



Taranm

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.

Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Taranm. I'm 19 years old and I'm studying architecture and I'm going to be a junior next year. I'm from Afghanistan and specifically Kabul. My mom is from Herat and my dad is from Azar Sharif. There is a lot of other people from other cities coming to Kabul since its the capital of Afghanistan, so it's of course. And it has four seasons, really hot summer, really cold winters. We would get like snow and it was really hard to walk in snow to be honest. But yeah, and then I moved to Turkey when I was 12 and then I moved to Tucson like 2020 and I've been living there, here, since then.

Can you tell me about your childhood?

Yeah, I had a really nice childhood, to be honest. It was kind of both places because I still considered myself a child when I moved to Turkey, so I kind of experienced both countries. But my childhood in Afghanistan was, it was bright. I was a lovely child, so I loved playing outside of our block. We would call them blocks. And then so I would just go, call my friends, knock on their doors, be like, let's go play. And then we would just hang out, play. And then after that I moved to Turkey, which was, I didn't really, like, had a childhood. It was pretty much we were stuck in houses cause I didn't like going outside cause I didn't know anyone. I didn't have any friends, so it was basically my childhood was with my sisters there, so I spent so much time with my older sisters and it was like they're my friends. So we got really close to each other because before then we were kind of competitions stuff cause we were only three years between each other. So we used to play together, but it wasn't much because we had each other's friend group, but when we moved to Turkey, so we only had each other and it was just basically we were playing with each other and stuff. But yeah, I had really nice childhood I would say. I am really grateful for that.

What are some of your favorite memories growing up?

I have a lot, this is a really nice question by the way. I feel like my favorite favorite would be we would plan birthdays and stuff for our dolls and then we would go buy snacks with our saved up money and then we would place them in front of our dolls and then we would just sing happy birthday and stuff. And we did that to our grandma too because she'd never had a birthday celebration before that. And we were organizing that all with my sisters and we bought snacks. It was literally those tiny cakes we put candles with. My mom was helping us and then we just celebrated her birthday. It was really nice. I remember clearly that moment. She was really happy about that. And then basically after, when we were out from school, I would run to the bus. We had buses waiting for us and then my sister was taking her time. She was like had a lot of friends, but I was running to get seats in the bus, but she would get us corn, cause they sell corn and then she would get us corn and we would eat it in the bus. That was the best time I had. I feel like that was best moments with my sister.

When did you leave Afghanistan?

2016.

Do you know why you and your family left Afghanistan?

We had a lot of reasons. As many of me know, there is war and there's a lot of conflict. When we left, there was no Taliban in the government. Of course they were there, they were doing the bombing, everything. But of course we don't know who actually were doing them. But it was basically my mom was super stressed about everything that was going on cause we would go to school and she would always stress out cause there was bombing in schools; there was bombing everywhere. So we could have been bombed every day and everywhere we go because there's no safe areas for girls either because they would get raped. Um, a lot of other stuff, they would throw acid in their faces. That was when we left there was really popular. A lot of girls got acid by some guy was like in love with them and they couldn't get them, so they were like, pour acid on them. So my mom was really stressed and she got cancer and my dad was like, I'm not really leaving my country. He was like, I have set stuff, life here. I have a house, everything. But my mom was stressed. She was like, I don't want to lose any of you. So until my mom got cancer and there was no medication for it in Afghanistan, so we had to go to Pakistan every week, not every week, every month for her to get her medication and we had to come back and go back and everything. My dad was like, I had enough, and cause my mom was stressing about it so much. He was like, I need to get out of here so my mom can relax a bit and not feel that much, you know, pressure by the bombing and everything that was going on. So yeah, he decided that we should move out and go a safer place so she can relax.

Did anyone from your family stay behind?

I was considered because we were, me and my grandma and my cousins and everything, we were living in the same kind of complex building. So we were so close to each other, but they wanted to stay, I dunno, I wasn't that grown up, but they wanted to stay and so we had to leave them and say goodbye to them when we were leaving. So I kind of feel like we left them behind. But for my close family, we were all, like, left.

Are you still in touch with them?

Yes.

How was it living in Turkey?

At the beginning it was really hard. I struggled a lot cause I feel like learning Turkish and everything, not knowing anything. And it was my first time moving from my country, my comfort zone. And it was really hard. And then we were waiting on some stuff to get to a specific city. We had to sign up and get our *kimliks*, and our IDs basically. So we were waiting on that and that amount of time, we were just always at home and we would just go get groceries and that was it. Like not outside. And then until we got to a city and they were like, you need to go to school. So, first day of school, we just didn't know anything. A little bit of Turkish that we learned from the streets and stuff. I was trying to learn at the same time so I can be like, oh, do you know Turkish? Be like, a little bit. I was just answering those questions. And then I just entered school and then I was just sitting and watching everybody. I was like, oh, I think they're talking about me, but I don't have no idea what they're saying. And yeah, it was really hard the first year. We went like mid-semester. So it was just like we were known to have to fail the first time we were there. They were just like, you have to go. You get used to the system and stuff. But we would like, it was set for us to fail the first year because first semester we had a zero out of our grades because we weren't even there and they couldn't transfer our grades. Then. So basically I was there and I was like, actually that was my most depressing times, cause I was only 13, maybe 12 ish, and I'm entering a new school and I didn't go to, I passed eighth grade, I never was in eighth grade.

They were like, since in Turkey, they do separate eighth grades with high school and you have to go through an exam. They were like, we're not going to do the exam for you, so it's going to be hard to do the exam and you're going to get to a really bad high school, so just go to the high school right away. So I never had an eighth grade, but I just went to high school and then I was there. But yeah, after that we had a summer. During that summertime we got used to the city and stuff. So it was really nice with having, spending time with my family and we learned Turkish, I don't know how, but it happened. So when I started school the next year where I was able to talk and everybody was shocked, they're like, how did you guys learn Turkish? I was like, I don't know. It happened. And I went to school for two years and then half semester and then I was here.

Was it hard adapting to the Turkish culture?

It was at first going there cause I didn't know anything. But learning, I realized how similar their culture was to my culture and I was just seeing we're doing the same stuff. The language is different, but also there's a lot of farsi in languages. I knew they just use the same words, but it's different for pronunciation. So I was just like, oh my gosh, we have some of similar stuff. So it wasn't that hard. I was just fascinated by how similar our cultures were, because it is far, I feel

like Turkey from Afghanistan, it's not that far, but, but I feel like it was fascinating how similar cultures were.

Did you experience any racism while living in Turkey?

I did once. I feel like it wasn't racism. It was basically, maybe it was, I don't know. It was basically because we had exams and it was different systems, so we'd go to different classes and different assigned seating, but I wasn't assigned any seats. They didn't have me in their system, it was like something wrong. And then I would just go, sit wherever it's an empty seat. So I would just take that to take my exam. And I was sitting in that empty seat and my professor, the teacher was like, okay, we're passing the exams. And there was this other girl that didn't get the exam, but she was Turkish. So then he took my exam and gave it to her. But I kind of make sense because I wasn't going to write anything anyways because I didn't know any Turkish back then. It was my first semester, but at that moment I was like, oh, it hits you hard. You're like, oh my gosh, he expects me to not be able to write anything. I mean, you would expect it, but still doing it in front of my face and I had to go find a new paper. So it was kind of hard because I was like, oh my gosh. I was sad because I didn't want to go look for a paper because I was like, I don't know where to go. But that was the only one. But I feel like Turkish people are really nice. Outside of that, I didn't face any other racism and anything. They're really nice. But that was the only time I think.

When did you arrive in the United States?

Year 2020. Mid COVID, not mid COVID, beginning of COVID.

What was the process of moving to U.S.?

We applied to the refugee thing. I honestly dunno, I forgot its name. But we applied to that and we would get a third country. They assume the second country is Turkey and the third country will be whatever you get. And then we got United States and we did a bunch of interviews and stuff before that in Turkey, and they're like, okay, I think you're legit. You're not a serial killer or anything. So they do everything for you. That process is already set, but you just go to the interviews and stuff and you just show up and then, yeah, so we just flew over here. We went to LA first and then over there, transit over here. And then also they pick Tucson for you. They pick the city for you too. They have everything set up for you, a house and everything. So we just move in here. If you don't like the city, you don't have any choice.

What was it like when you first arrived to Tucson?

We got the name of Tucson and then we were trying to search up, be like, what is this place? Let me search up where I'm going to live for the rest of my life, maybe. And then it was basically Google. It was showing nowhere. It was basically desert. And I was like, oh my gosh, they're literally taking us to nowhere. My mom was so sad. She's like, I don't know. I don't think I can live in a desert. Then we were like, oh, we were thinking about America's New York and all those big cities with skyscrapers and everything. We're like, oh my gosh, this is the middle of nowhere. And then when we came, we were like, oh, there's actually buildings here. So on the

way from the airports we're like, oh, they have little houses. They're so cute. And then I remember taking a picture next to a cactus, I was like, yeah, we're here. And then I actually like my house and everything, I was like, oh, it's kind of nice. I like little cities, little houses thing that reminds me of my home. And then my mom was sad. She doesn't like hot weathers and stuff, but I was fine with it. I was like intimate cities, which is actually Tucson's really big. So I don't know.

What has been the most difficult part of adapting to life in the US?

I feel like it wasn't English cause knew a little bit of English before coming here, but we just didn't know how to talk. And we just learned how to speak English. But I feel like the culture. I don't know, everything in U.S. is so much different than Turkey, so everything was so much different. And I was shocked when I went to grocery store because I saw so many people with pajamas and stuff, and I was like, oh, we are doing that here. And then I was like, we go to grocery store, you have to dress up in Turkey because you can't go with pajamas and stuff. And I was also shocked to see how many homeless people here, because the way they show in TVs and stuff, you don't see any homeless people. And I was thinking America really modern city, they don't have any homeless people. But seeing them on the street, I was like, oh, they actually have homeless people on the street. I was like, where is this place? They don't show it on the tv. But a lot of different things and different situations. But I feel like adapting to it was so much easier because I was exposed to another culture before.

What are some struggles you faced while living in U.S.?

When we started coming here, we were adapting to it a little bit and we started getting used to the space. And then my dad got sick. He was working two jobs and stuff, so we were already settled with our lives and we were happy and everything is going really nice. And he got sick. He had a headache and neck pain, and we were like, we should go to a hospital. You should go to a hospital. He never listened to us cause he still was working two jobs for us. And then finally we forced him to go and we learned that he was bleeding from his brain and he had internal bleeding from his scalp and his brain. And it was there for a long time that he never told us about it and the symptoms and everything we knew, but we just, everybody kind of ignored it cause we were like, we don't want to believe that he has actually that serious sickness and illness to him. But yeah, he had seven to eight surgeries and it was a really hard process for all of us since we're still adapting to this culture and U.S.. And we were faced with that sickness. And it was really hard for my mom too. She was just out and she was just relaxing. She faced another obstacle or challenge that was really hard for her family. We went through a lot. Nobody was eating anything. It was just like my mom was losing weight every day. We were seeing her lose weight every day. I was still in high school, so it was my first year of high school that I actually went, because the first time it was all online because of COVID. And that was the first year that was actually going to the high school of America. But I was so fixated on my dad that I was trying to ignore all that part of my dad's sickness. So I was just really focusing on my studies and I made myself busy. I went to J Ted and everything cause I was like, I don't want to think about it that much. And then after I was done with school, I would go to my dad and we

would have to, all of my sisters make schedule. You have to stay with that and you have to just stay with that. And it was really hard process for our family. And doctors were like, he had to go to rehab centers a lot after each surgery. They were like, you can't take him home. You have to go to a rehab center. And then taking him to the rehab center and he was staying there for a while. And then the doctors at rehab center, they were like, I think they made a meeting with my mom. They were like, I think he's dying. I don't think we can do anything about it. So you have to sign something that if his heart stops beating, then you have to sign something that don't do CPR, because it would hurt him a lot. We would break his bones and stuff, so just sign it so he won't experience any pain or something. And then my mom was like every one of us, we were like, no, he's not dying. He's going to live. And we fight for it. And we never signed any of those papers. We're like, he's going to live and you are going to do CPR if his heart ever stops. Yeah. So we fought for his life. And even though he doesn't remember all those months that he had those surgeries, but we were there with him and we were holding his hand. We're like, you're not going anywhere. And yeah, it happened. And now he's recovered. And we went to physical therapy with him and he did all of the work and now he can walk, he can drive, he can do everything. So we're just like, we got the life. And facing that challenges I feel like taught us a lot. We were broken afterward. We didn't know at that moment, but after my dad got recovered and everything, he was at home. We didn't want to go anywhere. We were always at home. And my mom was super broken too, but now I feel like we're more recovered. Going to college and everything helped us getting in more new friends and everything helped us and helped my sister too, because my oldest sister, she was really depressed. She was at home most of the time and she was overthinking everything. I was busy and I was trying to, don't think about it as much, but she was at home and I feel like we really fought for everything and we did it together. And now it taught us a lot in a sense that we can do everything together as long as we stay together, as long as we do everything together.

What are some of the advantages of living in U.S.?

There's a lot, because when I was in Turkey, I was trying to, because there's another exam you have to take before from other people, and it's so much harder because only math and science. It's only math and English, and you have to take that exam to get into a university. But if you don't know any math, then you're like, you can't go to a university. So it was so much harder to get to a university there. Rather, they had more opportunities for actual Turkish students to get into university. But coming here, I feel like there is a lot of more, there's more opportunities to get to college or anything you want and getting a work, getting a job and everything, I feel like there's more opportunities and there's more help for sure. If you want it, you can get more help to achieve that goal. But in Turkey, I feel like there's not much help. You don't know anything. You have to figure it out and work really hard for it to get in compared to other Turkish people. But comparing it to Afghanistan, there's a lot of advantages here. Comparing it to how Afghanistan is right now. Girls can go to school. They can't go anywhere without any men with them. They can't have fun going out to picnic or something. They can't go by themselves. So having these many advantages, I can do that all here by myself. I can go to college, I can go to

school, I can do whatever I want just alone. I can drive and everything. There's so many advantages here. Comparing it to Afghanistan right now.

Do you ever dream of going back to Afghanistan or Turkey?

Yes. Me and my sister, we have this dream because right now I feel like it's really hard to go back. But one day I dream of going back and helping people out over there. I want to be an architect and building houses and everything for low income designs and stuff. I feel like they would need some person to help them come up with design options and stuff. And also because my sister wants to be a doctor, making a clinic for people, low income and helping them over there. So we do have a dream of going back and helping people over there with the knowledge we get from here. And yeah, I have a dream of going back, but I don't know how realistic it is right now with the situations going on, but I hope so one day.

Is there anything about your culture or country or past that you miss?

Yes, everything. I love celebrating Eid with my family, and it was big ceremony for us. We would dress up every day and all new clothes and we would go out and to my other people's houses, friends', houses, family houses and stuff. We would visit them. But right here, you just don't get that and you can celebrate with your family. But I feel like there is no, people don't go to each other's houses and visit them. It's basically through phone. Because now going to Eid morning, I hear my dad, my mom, they're on the phone. They're like, oh, happy Eid. But it's just all on the phone. So I rather I even went to school for during Eid, it was had exams and stuff, so I didn't get to celebrate anything and didn't dress up for it. So I really miss having that holiday. Of course, having that free day to yourself and dressing up, doing kind of everything.

How has the experience of immigration affected your sense of identity and belonging?

It hasn't as much I would say. I still feel like I belong to Afghanistan, and I still identify as an Afghan girl. But I would say it affects me in a sense of there's so many diversity in culture over here. So I think in that sense, my sense of identity and belonging is more broad now. And I consider some part of cultures of Turkey mine and some part of culture that I like here, mine. So yeah, I do consider myself Afghan, but also so many diverse culture over here. I'd want to adapt some of them and call them mine cause I was living here and I was growing up here. So I would say yeah, it does affect me in the sense of adapting to those culture and taking some penny points of them.

Have you faced any discrimination since you came here because of your identity?

I don't think so. As I said, I feel like there's a lot of good people here that can help you, and they won't say you're from other country or something. And it is really nice because we, during even you take a new class, they don't like, oh, which country are you from? They never ask that. It's basically you introduce yourself and if you want to say you can, or if you don't want to say you can just be normal American. But also I feel like I do have an advantage of blending in with the people. So I feel like in that sense, maybe I never faced racism because of that. Maybe if you're

a hijabi or you're wearing hijab and stuff, I feel like maybe that can contribute to more racism. But I do have the advantage of blending in more with the rest.

What hopes do you have for the future?

I have a lot of hopes. I hope that there's no war in any part of the world, not just Afghanistan, any part. And I don't want anybody to get killed by just politics or anything else. Just by the countries are fighting, but the children are dying. I don't want any of that to happen. The hopes are that way. I don't want any war or anything, but personal goals. I have a lot. I'm really interested in architecture. It has a history behind it. My mom wanted to become an architect, and she studied for two years, but back then there Taliban came in and she couldn't study further, and she was telling me all about her studies when I was a kid, and I was like, I'm going to finish your dream. She always was dreaming about having the little drawings of architecture and stuff. When I was starting researching about it, I was like, I'm really interested in it too. So it was kind of both in two in one thing, creating spaces for people that they can live in. And also the feeling that you can arise from an architecture is really interesting to me, to a really interesting building. You look around and everything, and though I don't know, I'm really interested in a sense of designing arts and science, everything combined into one sort of job. I really like that because in architecture you can be creative, but you also need to be logical in a sense of construction and everything. So I really like the combination of creativity and logical and science part of it, all combined. You're just basically creating a space that people can live in their daily life. So I feel like doing the job that I love and also creating those homes for people is really important. So I really want to be good at it and creating those spaces that people can feel happy, hopeful, and actually feel everything. Because you can't just design spaces and be like, oh, I am just making them happy. But I feel like designing spaces for every type of emotion or anything, I really want to be good in what I'm doing in any sense, or creating a family. If I'm a mom, I want to be a good mom. Being kind to people, just being a good person.

What advice would you give to the newly arrived Taranm?

I would give a lot of advice in a sense that when I first came here, I was really stressed. I was like, what if I fall behind? What if I can't learn English? I was just really stressed about those things and I was trying to ask for help. Going to advisor, I'm like, oh, when are you going to transfer my grades and stuff. But I would just tell her to calm down. Everything's going to happen. You just have to be really wanting about everything and really ask for it. Ask for help, and don't be shy. And I feel like looking out for any opportunity you see, and also experiences that I have from last semester, I would tell her to not push herself in a sense that I can do everything. And painting a schedule that you can't even spend time with your family for you. I don't want to fall behind and everything, but I feel like just calm down and everything's going to happen one day and you're going to do fine.