



Fatima

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.

Hi, my name is Fatima. I'm 16 years old. I was born in Pakistan, Kahuta, basically Tucson. They have desert, hot weather. Everything is the same thing as here. It's a big city though. I left my country when I was nine years old. I left with my mom, my sister, and my brother.

Can you tell me about your childhood?

Yeah, so basically I was in Pakistan the whole time, ever since I was born here. I'm the youngest child in my family, and we did have a family. They were my mom's relatives, but they did live in the same apartment or houses we can say. And they have a daughter at my age. We grew up from learning our abcd's to basically going to fourth grade and then going to art classes and then going to Islamic classes after school. But I think I did have, like, a lot of fun when I was in Pakistan. And my most favorite memories growing up in my country, Pakistan, was spending time with my family, my cousin, my aunt, my uncles.

What happened to other family members who did not live with you?

I mean, nothing happened. They continued their lives. I mean, they were sad, but they did continue living in Pakistan. Some of them moved. They went to different countries. Some of them went to Australia, and then some of them came here, but some of my aunt and my cousins and my uncle, they're still living in Pakistan.

Do you know why you and your family left?

Yeah, so when I was 1-year-old, my father passed away and that's when my mom had to start working, paying for, I don't know, paying for our expenses. And the reason why we moved here is because we wanted to have a better future.

Can you talk about what you think happened in your country that led to this decision?

I mean, I don't know, in Pakistan, that's not our country. I'm originally from Afghanistan, but my mom did have to move there because of the war that was happening in Afghanistan. And we were like a refugee in Pakistan.

Can you talk about your journey in the USA?

Yeah, I mean everything changed when I came here. I mean, we came directly from Pakistan to here. We did not go into any other countries. Some people, they go to Iran and some of them they go to Turkey. I did not go there.

Did you stay in other countries?

No, I did not.

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

It was at night. When we arrived here, there was some people who greeted us. They brought us gift balloons and a cake. They took us to our house, like our new house. It was different than I expected. I thought they will have such beautiful big houses. But yeah, everything was different.

How long have you been in Tucson?

I have lived in Tucson for seven years now.

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

I think the most difficult part of adapting to life in the US was basically the culture, our religion. Everything is hard here. How there are some Karens being racist. I mean it's not only toward Muslims, but they're toward Africans, you know, those Mexicans, some of them.

What has been the easiest?

I don't know. I mean, when I moved here I was a child. As I'm growing up, nothing is easy here. You got to work hard for everything.

What do you like about Tucson?

I think the traffic in other cities, they have to get to work at 7, leave their house at 4 or something.

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

Spending time with my family and friends.

How has your life changed since coming to Tucson?

I mean, I don't know. Everything changed. Everything.

In what ways has it stayed the same?

My families. I mean, I did have my niece. She was born here, but yeah.

Do you ever dream of going back?

I mean, yeah, I do. Who doesn't want to go back to their own country? I mean, it is, you have a better future here, but I feel like everyone feels welcome in their own country.

Can you describe your dream in detail? If you have an image in your mind?

Okay, so I want to get a job first. Become a doctor or something or a surgeon, and then I want to buy a house in my country and basically serve my people in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Do you wish that you never came here?

Okay. It's kind of hard. I mean, I do, yeah, and I do not. I experienced so much here, but I do wish that I never came here because the kids my age, they did not experience most of the things that I did here. They were not bullied or they did not go through hard things or they did not become adult before their age. Why? I don't know. In my country, parents are doing the most job because they know the language, the places, but here we have to become that, and translate and do most of the work.

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

I feel like the people, the feeling of being welcome.

Can you talk about the role that language has played in your experience living in the US?

Yeah. It was hard when we first came. We had to ask for help from different people. And I know it was kind of hard for them, difficult, because they had a job, they had a life. Language was the hardest thing, but thank God I met two of the kindest American friends in elementary when I

just moved here. Yeah, they did help me learn the language, learn their names, but yeah, I'm thankful to them.

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

I think I did. I think my friends and the food too, because we don't have American food in our country.

Have you found emotional support here?

I think I did. My friends at school. I am not going to say names because there are different people who did help me, but yeah, I think I did. But not as much as my cousins or someone from my family, but yeah, they are helping me.

Have you found someone who you can talk to, like relatives you had back home, aunt and cousins who understood you? If yes, who are they?

I don't think I did. When you move to a different country, everyone has their own journey. They have their own experiences, so it's kind of hard to relate.

How has your experience leaving your home country affected your identity and sense of belonging?

It has affected me in so many ways. Leaving my country and meeting new people and some of the experiences that I did. I don't know, it's difficult to answer them.

Have you faced any discrimination or prejudice in your new home?

Yeah. People are rude here. It's not our country and I feel like people need to grow up here.

How have you dealt with it?

I don't know. By being kind,

What hopes do you have for the future, both personal goals and the future of your home country?

I don't know. Healing from some of the things that I went through. For example, being bullied in middle school. It takes time to get healed or be okay with them. And some of the hopes that I have for my future home is that they don't have any more war and girls can go to school. Yeah.

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

I don't know. Don't be scared when you go somewhere and don't let people get to you because it's just a part of who they are. It shows they went through so much too that they're being rude and racist.

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

Don't let anyone tell you who you are or your identity, your country. I mean, stand up for who you are, in a kind way, not in a bad way, being fighting back or saying rude words, but yeah, just stand up for yourself. Don't be scared of people talking shit. Yeah.