



Fatemeh

Hamrah, together on a journey— The Hamrah Oral History Project is a series of interviews with immigrants, refugees, and asylees in Arizona, people who had to leave home due to oppression, war or violence, pursuing their future elsewhere. These are personal accounts of life between places and cultures, exploring how we arrived here and why we left home. Listen to stories of joy, dream and emotional pain that comes with the relocation and separation. Recorded at KXCI Community Radio's Historic Armory Park Studios in Tucson, Arizona.

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Fatemeh. I am 40 years old. I was born in Tehran.

Can you give some details about where you were born?

Tehran is the capital of Iran. It's a beautiful city with beautiful mountains. It has a main boulevard called *Valiasr* with big grown trees and it's a very beautiful place.

How is the weather? What is the climate in Tehran, Iran?

Tehran has four seasons and it's pretty polluted because it's a very crowded city.

Can you tell me about your childhood?

I had a very good upbringing in Tehran. I had a good childhood and I have very good memories from that time.

What is your favorite memory growing up?

The first day that I went to school. I remember it as a very good memory.

What was it like growing up in your home?

I had a pretty good time in Iran growing up and going to school and getting education. I didn't have any bad experiences there.

Can you tell me about the education life that you had in Iran, Tehran?

I had really good friends at a school in Tehran and I'm still in touch with some of them. I also had really good teachers there.

When did you leave your country?

I left Iran after I got married back to where my family was from, Afghanistan, to restart a new life there with my husband.

Who did you leave with?

I left Iran for Afghanistan with my ex-husband and my first daughter.

Do you know why you or your family left your home country?

So when I went back, or when I went to Afghanistan with my husband to start my life there again, I had a lot of dreams, but what appeared to be the reality was different than what I had in my mind. I had dreams of going to the university and continuing my education, but my husband's family, they didn't like that and they wanted me to stay home, have children, and take care of them. Even though he had promised me in Iran when we married, that when we go back to Afghanistan, I would be able to continue my education and work, but that didn't come true when we got there. Given all of that, I stayed in Afghanistan with my family for 14 years. When my first daughter was growing, I got worried that she soon has to start a family of her own and not have the opportunities that I had in Iran even. That's when I realized that I have to do something for my daughters. That's when I decided to immigrate, to leave to Turkey. So I went back to Iran and then from Iran I went to Turkey.

The reason that I left for Iran and then Turkey was not just access to education and opportunities. I had a lot of family problems that I had to address as a woman. I didn't have any chance to make any decision for myself, even wearing the color that I like or doing anything that I like. So I always had to listen to them making decision for me, my husband, family making decision for me and I didn't want my daughters to have to go through this pain and live this life. I wanted my daughters to have the best life, to have the best opportunities to become the best of who they are and grow as individuals.

What was the hardest part of leaving Afghanistan and going to Iran? How did you manage doing that? How did you leave Afghanistan and went to Iran, then to Turkey and now to US?

The last years that I lived in Afghanistan, I got a lot of illnesses and I was very depressed. And I had to go to Iran to visit doctors and to heal. And my parents lived in Iran and they paid for my expenses to go to Iran and they paid for my doctor's visits. And the hardest thing I faced was that my ex-husband didn't allow me to travel to Iran with my daughters, so I had to go back to

Iran all alone. It took about eight months until I felt better in Iran. After eight months that I felt better, I realized that I can't continue like this and I have to make a decision to change my life and I requested a divorce from my husband. After I got divorced, I left Iran, I went to Turkey with my uncle's family. I had a feeling that if I leave Iran, my former husband would bring the kids to me. It took a year and eight months until he finally brought my daughters to Turkey to me. And that was a really exciting moment that I saw my children after a long time and that is still one of the best memories I have.

After that, I decided to make the best life for my daughters with the help of God. I wanted to make the best life for them, even though my former husband caused a lot of trouble for us in Turkey and we had to move to a different city because of him. And after about three years, we finally were resettled through the UN United Nation in the US in Tucson because our lives were in danger and we couldn't stay in Turkey because we didn't feel safe, and then we came to the US.

What happened to your husband who did not left with you guys?

My former husband, I don't know if he ended up staying in Turkey immediately or he went back, but he couldn't find us eventually, and I think now he's back in Afghanistan.

Did he ever threaten you? Did you ever feel like you were going to get hurt by him?

My former husband threatened us and threatened our lives that if I didn't listen to him, he would destroy us and he would, for example, throw acid on us and other things that I don't feel comfortable sharing.

How did you manage to come up with anxiety? How did you manage to stay alive in this situation and not hurt yourself?

In that very stressful period, I had very bad thoughts. I even thought about hurting myself, but thankfully I saw a light at the end of the tunnel. I believe in God and I thought God was helping me and God was watching over me and my children and was holding my hand and I felt safe and I believed in my path.

As a human, as a person, who gave you the courage to leave Afghanistan and just start a new life with your children, who supported you? Was it your family or friends or?

When I decided to get separated from my husband, I didn't get a lot of support from my family. When I was in Iran, my dad told me that given the situation in his life and in Iran, he wasn't able to afford having the children, my children with me, and he was only able to support me, but without my children. And he was saying that because he wanted to push me to go back to my life, to go back to my husband and continue that very difficult life. But I had made my decision.

I didn't want to go back to that situation. I wanted to go and have a better life, to leave, and my mom was the only one who financially supported me.

Why do you think your father didn't support you with it? Because he didn't want people to call him a person with a divorced daughter or a person with a single mom? Or why do you think your dad did not support you?

In my culture, in Afghan culture, divorced women are really not accepted. It's not accepted for women to want to separate from their husband, so it's really not accepted and usually immediate family members don't support that decision.

Can you talk about your journey to US?

I left Iran with the smugglers to cross the border to Turkey. It was a two day journey and it was pretty difficult to get to Turkey, and when we got there, we applied for asylum and it took some time to be approved. It took three years for our case to be approved and be resettled in the US.

How long have you been living in Tucson?

I have lived in Tucson for three and a half years.

What was it like when you first arrived in the US?

When I arrived in the US, I felt I have arrived at a very safe place that my former husband cannot reach me.

What was your expectations about US?

I thought the city in the US that I would arrive at would be, there would be a lot of tall buildings, busy streets, but after a week, I realized that Tucson was not like that. I hadn't even thought that if I live in an apartment, in a tall building that has an elevator, how would I use the elevator because I'm very scared of elevators.

What has been the most difficult part of adopting to live in US?

Not a lot of things have been difficult. Everything is new, but not very difficult, and I'm very excited to learn new things and learn how to live in the US faster.

What do you miss the most about your home, country and culture?

I don't miss a lot of things about my culture or home country. The only thing I really miss is the ceremonies and the celebrations that we had.

Have you found something that you really like in US?

Since I arrived in the US I was able to finally get my driver's license, buy a car, and drive and get a job and afford a life for my family with the help of God. While this is all very difficult for a single mom to do all of this on her own, but I feel I'm very strong and I have been working really hard.

What hopes do you have for the future?

My hopes for the future are for my daughters to do what they really like to do in life, to follow their intuitions and their interests, and become independent women. I also wish for myself to be able to travel more.

What advice do you have for yourself when you had just arrived in US?

When I came here, I told myself, this is the place that you can be yourself and you can restart and create yourself the way you want, a strong woman as you are. I have always told myself to avoid people who have negative thoughts or negative energies and be around people who are positive and they make me feel good. And my hope is that I can keep staying strong and keep fighting. I have had only three and a half years here and I have already learned so much and gained so much, even though I had some difficult days, as well as some very good days here. I also hope I can continue my education and study something that I really like and have a better future.

