who are listening, I was connected with Yasmin through Moustafa Bayoumi, who gave a CBBG programming event in

January. So it's interesting that you characterize Bay Ridge as Arab Central. In what ways does it characterize that sense of being Arab Central?

YASMIN DWEDAR: In that many Arabs live here. I mean, you know, I didn't know Arabs lived here, and we lived in Flatbush for at least the first five years of my life, and when we moved here I didn't really have a sense of like Arabs or -- like I didn't know people from different -- what the difference was between like different -- people of different races and different ethnicities. For a long time I didn't even know my mom was Filipino. I thought she was Chinese for a very long time. But, you know, we moved into Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, and a few years ago, I asked my dad. I said, "You know, did you know that Arabs were here when we got here?" And he said, "Actually we didn't know they were here." And so we ended up in a very Arab neighborhood. And I say that because I live in the Bay Ridge Avenue area and just a block from Fourth Avenue is Fifth Avenue, and there's the -- there's a mosque there and then there's several Arab stores, like supermarkets, places that sell sweets. And a lot of people that I run into happen to be Arab. I mean they could be Yemenis. They could be Palestinian. They could be Egyptian. They could be Moroccan. But there's just a concentration of Arabs in Bay Ridge in the same way that there's a concentration of Arabs in Astoria, and really in all of Brooklyn those are the two main places that I've seen like a high concentration of Arabs, usually along a strip. So in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn it would be like usually the Fifth Avenue strip for a couple of blocks. And in Astoria Steinway.

AMNA AHMAD: Perfect. Actually it's interesting that another interviewee made that same connection between the Astoria and Bay Ridge communities as well. So do you have any

specific locations in Bay Ridge that are representative of the Arab culture, the stores?

Perhaps the restaurants that you're particularly fond of nowadays?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, the one business that I always think is quite an experience is Balady Supermarket. I've never seen a supermarket quite like it. They have just a lot of pieces from like the Arab world. They have like the flags. They have the drums. They have like these pieces that are made of -- I guess we call it sadaf, so and it's some kind of like pearl or something like that. They just have a lot of beautiful things from the Middle East that, you know, you can't easily find everywhere. But in addition to that they're a supermarket. So they have a lot of the Arab foods that you also can't find anywhere. I guess the only competition with them outside of Bay Ridge would be Sahadi's, which people like to refer to as a cultural experience. But another winner is Tanoreen, which has exploded in popularity ever since "Best Thing I Ever Ate," and, you know, that's a unique establishment in that I believe the owner is Palestinian but she serves a variety of Arab foods, and sometimes somewhat non-Arab foods. But like the knafeh she makes is the best knafeh I've ever had. And the Arab dishes that she makes are also phenomenal. I'm very picky when it comes to restaurants, and, you know, I wouldn't necessarily pick Middle Eastern food over any other food. But Tanoreen is currently number one on my list. So if I had to frequent two places, which I normally do, it's always Tanoreen and Balady. So --

AMNA AHMAD: That's a great characterization. Thank you so much. And Tanoreen and Balady have been staples of the neighborhood for quite some time. [00:05:00] So I'm happy that you were able to mention them. So some people move to a certain community in order to be a part of a larger community of their religion or race. But it seems that

your family didn't know that Bay Ridge had a high Arab concentration at all. So why did your family move to Bay Ridge or decide to make the move from Flatbush?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, the truth is the reason we moved from Flatbush was that crime started to increase in our area. And my father felt that it was unsafe for us to remain there when people were like robbing -- trying to rob our house in broad daylight.

AMNA AHMAD: Wow.

YASMIN DWEDAR: You know, and they would come into the buildings and try to rob you right in front of your door. And it happened on more than one occasion. And then I remember our car getting the -- I don't know if it was they were trying to break into the car or they broke the glass. Something happened with the car also. And so my father, you know, was kind of fearful that, you know, if they're willing to do it to him, and he can somewhat defend himself, like what's going to happen if, you know, my mom or me or my sister at the time, you know, were in the wrong place at the wrong time. So he was concerned, and you know, he went to a real estate agent and for some reason the real estate agent showed a couple of apartments. And two of the apartments were in Bay Ridge. One was on 68th Street between I believe it was Third and Fourth, and then the other one was along Fourth Avenue between 68th and 69th. And they just happened to fall in love with the one that was on Fourth Avenue. And we've been there for well over 20 years.

AMNA AHMAD: And do you -- just on a hunch, do you think that perhaps the real estate agent chose Bay Ridge because he knew of your father's background or --

YASMIN DWEDAR: Actually I'm not sure. I don't know if he knew that my dad was Arab. I think my dad just turned to someone that was recommended, and I think it was really

random, because I specifically asked him that question. I said, “Did you move here because there are Arabs?” He said, “I honestly had no idea.” And I really don’t think the real estate agent knew either, because we were just looking for affordable apartments away from where we were previously living and it just so happened that two of the other number of apartments that they were looking at were located in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. And the one that we got at the time was a very affordable one that was big and it had like three bedrooms. And so it was me and my sister at the time, so I think that’s the reason why they chose that one.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So why don’t you take me back to your early years when you first lived in Bay Ridge. What are some of the experiences that stuck out to you in your childhood?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, it’s not something that’s specifically or directly related to Bay Ridge. But in terms of growing up, so my father wanted to raise us Muslim. And so a big thing for him was having us have an Islamic education. What I remember most about growing up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn is waking up extremely early in the morning and being driven to school all the way in Paterson, New Jersey, at least at the beginning. There was a school out there that I think was called Ibad El Rahman. And it was in Paterson, New Jersey, and I was a student there for one to two years. And then the other school that was I think a little bit closer to New York was called Al Ghazaly. And then my parents put me in there. And then from second grade through sixth grade I remained a student there. But I just remember the long trips. And so we would commute to New Jersey from Brooklyn every single morning. It was particularly difficult but, you know, maybe I didn’t focus on it so much as a child, because I probably wasn’t thinking of the

time factor, although I didn't like waking up that early. But we used to wake up maybe around like 6:00 or 7:00 just so that they could drive us for the trip, which was I don't recall how long, but maybe an hour and a half or so.

AMNA AHMAD: Quite long.

YASMIN DWEDAR: In the morning. And then the same long trip on the way back. So I remember waking up for school to go to school in New Jersey, which I don't think most people can say they've ever done going from one state to another, but at the time that's where the Islamic schools were. And so that's where we went.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah. And as you mentioned it's quite rare for a family to send their children to a school that's so far away. But it seems your father had this real passion for ensuring that his daughters got an Islamic education.

YASMIN DWEDAR: I mean I think it was important for my father that not only that we be raised Muslim and have kind of like that around us but also to learn the language, because in the Islamic schools in addition to Islamic studies classes, the other requirement is Arabic. And so we learned to read and write and speak Arabic. And he also in addition to that sent us to Egypt every few years. [00:10:00] And so I think he really just wanted to surround us with like the religion and the culture, particularly since, you know, he came here to America, a totally different society with totally different values. And I think he just wanted to make sure that we were raised in, you know, an Islamic way.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. And when did your father make the trip to the US? How old was he?

YASMIN DWEDAR: I actually don't know when he made his trip to the US. I think it was in the late 1970s. And I think at that time he was in his late 20s, somewhere around his late 20s. He was making a trip for my uncle who had a candy factory at the time. So he needed to buy for him I guess a part for one of his machines and that's how he came to the United States.

AMNA AHMAD: It's a really interesting story. So all of our stories begin with our parents. Do you happen to know the story of how your parents met?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Yes, I actually do. So my mother was a nurse at I believe it was Saint Mary's Hospital. And my father had a friend whose name was Suliman. I do remember his first name. And Suliman was a security guard at the hospital and my father was speaking to him about getting married. So I'm assuming my father was talking to him about marriage because he was in his late 20s. In Arab culture there is an expiration date, more so on women than men. But I think he was seriously interested in like meeting someone and getting married, and so his friend Suliman said, "Well, do you want to marry someone for the papers? Or do you want to marry someone for love?" And he said, "Well, to be honest I'd want to marry someone for love." And he said, "Well, I know someone that works here and I think she's like the perfect person for you. She's sweet, she's one of the nicest people on earth." And he said, "You know, would you like me to introduce you to her?" And he said yes. But he said, "You know, I'm going to speak to her first and see if she's interested in meeting you." And I guess she said yes. And so he introduced them to each other. The details of what happened after that are unclear. I tell my dad, "You know, I'm pretty sure you were dating her." He's like no, no, no, it was with the intention of marriage. But he talks a lot about how they went out

to dinner and how she'd torture him and bring him to the most expensive restaurants. And when my father came here he was making pennies. I think they -- he said he used to work for a bodega somewhere I think in East New York, and he would get paid something like -- you would think no one could live off of it. He used to work from -- I believe it was like 4:00 a.m. to like 2:00 a.m. Like he developed a sleeping problem because of the hours they used to make him work. And he used to get paid I think maybe \$1 to \$2 an hour. It was something very very low, to the point that he used to like eat I think it was canned fava beans and like maybe rice. That was like his regular dinner. And then she would take him to these restaurants. I don't know if she knew about his living situation. But she would take him to the most expensive restaurants. So he'd have to save all of his savings to take her out. And so I guess they dated for -- I'm going to call it dating -- for a little bit. And I guess they really liked each other, so they decided to get married. But, you know, they did have their issues because I think it was less the racial issues than it was like the religious issues, because Filipinos are very very much into the Catholic faith, and I'm sure my dad was -- felt very strongly about being Muslim. And so, you know, they had to negotiate for example, you know, what would happen if they had kids and they went through the whole conversation about like splitting it up. Like girls could be Catholic and the boys would be Muslim. It so happens we're four girls. So if that, you know, if that was the -- if the original plan stuck we'd -- all four of us would be Catholic. But I think they talked about it and they had discussions I think with my mom's priest, who obviously said they should be Catholic. And then, you know, with an imam who obviously said, "No, they need to be Muslim." But at the end of the day they settled on raising whatever children they had Muslim. But my dad never, you

know, put pressure on my mom or anything to convert. He said, "You know, faith is, you know, up to you. It's between you and God. If you ever want to convert that's your thing. But don't do it for me," because she offered to do it for him, and he was -- and he said, "No, you do it on your time when you feel like you're ready, if you ever feel like you're ready. But don't do it just for me." And so she converted maybe I guess -- I believe it was five years after I was born.

AMNA AHMAD: So do you recall a time when your parents were practicing different faiths?

YASMIN DWEDAR: [00:15:00] It's very weird, because I did not pay attention to anything, and I think about these things a lot, because I tell my friends, you know, growing up I actually never noticed that there was anything different about my parents until -- I mean I was in Islamic school and then like the kids would say, "Why does your mom look like that?" And, you know, as a child you look at your parents and you're like, you know, that's my mom and that's my dad. And it kind of ends there. And then, you know, I think about like well, what do they mean why does she look like that. And then like I don't know how I put it together but I put pieces together where I was just like OK, she does kind of look a little bit different from us. But I have no idea why. I believed she was Chinese. And I think it's because she looked Asian to me and at the time Chinese sounded right. Like we never really talked about race or ethnicity. Religion just came because, you know, we were in school and my dad would talk to us about it. But I had no idea that my mom was different or looked different from us or like was different from my dad. I didn't know they were different religiously. I didn't know they were different, you know, ethnically until like the other kids started pointing it out. And then I started to think about it. And then, you know, that's when I was just like oh, OK, I guess she's

different. And then I started to make the distinction. I can't remember when or how. But somehow I knew that she wasn't Muslim. And I don't recall how I knew that but I do remember I was sitting in class in Islamic school and, you know, they shouldn't teach it like this, but they did at that time. Hopefully they've changed that. But I was sitting in class and we were talking about religion and, you know, who gets to go to heaven, and the teacher said, "You know, kafirs don't go to heaven. You know, they go straight to hell." And I don't remember how I knew that she was Christian but I just -- as I was sitting in my seat I envisioned me, my sister and my dad standing in heaven looking down on my mom in hell. And so I went home and I -- and both of my parents were in the kitchen and I turned to my mom and I said, "You know, Mama, I want you to come to heaven with us."

AMNA AHMAD: Oh.

YASMIN DWEDAR: And it was -- I don't recall where the rest of the conversation went but I do remember saying that to her. Whether that's the reason she ended up converting I'm not sure. My dad says that she just decided to one day. He says it was when my sister asked why my mom can eat pork and she can't. Actually, no, more specifically it was we were fasting. And as children our dad didn't have us fast the whole day. We did half days. But my mom wasn't fasting. And so I guess my little sister saw her eating one day when we were supposed to be, you know, fasting. And she was just like how come she gets to eat. He says it's based on that one. But I can't recall exactly what made her convert, but I do remember there was a day we went to the mosque and they had like an official conversion. So --

AMNA AHMAD: And what did the process of this official conversion entail?

YASMIN DWEDAR: I'm not going to remember too much. I just remember enjoying myself running around all over the mosque. But I do --

AMNA AHMAD: Nice carpet, right?

YASMIN DWEDAR: It was actually that mosque on 96th Street I believe in Manhattan.

AMNA AHMAD: Yes, beautiful mosque.

YASMIN DWEDAR: That big mosque. And all I remember is that the mosque was carpeted as most mosques are, and there was a chair somewhere in the front. And my mom was sitting. My dad was standing next to her. And there was an imam there. And I think he was telling her the Shahada and to repeat after him, which she did, and then all I remember after that is everybody there being happy and going up to her and hugging her. But that's the extent of my memory.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah. I mean great memory for that age certainly. So it's really interesting that you note the first instance in which race had become apparent to you in terms of your parents' descent. It was during your school years, your early school years. But when did you actually find out about your mother's Filipino heritage?

YASMIN DWEDAR: I actually don't recall. But I do know it was at least until the fifth or sixth grade that I still believed that she was Chinese, because we had to do a presentation about like different countries. And they made us pick countries. And I decided I wanted to do my mother's country. So I did a presentation about China and how they built like -- I forget what I read in a magazine. They had like some ice sculptures or something like that with lights that I thought were pretty. And I started talking about that. But I think the reason my mother's background was very much a mystery to me was because, you know, there were tensions between like my mom's family and my dad. I'll never know

exactly what they were, but I can guess that a part of it was, you know, the differences in faith. [00:20:00] I'm not sure that they approved 100% of my mom marrying him. Like I said, they're very very religious, and so like if you go to my uncles and aunts' houses like their houses are definitely blessed. There are altars, you know, with, you know, the Bible or multiple Bibles and rosaries and crosses and Marys and Jesuses like all over the place. So they're very religious. But they weren't present in our lives since birth until maybe I was 10. They were just missing. And so for me it was a different experience growing up, because it was just our nuclear family. And my dad's family was in Egypt, and we went maybe once every three or four years when we were growing up. And so my only contact with family was when we used to go to Egypt. And I loved them very much, and I had an attachment to them, but it was whenever we traveled there. So that was the only sense of family that I had. But I knew that a family probably existed on my mother's side. I just never met them and I never knew where they were or why they weren't present. And so I had this thing where like I just envisioned they probably looked like my mom, who I believed was Chinese at the time. And so any time we were on the street like I would look at every person that to me I considered to be Chinese, and I would just like smile at all of them, thinking to myself, you know, I hope they think that - - I hope they're able to identify me as their long lost niece. Like I think there was a movie going on in my head, some dramatic movie in my head when I was a kid about like being reunited with my long lost aunts and uncles. And so there was just a very long period of time that I didn't have her family in our life. And so I don't think we had that exposure. And my mom and dad never really talked about what the problem was or why they weren't speaking. And, you know, I'm going to say maybe a part of it also had to do

with maybe it's a part that it just never came up, but at the same time I think, you know, my dad had this, you know, idea that children who are born to like an Arab father are automatically assumed to be Arab. And so we would have to identify with the Arab culture. And so they never really discussed, you know, the Filipino side. And then I probably learned, you know, that she was Filipino probably around like maybe 8 or 9 or slightly around the time that we finally met my mother's family, which was around when I was 10. That's when I started getting the details. That's when I started, you know, hearing people speak Tagalog. That's when I started learning like bits and pieces about like her family history and about their culture. But it was very on and off, because the tension was always still there. And so it was a very very slow learning process. So I've probably learned now -- learned more now as an adult than I did back then, only because now I pay more attention, you know, when I'm around my mother's family, to kind of like absorb everything that I didn't get growing up.

AMNA AHMAD: So I think this is really interesting. You've presented a lot of imagery, particularly in the moment where you're imagining your sisters and your father looking down at your mother while you guys are in heaven and she was presumably I guess in hell. So I wonder if you've had conversations with your sisters about how they had experienced race during their childhood and whether or not it was different from your or similar in certain respects.

YASMIN DWEDAR: I'm pretty sure it was the same. We never really had conversations about that. But I know we all had the same feeling of like, you know, just a part of us missing, like some part of like having a part of my mom's history missing also kind of felt like having a part of our history missing. And we never really had those conversations but we

all kind of like yearned for like that relationship and learning about the culture and learning about the language, which came much much later in our lives, now that we're adults now. And so my sister is actually in the Philippines right now. She works with Human Rights Watch and I think, you know, she's really trying to, you know, discover the other members of my mother's family who never came to the United States, visit her place of birth, see, you know, the family businesses that are owned, and really get to know the people and the culture there. And I haven't -- we've never gone there growing up, because the focus was always on like Egypt, because my dad's family was there. And my mom's family, all of them came here with the exception of one brother. And so there was no reason really to go to the [00:25:00] Philippines. But it would have been great to have that exposure. Now that we're adults I think, you know, we might explore that a little bit more. I have a crazy work schedule but the Philippines is definitely on my list just because I want to have that experience. And my sister is currently having that experience, and it seems like she's having a blast kind of making that connection with my mom's past and just seeing where she grew up and, you know, learning about the people there.

AMNA AHMAD: That's really great. So during these times that you were able to go back to Egypt and visit family, were there any specific experiences that stick out in your memory from those times?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, I think generally I loved visiting Egypt because I -- that was the one place where I had that feeling of family. Like I could actually utter the words aunt and uncle and cousin. You know, and there were people that we could play with, people that genuinely loved us even though they saw us like once in a blue moon. Every time we

went back it was as if we never left. There was a sense of community there that I had never felt anywhere else. I mean living in New York people are just disconnected. In Egypt my dad has family members that live in affluent areas and family members who live in poor areas and I always felt closer to my dad's side of the family that didn't have as much. And so I spent most of my time in the poor areas. And the sense of community there is so strong that, you know, if you go missing for a few hours, like you didn't emerge from your apartment, like people would go on a search to find out what happened. You know, and whenever there are problems between family members or friends you know, the community steps in and they try to help you resolve it. There was one time I was just buying ice cream. Suddenly I heard all this commotion and this guy running like crazy behind me. Turns out everybody and their mother got out of their houses and were running after the one guy that stole something from the store. And I had never seen anything like that. Like in the United States you get robbed, the guy runs, nobody's going to go after him. This one, everybody came out of their houses and ran after him. And so like all these experiences were really unique. But I really like the sense of community there. But in terms of experiences that also stick out, there are some negative ones. And so, you know, I have more positive memories than I do have negative memories, but I do recall a distinct day in the time that I spent in Egypt I think around when I was 10. And so I'm sure you must be familiar with this issue in Egypt, FGM. You're not. OK, so --

AMNA AHMAD: Not familiar, no.

YASMIN DWEDAR: This is a story that needs to be told.

AMNA AHMAD: I'm happy you're here to tell it.

YASMIN DWEDAR: So it's not the best story to tell. But it's a part of, you know, the somewhat traumatic experience that I had there. Thank God nothing happened to me.

But so FGM is female genital mutilation, which is like --

AMNA AHMAD: Oh yes.

YASMIN DWEDAR: -- unique to like Egypt and maybe like Sudan and then other parts of Africa. You won't see things like that for example in like Saudi Arabia or Palestine or Libya or Morocco so much. It seems to be something that's like in Egypt, Sudan and Africa. And first of all I had no idea anything like that existed. But I remember being at my uncle's wife's house and they were having some conversation that sounded very important and it concerned me. And then we were leaving her apartment and she like grabbed my arm and she was like I have to talk to your father. And I'm like well, what do you need to talk to my father about. She's like you're 10 now. She's like I can't believe you haven't had it done. I'm like wait, what did I not have done? She's like I'm going to have to speak to your father. And like I think I caught bits and pieces of what they were saying but I didn't know what they were talking about. I just knew it didn't sound like it was good. And I don't know how it came to me that I started to understand what they were talking about. She must have talked to someone who then slightly mentioned something. And then I started asking more questions about what it was about. And then when I found out what it was about like I was speechless and I was like -- I just couldn't believe that one, they do that to girls over there. And two, my parents were not around. And so --

AMNA AHMAD: Oh yeah.

YASMIN DWEDAR: I was legitimately fearful that someone was going to like -- because obviously most girls don't willingly walk into situations like that. So my fear back then was well, my parents aren't here, so nobody's going to stop anyone from doing anything. And they're going to trick me into going to some place and that's not going to be, you know, [00:30:00] a great experience. And like I just remember being traumatized. Like even into my adult life. Like nobody touched me or anything but the fact that they had conversations and they were saying that I should have something like that done like well into my adult life is still traumatic. Like even when I talk about it I get like really upset or like when they bring it up, because in Egypt they don't really practice that anymore, because it was outlawed I think maybe around 2005, 2006. But it still goes on under the radar like --

AMNA AHMAD: Oh yeah.

YASMIN DWEDAR: There are still people who do it. There are still people who believe that it's something that's required and that should be done. And they'll do it under the table somewhere at some doctor that's willing to do it. And pretty much I would say almost 100% of my family in Egypt has had it done that are women. And a couple of them probably had it done to their daughters. But I think the practice is like slowly dying out.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah.

YASMIN DWEDAR: But it still is somewhat present but I get really worked up when they start talking about those issues because I mean I don't know if it's because I was born and raised here, but that idea is just so foreign to me and I just can't understand why anyone would want to do that to young girls. But apparently to them like they kind of accept it as normal like a rite of passage. And I remember my cousin's daughter. She knew that I

was traumatized by it because like I would get silent and there were times when I would just like run and hide under a bed and just start crying because I didn't want anyone to come near me. And she knew it bothered me. And so one day I went to her house and she said, "You see that candle over there?" And I said, "Yeah." It was like a bridal candle I think from her mother's wedding. And so it was really nicely decorated and it was pretty. She said, "They're going to use that one for me when I have it done." And I'm like whoa, girl, if you're willing to have that done for a candle, I don't know about you, you go have that done for that candle, but I don't need any candles or decorations or parties or candy or anything. But she seemed like genuinely excited like I can't wait to go through this because they're going to light that candle. I'm like OK, you go do that. But that was definitely one of the experiences that I had growing up I think that stuck with me.

AMNA AHMAD: Oh yeah.

YASMIN DWEDAR: To this day. They have other practices that are -- that I, you know, fight with them about. But, you know, I think the younger generations are kind of realizing like we went through that and we suffered as a result of it and we don't want to repeat that with our daughters. So I'm kind of happy it's moving in that direction. But that was definitely quite an experience to have as a 10-year-old.

AMNA AHMAD: Certainly. Sorry. I wasn't familiar with the acronym. But it's definitely been a point of contention, especially when -- in Western circles, when people are discussing it. So when you present this idea to people I guess in an American context, what's their reaction to the fact that this practice had even existed?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, they obviously don't understand it. I mean we've had these conversations just generally. Most people are appalled by it. And, you know, when I share my experiences there I've had negative experiences, you know, growing up. And like when I share them I don't want people to kind of think to themselves like oh so the stereotypes are true. But I share the experiences more to just share it with them, not necessarily to paint a bad picture about Arabs. There are things that go on that, you know, are related to culture rather than religion for instance and I always make that distinction. The practice obviously almost 99% or 99.9% of the people that I speak to are absolutely opposed to it. And I take that position. But we've had like intellectual conversations and like master's programs like we had a discussion I think in -- I forget what class. But the subject of FGM came up and my professor made a legitimate point. He said, "You know, we shouldn't judge other cultures, you know, by their practices. If that's normal to them, who are we to say that our practices are better than, you know, whatever their practices are?" And then I believe -- I forget where this conversation come up. But somebody said for example in the United States people have like -- people do have like I think it's like vaginoplasties, labiaplasties, things like that. And so how is that practice any different? I can kind of see, you know, where they're going with that argument. But I still disagree because, you know, the matter of choice is really what makes it different. Like if somebody wants to choose whatever it is that they want to do with their body so be it, even if it's crazy. I mean, you know, people get piercings all over their bodies. We're not going to judge them for that. But when it comes to forcing people to go through something, I think it's absolutely different. But, you know, there are like the one or two people whenever I bring up the conversation that say, [00:35:00]

“You know, who are we to say that, you know, our practices are better than other cultures’ practices? You know, if that’s their way of life who are we to judge? Just let them be.” I don’t know. I disagree. But like when I post stuff -- because when I see articles or things like that I post a lot of random articles. And sometimes like once in a blue moon an article will come up about FGM and I do share those things because I like to share information. And then there’ll be like the one or two people that dissent when I say this is a horrible practice and it should be outlawed and how can people do this. But generally most people object to it and they just don’t understand it.

AMNA AHMAD: Yeah. I’ve also heard arguments on both sides, some stronger than others. But I’m really happy that you were able to share your experience in Egypt on that subject. So I’m just curious what parts of Egypt were you spending time in.

YASMIN DWEDAR: Oh, mainly Cairo, because my dad is from Cairo. The -- I remember distinctly Rod al-Farag because that’s where my aunt’s house was and that’s always where we went. And then so for me as a child like that was like home to me. And that’s where her kids were. And her kids were like younger, maybe in their late teens, early 20s. And they lived with her in the house, and so we lived with all of them. It was like one big happy family in like a two-room house. So I remember Rod al-Farag. But at the same time I also remember my uncle’s house because my father always made it a point to go to my uncle’s house first because he was his oldest or older brother. And I can’t remember exactly where he lived but I remember going to his house. And I believe my dad’s mother was raised in something called Bab El Sheraya because like when I was a kid we always used to joke around, and they used to laugh when I would say “Ana Mmusreya min Bab El Sheraya. That supposed to be like the most Egyptian thing you

can ever say. So those are the only places that I remember, but distinctly my aunt's house because that's where we spent all of our summers as children.

AMNA AHMAD: So at times when you're a minority religion or race in the United States, the -- your actions are taken as representative of the minority race or religion that you belong to. Have you ever experienced that?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Yeah. So like I said, you know, I share my experiences, even the negative ones, with people. But sometimes like I think deeply about whether or not I should share certain stories. And so it depends on who I'm talking to. Sometimes I'll tell them about my experiences. Sometimes I won't. It depends on the audience. But I do run into people who -- so for example, in law school, I've had a bunch of experiences, but I remember I had a colleague of mine, and I was discussing with him something that came on TV that I think it was Bill Maher and he was saying something about Islam and probably something along the lines of, you know, they're terrorists and they're extremists. And for some reason I took that to heart and I got really emotional about it. I remember telling my friend who was a white male colleague at the time how much it had affected me and how upset I was. And he was telling me, "You know, you shouldn't let it get to you." And then somewhere deep down I kind of said to myself, "Well, I don't think you understand because you don't have to wake up every single day to this." Nine eleven happened a long time ago but it's not even 9/11. I mean what came after 9/11, you know, is just, you know, all of these negative things in the media about Islam. But that's not where it began. It actually began before that. And I remember that even as a child. And when you have to wake up every single day and hear about how your people are violent extremists, terrorists, you know, and people just saying all these racist

Islamophobic things, like even the tiniest thing can get you emotional because you have to hear it every single day and, you know, I can't change the fact that I'm Arab. I was born Arab. And I choose to identify as Muslim. And I choose to be veiled. And like, you know, there are consequences for making those choices, but I don't feel like, you know, it's my fault that I'm making all these choices, because I've never done anything bad in my life. And so in terms of being an example, the way we ended that conversation, my colleague said to me -- I said, "You know, there's so much negativity out there, the media is too powerful, and they keep saying all of these negative things every single day, [00:40:00] what do you think people are going to think about people who are Arab or Muslim if they hear this every single day? And I'm just one person. I'm not going to be able to change everything that they put out there." And he turned to me and he said, "Well, I just want you to know that you've changed my mind about people who come from your community and I think you're a positive example. And so I think you should, you know, keep up the good work I guess in a sense." I don't recall the details of our conversation. But he kind of said, "Like listen, you're a positive example. So I don't think you should worry about it. And if you're a positive example, you know, hopefully other people are going to see that and learn from you." And so my philosophy in life is like I'll tell people about the negative experiences and I'll say, "Listen, this happens sometimes, and crazy things happen in every single community. But I just wanted to let you know that this is my personal experience. I don't want you to apply this to everyone else." But at the same time I also feel like, you know, I am a representative for the community. And that doesn't mean that I feel like I need to be on my best behavior. I like to be on my best behavior and be an upstanding citizen and help

people and be kind just as a human being. It doesn't even have anything to do with like race, religion, culture. I just do it because I think it's the right thing to do and I'm a firm believer in do unto others. But my hope is that, you know, when people meet people like me hopefully, you know, they'll change their mind. I mean there was a day that I walked into a store and this woman just kept saying, "You know, this nation was built on our backs, you and your people come here, you take our jobs, you should go back to your country." And she was just cursing us out. And it was clear that she was targeting me and the cashier because both of us were veiled Muslim females. She was being loud about it. And everything she was saying was just so hateful. And when people say hateful things they're hurtful but at the same time like you kind of want to be nice to people. She was an older woman and I didn't necessarily want to spew the same hateful things back to her. But I was just like why is she saying all these things. And then there was a moment where she just continued to curse us out and she dropped her credit card and she left. And really somewhere deep down a part of me was like that credit card should stay there. But I said, "You know what, let me give it back to her, because it is her credit card, and, you know, hopefully she'll learn that maybe, you know, that terrorist person that she thinks should get out of her country who by the way was born in Brooklyn, New York, returned her credit card and did a good deed even though she did something that was really hurtful to the two people who were clearly being targeted by what she was saying." So I really try to be a good person generally and hopefully that comes through and is a positive reflection on Arabs and Muslims generally.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So you were profiled in Moustafa Bayoumi's book *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America*. And he gave a speech during

a public programming event for CBBG in late January of this year. I just stumbled upon a profile of the book actually from *Oprah* magazine. And it's written by Francine Prose. At the end of the profile she writes, "The most encouraging chapter concerns Yasmin, a brave young woman who fought hard and earned the right to hold a student government office at her high school without having to compromise her religious principles.

Yasmin's story reminds us of why despite the -- despite what they have suffered and continue to endure Bayoumi and his interview subjects still hope that America is a place where they can live in peace and find justice, fairness and freedom." So interestingly enough encouraging in life, encouraging in profile. What were the reactions to you following being profiled in Bayoumi's book?

YASMIN DWEDAR: I have to say that they were really positive. When he interviewed me for the story, I mean when I was in high school that was a really difficult experience for me. And, you know, I would have hoped and prayed for the moment I could share my story, because it was a very painful period of my life. And when it was featured in the book I wasn't so sure what the reactions would be, particularly if people from the high school read the story, because there are people in there, and, you know, they're mentioned only by first name, but if you knew the year and you knew the high school, you kind of knew who they were talking about. And so I wasn't sure how they would receive the story. But I think Bayoumi does a good job in presenting the story without like really vilifying anyone, just really covering each side of the story. So I think it's a fair representation of what happened at the time. I don't know who from the high school has read the story. [00:45:00] I had a 10-year reunion maybe a year or so ago and people were surprised to know that a book existed out there. And so I'm not sure that anyone has read it yet. And

I don't know what their reactions would be. At the reunion one girl did say, "You know, I didn't know that you had a story but I'm sure it'll be a really interesting one and I can't wait to read it." And she was interested in reading it. I mean my fear was having people read it, particularly people from the high school, because I didn't know if their reactions would be negative. But she seemed like she was really excited to hear about it and she said she didn't know that that was a really painful period of my life or what I was going through. And I think a lot of people back then didn't know like how complex my life was and all of my inner struggles. I think they just saw what was on the surface. But it's a very deep and complex story. It's -- I think it covers about 30 pages but there's a whole backstory to it that would take forever to tell. But I have to say that generally people were sending me messages of, you know, encouragement. They would say, you know, the story was very motivational and very inspirational and how they were able to relate to it. And I think what was great about those messages was that even though the story kind of focuses on my experience and how I felt discriminated against as an Arab Muslim American female in terms of student government and the election process, there were people who had other issues that were able to relate to it. So for example one of the first people I met was at I believe it was Johnson State College. She had mental health issues and she was discriminated against in her job as a result of her mental health issues. And she said she totally understood where I was coming from in the story because she knew what it felt like to be singled out and to be discriminated against and there were quite a number of people who said the same thing. They had totally different experiences but they experienced discrimination in one form or another and so they understood my pain. And so like the story, you know, covers it to some extent. At the time I wasn't able to

give him all of my diaries because I lost some of them. But in high school there were some really mean things that were said. Like recently I found like an old diary where I was reading one of the lines and one of my friends was campaigning for me and I believe I was running for president at the time. She said to him, "You should vote for my friend." And I guess he knew I was Arab and Muslim and he turned to her and he said, "Why should I vote for Osama bin Laden's daughter?" or something like that. And I just got so angry when I read it, because this -- after -- I mean -- OK, I don't want to give away the story. But when I read that, you know, it just brought back all the memories of the things I had to go through and the things that -- I mean people are mean in high school generally but to know that that was said and that things along those lines were said, because that was only one diary I was able to recover. But things along those lines and even worse were said. So I can't recall. I don't believe the story covers it. But I remember there was a teacher at the time when I was challenging the school and I guess they didn't know that I had friends that reported back to me whenever they overheard conversations. And he was talking to another teacher and they were clearly upset that I was challenging the school. And he said, "Well, shouldn't she be at home making babies?" And I was just so appalled to hear that. Like the conversations that go on behind closed doors and what people are really thinking and what people are saying. So high school was definitely not an easy experience and probably wasn't the most positive one with the exception of kind of like learning more about myself and learning how to overcome obstacles like that. And so as much as it was a difficult time in my life it was a very empowering time. And it's really that story that marks the beginning of my path into the legal field because I always felt powerless and I wanted to find a way to

empower myself and to empower others. And I found that the legal field was it. And so that's why I decided to become an attorney.

AMNA AHMAD: That's great. So it's real interesting. You've made reference a few times to being not only an Arab American Muslim woman but also a veiled Arab American Muslim woman. So do you think that the hijab has in the fact that it makes your religion more visible made your experience different from other women who practice Islam in America?

YASMIN DWEDAR: I think it makes it very different. I mean I personally don't have any [00:50:00] views. I mean people take positions like the hijab is mandatory, hijab is not mandatory. My position is, you know, faith is something that's between you and God. And, you know, that's personal. So it's between you and him and you decide what you want to do with your body. But in terms of the practice of veiling I'm pretty sure that it made all of my experiences different because it made me a -- it clearly identifies you as Muslim. And so it makes it easier for people to target you when they want to say hateful things. I mean my sister and I were on like the train platform and there was a guy that was playing his guitar. He wanted like donations and things like that. He saw us and suddenly he started turning to us and playing a specific song about the Muhammadans and the terrorists. And so it was kind of -- it was tragically funny. And so people know that I'm Muslim. And so it makes it easier for them to do mean things. But at the same time like I feel like I'm strong enough to deal with them although sometimes it can be really hurtful what people can say and do. But it does make the experience different and I think it makes it easier for people to discriminate. The thing about discrimination is that you can never put your finger on it and you can't exactly prove it. But there have been

instances in my life where I am pretty positive I was discriminated against. I mean this story was definitely one of them. But for example in the workplace like even when it came to like internships, sometimes interviewing for jobs, like you can't put your finger on it, but you know that it's happening. And you're never going to be able to prove it. But you just know because of how people are talking to you, how people are looking at you, whether or not you're given another interview. And sometimes people will say some interesting things at interviews. And sometimes you just know from the inside from talking to other people who know about like certain people and what their views are. But it definitely makes it harder for me especially in comparison to people who don't veil because the thing is what's interesting about being Arab is that say for example I didn't veil. Like a lot of people say this to me and I'm pretty sure it's true. I would probably pass as a Latina, which would make my life so much easier. But otherwise like when you're veiled like the immediate assumption is are you Arab. Or some people will say really interesting things. I had a friend tell me that people thought -- she was Muslim and so was she from Muslamia. You know, like people don't know some things. Like they need to get an education. And like people can't differentiate between culture and religion and so like I don't know, there's a lot that comes with choosing to veil, but the thing about it for me is that in some ways I appreciate the challenge. Like for example I have a LinkedIn profile and there was a time as I was building my profile and putting my experience on there I thought to myself I should put a picture, no, I shouldn't put a picture. And I was like OK, yeah, I'm not going to put a picture, because it makes it easier for people to discriminate. But then I thought to myself well, actually if they want to discriminate, let them do it early, because I don't want to interview with them, and I

don't want to work with them. But it's -- I have to say that it's really difficult because I've felt discriminated against and you can tell like even though you can't put your finger on it when you realize that you're being treated differently than other people and it's definitely not the best feeling in the world. It's really hurtful and it's like even to this day it's difficult to cope with. When I was in law school we had circles. We had a circle. It was called women of color. And we would just have meetings where we would all sit together and kind of talk about our experiences. And I never wanted to go but someone dragged me one time. And after that I continued to go to the meetings. Every time we went to a meeting everybody would start crying. And even me. And I do not like to cry in front of people and I don't necessarily like to, you know, reveal that I have some weaknesses. Like I can get emotional about things. But like those meetings were really beneficial because, you know, if you experience something like discrimination you kind of like bottle it up, bottle it up. You notice that thing, you notice this. You know, bottle it up, bottle it up. And you kind of need an outlet to vent. And so these women of color meetings, like we would introduce ourselves and then suddenly we would be talking about, you know, the things that we were going through, and people would start crying because like you realize that a lot of other people in the room are going through the same thing but maybe, you know, they just won't talk about it [00:55:00] outside of, you know, a space where they feel comfortable. And that was a space where you would feel comfortable to share your experiences. It's actually one of the very few places. Like when I'm in the professional world or whenever I'm introducing myself to people, I actually say, "My name is Yasmin Dwedar." Because I think it makes it easier for people, and it sounds a little less foreign. But for some reason sitting in that circle when

we had to, you know, introduce ourselves I just said, “My name is Yasmin Dwedar.” And I don’t normally tell people right off the bat my name is Yasmin unless they like ask me, “How do you want me to pronounce your name?” And I’ll say, “Well, Yasmin is how you say my name, and all my family members and really close friends call me Yasmin.” But there was something really unique having a safe space like that to talk about your experiences. And I’m thinking even now in my adult life I need to return to that because, you know, discrimination isn’t something that’s going to leave me. It’s something that’s going to follow me, you know, throughout my legal career. Hopefully nobody does it. So far so good. But I mean just in life generally there are people who are going to continue to discriminate against you, say hateful things about you. But I think circles like that are very helpful to like get that out and, you know, maybe work on issues together. And that’s been a very supportive group so far.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So you’ve described your movement into law as a profession as a sort of means of empowerment in some sense. So could you describe a few instances in which you felt empowered?

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, in terms of empowerment, I mean my mom -- this is also one of the stories as to why I became an attorney, in addition to the book. My mom had a negative experience with her job and she was kind of highly paid because she was very senior. She had been at her job for 30 years. And they really wanted to push her out. And so they would make up all these things just to put complaint sheets in her file. I’m not sure what they’re referred to -- but they were trying to push her out of her job. And so my parents decided to get an attorney and I was just so fascinated by how quickly the hospital just like decided to straighten itself up. And they were very careful about how

they did things after an attorney just picked up the phone and said he represented my mother. And so I thought to myself wow, I would really love to have the power to pick up the phone and set people straight. Not necessarily to use the law in a negative way. But, you know, people are taken advantage of. And I never liked, you know, having the little person be taken advantage of, because I know what it's like to not have legal access. So in that story a part of the problem, you know, the problem dragged out for like a year or two because I couldn't find anyone to help me. And I would flip through the yellow pages. You know, that was back before Google really. And then you would like flip, flip, flip, and then be like 15-minute consultation free, free, free. And I'm like OK. I can talk to an attorney, I'll get as much in as quickly as possible, and maybe he can tell me the answer, you know, in the 15 minutes. And I would call them and they'd say, "Well, you need to come in and talk to us." And so it was kind of like a dead end. And I really felt like I was wronged and there was no one there to help me until I watched -- I mean this is covered in the story. I watched the movie *I Am Sam* and Michelle Pfeiffer decides to say the word pro bono in the movie. And I'm like oh, that sounds like it's free. I didn't know that there were free lawyers anywhere. Because I knew my family couldn't afford an attorney. And my dad flat out said, "We don't have \$40,000 to be putting into a case just because you think it's important. You have three sisters, yourself included, that need to go to college. And we're not going to put that money in something that's uncertain." And so I stumbled upon Advocates for Children. And they're ultimately the ones that helped me, you know, with my case. And it was really that experience of having access to someone who was willing to -- who understood my pain. His name is Jimmy Yan. And he was an attorney for that organization back then, someone who was

willing to listen to my story and felt like I was wronged and was willing to take action on my behalf. That's really what changed my life. I mean as an attorney I am pretty certain it's not going to change, but I specifically chose to study or to go to a public interest law institution, so I ended up going to CUNY Law School. And everything that I've done since [01:00:00] then has been public service, and it's because I understand that there's -- people need help and I don't think that I necessarily need to be taking people's money to help them. I guess if I became a private attorney I'd need money to survive. But I'm very much about helping people just generally. And I just really like the fact that, you know, public service work allows me to help people without really like taking a lot of money from them. But in terms of helping people, it's going to sound like a really weird story, but the one time I really felt empowered, my friend decided to get -- I think she wanted to get microdermabrasion one day. And she walked into an office and she made an appointment. And the technician or whoever was there convinced her to get a face peel or chemical peel, something like that. And so she asked her some questions. She said, "Oh no, no, it's just like a little bit of redness, like nothing's going to happen, you can go to work, you'll be fine." So she agreed, and she signed some papers. And then her face was so messed up because she felt that it was like really burning. And then she just thought maybe it was the procedure and then when she got home it would be better. But she had so many like scarring and like -- I forget what it was. But she didn't even want to go into work. It was so bad. Like she wore a cap to work, and she even explained to her -- she was a teacher, which made it even worse. She told the students. She said, "I had this done. So -- and this is the only thing that makes me feel secure right now. So please just, you know, bear with me." And they really sympathized with her.

But she was crying for so many days. And I said, "We're going to take care of this right now." And like this coming from a person, like if you read the story. I was very quiet. Like I'm not the type of person to start any problems or to say anything. But at that time I think I had just taken the bar or maybe it was after the -- it was after the bar. [01:02:06]

END OF AUDIO FILE

YASMIN DWEDAR: [00:00:00] I took the bar exam. And so I said, "No, we're going to take care of this." So like I marched into the office with her and she's definitely a stronger person than I am, but she was a mess, because she was crying. And so I walked in there, and I said, "You see this girl over here? She got a treatment and this is what happened to her face." And they're like oh, that's normal. I said, "No. I want you to pull the file right now. I want to look at the papers that she signed." And they had this look on their face like OK. And they pulled the file and I opened it. I was like I want to see all the paperwork. So I was flipping through the paperwork. And everyone looked concerned. And then a whole bunch of people started storming into offices. Doors started to close. And I'm reading the paperwork. And I'm like she didn't sign -- there are consent forms. She signed a consent form, I believe it was for the thing she originally asked for, she didn't sign a consent form for chemical peel. And then they had papers in there I think that described what you do afterwards. But what was important was that she never signed a consent form for -- I think it's like a waiver or something like that that they won't be responsible. But she never signed anything relating to the procedure she actually had done. And the technician was supposed to explain to her like the aftercare. And even prior to that there's a paper that explains what the procedure is. She never

went over any of that. And so I got really loud and attitude with them and I said, "How could you do this?" And I kept thinking to myself I wonder if we could bring a lawsuit for this, because I felt bad for her, because she was crying. And so we ultimately got it so that the doctor, the people in the office apologized. And I think they gave her like a \$100 credit. But to me that was my first victory. I know it's a very odd story. But just to walk in and to help a friend who was going through something very difficult and, you know, her face was like really messed up because of this. And to kind of like have -- it reminded me of when my mom let her hospital know that there was an attorney and everyone immediately straightened themselves out. And that's how -- that's what the reaction was at the office. And I thought to myself wow, this is really empowering. You see like -- you see what you can do when you know the law. And so the story in the book is actually the same. Like, you know, I was very ignorant. Like I had no idea about what my rights were, didn't care. And you usually don't care until something happens to you. And the same is true for our community. I mean like nobody cares about anything that's going on right now. But, you know, if there's like an illegal -- some -- like the FBI comes and picks you up suddenly, now you start caring about what your rights are. It's, you know, after you've been harmed. But, you know, I kind of like learned that in high school. And I learned from that experience listen, you have rights, and it's good for you to know them. And one of the great things about going to law school was learning about the law, like, you know, what the options are out there. If something wrong happens what do you do? And that's what most people go to lawyers for, but since I'm a lawyer I can look it up. And so for me like that's very empowering to know what your rights are and to be able to act upon them, should you need to.

AMNA AHMAD: Great. So we've heard of your first victory as your -- one of your first instances of viewing how the law can be particularly empowering. So I'm wondering whether you have any particular career aspirations for the future that you'd like to share.

YASMIN DWEDAR: Well, I'm very much a person that goes with the wind. I currently love where I work. And I love the work that I do. And regardless of where I end up it is most certainly going to be something that involves helping people and not charging them for it. But I do think that at some point I might be interested in either politics or maybe -- politics is not a nonlegal aspiration, but in terms of, you know, my legal career, I did work for a judge after law school for about a little over two years. And she was a great mentor to me and definitely an inspirational person and someone who's been very supportive of me throughout my short legal career. But I think someday I'd like to hopefully become a judge. And I think it's interesting that we live in Brooklyn and there are no Arab judges whatsoever. There are no Arab judges in New York State, I don't think, which is really surprising. There's only one Arab Muslim judge, and he's in New Jersey. And he's a recent -- I believe he's a recent appointment, maybe in the past two years, and [00:05:00] he happens to be an Egyptian Muslim. And so I'm hoping New York is going to follow. I don't want to say that I want to be the first because I'm on the countdown and you have to have at least 10 years of legal experience before you can try to become a judge. But I think it would be great to have an Arab or a Muslim judge, particularly since there's an Arab and a Muslim population in New York, but also very specifically in Brooklyn. And I think maybe someday I might be interested in that. But as I said, you know, I currently love where I'm working now, and I'm very much a person that goes with the wind. So who knows? I mean if someone will offer me to

become the president of the United States one day I'll just go with that. But actually there's a page on Facebook, so everybody can go and like that one. And just remember to vote for me in 2032. That was a joke out of law school. But it's kind of one of the things about me, like I like to set my sights high. And, you know, people laugh because they think, you know, that's definitely unachievable. And, you know, maybe it's a little out there. But I like to, you know, aim for the moon and hopefully land on the stars. But I like to think that everything's achievable if you put your mind to it. And so if I feel like running for president of the United States I'm going to do it, and I don't care if, you know, people think otherwise. Like oh no, it's -- you're not going to win, it's just, you know, you're not -- you're just not going to win. I really don't care what people say. And like the story is proof of that because, you know, there were a lot of people, family, people outside of family, that just kept saying, "Give this up. It's impossible to like get anywhere with this." And I said to myself, "No, this is important to me, and I'm going to go forward with this." And so who knows what the future holds? But I'm hoping to do good in the world, so wherever it is that I end up I hope that, you know, I remember where I came from and that I continue to do good. That's the ultimate goal.

AMNA AHMAD: Well, on that note, first I'd like to thank you so much for this interview. It's been enlightening and empowering just to speak to you. And I'd like to ask you whether or not you have anything else that you'd like to share.

YASMIN DWEDAR: No, I just have a very long story to tell that anyone can contact me to hear about. But I think sometimes that, you know, you can write a novel just to cover all of the experiences, but you got a nice large chunk. So it was great speaking with you and the audience as well.

AMNA AHMAD: Well, thank you so much, Yasmin, and I look forward to everyone experiencing the same story that I just have. OK, on that note we will end. [00:07:48]

END OF AUDIO FILE