



Mado

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.

My name is Mado. I am 14 years old. I was born in Mazar-i-Sharif. Mazar-i-Sharif is a really dry place. It's like Tucson basically, but we have more plants there. It's a little bit cooler than here, I believe, but the climate is really similar to Tucson's.

Can you tell me about your childhood?

My childhood was good I believe. I had a lot of friends, to be honest. with my cousins, with my friends.

What was it like growing up in your home?

It was good growing up in my home country because I knew the people. I knew the culture. I felt belonged there, to be honest. I felt like I wasn't really getting judged. I was, even though I was a child, but not as much as I am getting judged right now.

What were some of your favorite memories growing up?

My favorite memories were about the times that I was actually living in Turkey and also Afghanistan. The times that we were going on picnics with my family, to Luna Parks and other stuff. And my favorite part of the memory about living in Turkey is when I was going to school and actually becoming really successful, getting good grades and getting a lot of good certificates and other stuff, but I had to unfortunately leave them. I can't say unfortunately, but still, I still miss Turkey.

When did you leave?

I left Afghanistan when I was eight years old and I left Turkey when I was 10 years old, about to become 11 years old on August, 2019.

Who do you live with?

Right now? I'm living with my mom and sister together.

What happened to other family members who didn't live with you?

They're still in Afghanistan. Well, we are all around the world, to be honest. My mom's parents are living in Iran and my dad's side are living in Afghanistan with my dad. Some of my aunts are living in Europe. My uncles are living in Europe, like Germany, Sweden, Finland, and other parts of the world. But yeah.

Do you know why you and your family left?

So the main reason was actually safety. Afghanistan is not a really safe country, is actually the most dangerous country, especially for women. That's the main reason, and also because we know that Taliban would take over Afghanistan and we would not be able to go to school, get education and would really, wouldn't have a good future. Yeah, and also because of some family problems and personal reasons.

Can you talk about your journey to the USA?

My journey to US started when you first actually moved from Afghanistan to Turkey. As I said, when I was eight years old with my family, we stayed in Turkey for three and a half years, actually three years. Then we moved to US. That was a pretty long journey to be honest and pretty stressful. But I mean, we are here now and I'm trying to make a new life and make everything great. I guess.

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

When I first arrived in USA, that was pretty disappointing to be honest because the US that I was actually expecting was a US that I saw in movies, tall buildings, great dressed people, parties and other stuff. But when I first got to Tucson, I noticed that it wasn't like the movies, obviously. It was a really disappointing experience, to be honest, but I'm still happy to be in here. I noticed that it was really dry in here, really hot. There weren't as much as plant that I thought it would be. It wasn't green because I grew up in a place that had four seasons: Summer, Winter, Spring, and Fall. I grew up in a place that snowed a lot, especially in Turkey in the city that I was living, also Mazar-i-Sharif. But when winter came, we didn't saw any snow and that was pretty disappointing because we were really excited. We wanted to play with snow after a long season of summer, really hot weather. And I can also say that we experienced

pretty bad depression. The people were not how we expected them to be. Also the Afghan community. I mean, they were supportive, but still it's not like family. Yeah.

How long have you been in Tucson?

I have been in Tucson for almost four years.

What has been the most difficult part of adopting to life in USA?

The hardest part was definitely the culture and the language. That's a new language, a new grammar, a new type of accent, and that was pretty hard for me to learn. English was actually the hardest language that I've ever learned, to be honest. Everything was so hard for me to begin, especially the culture. It was so different than what I thought it would be like cause I grew up in Asia and the culture difference between Turkish culture and Afghan culture are not really, so I thought it would be like Turkey or like Afghanistan, but it's definitely not. People are different. They don't really care about each other. I mean, they're kind, but not really caring, so yeah.

What has been the easiest?

There is no easiest part. It was really hard for me to get adopted to this new culture, country, people, language, and especially climate, especially the hot weather.

What do you like about Tucson?

I can say I like Hamrah Art Club. Hamrah Art Club is a club that is made for refugees or people who were not born in U.S., for Afghans, Iranians, people from all around the world. Hamrah Art Club helped me a lot, gave me a lot of opportunities to find new stuff, learn new stuff, and experience new stuff. That's my favorite part about living in Tucson.

What are some of the fun things you did in Tucson?

I like going out to mountains, I guess, because that's the coldest part of the Tucson: going there playing with snow, especially around winter. Then I like going shopping with my family. I like going to picnic, but just around winter, not summer. Beside that, I like the freedom I have here so I can go swimming without people judging me. I couldn't do it in Afghanistan. I could do it in Turkey, but still I would get judged because I was a refugee there.

How has your life changed since coming to Tucson?

I guess that my life has changed in a positive way. I have more opportunities now. I know what I want to do in future. I know what I can change. I have the freedom of speech. I have a lot of opportunities. As I said, I like how confident I'm am right now cause the society that I'm in right now, the people around me are not judging me. I like that. If I was in Afghanistan as a girl, as a

woman, I would not have the opportunities that I have right now. I couldn't even go to school. You guys know. So yeah, I like the freedom here.

In what ways has it stayed the same?

Nothing, actually. Everything has changed pretty much. I have become a lot more open-minded compared to times when I was in Afghanistan, Iran, or Turkey. A lot of things has changed, but I believe the part that has not changed at all is the part that I am proud of being Afghan, and it has never changed. I was the same when I was in Afghanistan. It was the same when I was in Turkey, and it is still the same and even more. I am really proud of being Afghann. I am really proud of my culture, my language, my traditions. Yeah.

Do you ever dream of going back?

I do, to be honest, but I wouldn't want to go right now. I would want to go when Afghanistan becomes a better place to live. Like, a time that women would have the freedom to whatever they want to, a time that women wouldn't get oppressed by men or the made up religion. I would like to, and I would also love to go back to Turkey to visit my family there and also stay there for a little while for vacation and other stuff.

Do you wish that you never came here?

I did. I did, but not anymore. I mean obviously, but I did when I first got here, as I said, I was really depressed and I wish that we never came here. We were really alone. We were really alone. We didn't really have much people to talk to, and it wasn't the type of US that we thought it would be, so we had a lot of problems and I was always dreaming of going back to Turkey and living the life that we had in Turkey.

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

The thing that I miss the most about my culture and my country and other stuff is the way that Afghans are friendly. I miss the traditions that we were celebrating in Afghanistan. We have our own new year or own type of celebrations and stuff. We used to make really big celebrations in Afghanistan all around the cities and stuff, but we don't really do it right now cause the space is not okay, I guess. I don't really know why we're not doing it anymore. But I missed the part that I was with my family. I miss my aunts and I miss my cousins, but they're living back in home Afghanistan.

Have you found something you really like here? For example, food, new friends, plans, opportunities?

What I like the most about U.S. is that it's really diverse. It's super diverse. There is racism too, but there are good parts of being in U.S. Like you have the opportunity to meet new people,

new cultures, try out new foods, learn their languages and experience new cultures I guess. I like that a lot.

Have you found emotional support here?

Yes, a lot. I have experienced and found emotional support by a lot of different people in Hamrah Art Club. I have found really good people who would want to be my therapist and listen to me, listen to my experiences, listen what I have been through and helped me and make the life, the world a better place for me.

Have you faced any racism in your new home?

I have experienced racism in US a lot. By middle schoolers, by some people around. Yeah, I have.

How?

You know, they have called me terrorist a few times. And then I know people in my school who have mocked my language, my culture, the way that I'm speaking, my accent and other stuff.

What hopes do you have for the future?

I want to become a really important person in future, a really strong woman, so I can change a lot of stuff cause this world is really messed up right now. I would want to change that women do not have as much opportunities as men has. I would want to change that. I would want to give the freedom that women needs to women, not just in US, in Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, all around the world. I would love to do that and make world an easier place to live for women because we are going through a lot and we need people who understands us, not just physically, but mentally too. They think that it's easy to be a woman, especially in this time in this society that judges us based on the smallest thing that we do. I would love to change that and make world a better place for a women and children, especially immigrants, and I would want people to stay in their countries, be safe in their countries, and wouldn't need to leave their countries like me, and grow up with their culture and just love themselves based on who they are and just don't need to change themselves because people are telling that they are different than them because of their skin color, because of their culture, language and gender identity, sexual identity and other stuff.

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

I would tell my younger self, who had just arrived in the U.S. that I should be more positive about being here. Cause I was really sad because I was really sad and I was really depressed of being in US. I would tell myself that you are like this right now, but it will change in a few years or months. You will find new friends, you will get a language and you will get a lot of

opportunities and you will become a new person basically. You'll experience a lot of things that you've never experienced and you will become a better person in a way, and you'll change a lot. So just be open-minded and be respectful, I guess, to new experiences. Like don't judge it. Yeah.

What advice do you have for other young people who have just arrived in USA from the Middle East?

Oh, I would tell them to don't be so hard on themselves, on themselves. Don't be like, oh yeah, I'm a failure cause didn't learn language in a few days because English is really hard. It's really, really hard. As someone who has been living here for four years, I'm not fluent in English and not even close to be fluent in English. So I would just be confident for who you are and don't force yourself to do things that other people are telling you and don't feel like you're not belong in this society or the community just because of your culture and other things that you have basically personal reasons.