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INTERVIEW: Youth Interview

NAME LIKE TO BE CALLED: Zainab

COMPANY: Park Teen Center

HOMELAND: Basra, Iraq

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(WHERE DOES YOUR FAMILY COME FROM?)

Um, my family came from Iraq, I, from Basra, Iraq. I was born in Saudi Arabia and, yeah.

(AND HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE IN SAUDI ARABIA?)

For three years.

(DID YOU EVER LIVE IN IRAQ?)

No.

(DOES A LOT OF YOUR FAMILY STILL LIVE IN IRAQ?)

I don't have any cousins, uncles, nothing in, um, here in America. All of them are in Iraq.

(SO YOU DON'T HAVE ANY FAMILY LIVING IN IRAQ STILL?)

No. Well in Iraq I have all of them. I don't have any here.

(OH, SO ALL YOUR FAMILY LIVES IN IRAQ?)

Yeah.

(SO, OK... IN YOUR HOME TOWN, IN THE TOWN THAT YOUR PARENTS WERE?)

Yeah, well they're all over. See, I have some family in Iran, um, in Iraq, but there is in Sumal(?) and Basra.

(WHAT LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN THERE?)

Arabic, mostly.

(MOSTLY ARABIC. WHAT, WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT SAUDI ARABIA?)

Um, it was like a desert there. We didn't have any roofs on the top of the houses. Only on top of the rooms, like on the living room we don't have any roofs. Um, we walked everywhere; we barely drove car. My dad had to go to work on a bicycle. Um, my uncle and my dad used to make bread all the time and sell it. He was famous for that. I don't know. (smile)

(YOUR HOUSES DID NOT HAVE ROOFS OVER, OVER THE...)

On the living room.

(ON THE LIVING ROOM)

Yeah. And the living room was like the main thing about the house.

(DO YOU REMEMBER HAVING FEELINGS ABOUT THAT? DID YOU REALLY LIKE IT, DID YOU...)

I mean, it was OK, but when it rained we had to stay in the rooms, we couldn't get out. And, and the bathroom is in the middle of the living room and when it rains we have to go (inaud).

(DOES THE BATHROOM HAVE A ROOF OVER IT?)

Yeah, and a door (inaud).

(NO, NO, NO, I WAS JUST MAKING... WERE YOU GETTING RAINED ON.)

It was like, it was like this big, the bathroom, and it was like on a corner of the living room.

(SO YOU'D HAVE TO WALK THROUGH THE RAIN TO GET TO IT.)

Um hum. (yes) I've done that lots of times (smile) at night mostly. (YEAH) And the house is there. There is like, they're all in a row. I mean there is no, no space. Like if you open this door you will see the neighbors house. Yeah, and so when our neighbor wants to come in, she doesn't have to go all the way around. She just opens the door and comes in our house.

(THEY'RE ALL CONNECTED)

Yeah. Like, it would be like this room right here. You open that door and then there is like a different house.

(IT'S ALMOST LIKE ANOTHER ROOM, LIKE...)

Yeah, except but they're all different. Yeah.

(DOES EVERYBODY, DO YOU HAVE DOORS TO THE NEIGHBOR'S HOUSES OR..)

I mean from the outside? Yeah, we have doors. It's just that we don't, it's the same here, it's just that we don't have roofs.

(OH, OK)

And they're all brick. All made of brick. Yeah.

(ALRIGHT. UM, WAS THERE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION?)

What do you mean?

(DID YOU HAVE TAXIS OR BUSSES OR WAS IT JUST...)

No, we just... (YOU HAD A CAR OR YOU WALKED) ...bicycles.

(BIKES)

Yeah, just on bikes. My dad used to carry me around in his basket in front of his bicycle. Yeah, and one time he tripped and we both fell. (smile) When I was two.

(WHEN YOU WERE TWO – SMILE)

Yes, I was two. (smile)

(WHAT STORIES, WHO TELL, WHO TELLS STORIES IN YOUR HOUSE?)

My parents, both of them. Mostly my dad.

(WHAT STORIES DOES HE TELL ABOUT SAUDI ARABIA OR IRAQ?)

I mean it's not like stories like fairy tales or anything... (RIGHT) It's like stories he's been through. Like the time his, my grandma got bit on her face, right here, by a dog. And still a mark right there too. And I don't know, it's just stories my dad gets and they're like really, really cool. I mean the, the first time he tells them to you, you just wanta, want him to say more and more stories.

(ARE, ARE THE STORIES MORE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE ABOUT SAUDI ARABIA?)

Both.

(BOTH?)

Um hum. (yes)

(WHAT ARE SOME POSITIVE STORIES THAT HE TELLS?)

They say that like there is a lot of stores there, a lot of clothes we can wear like here. Like we, we barely can get any clothes here because, you know, this is not what we wear.

(RIGHT)

And in Saudi Arabia, it's like a whole bunch of clothes that we can wear, all fancy and stuff. Yeah.

(WHAT ARE SOME NEGATIVE STORIES HE TELLS ABOUT IT?)

Well, Saudi Arabia, the people there, they don't like Iraq people. And so we always had fights and stuff.

(SO THERE IS SOME CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THERE THAT HE DIDN'T LIKE)

Um hum. (yes)

(UM, WHAT STORIES DOES HE TELL ABOUT IRAQ?)

Mostly about Saddam Hussein or how, I don't know, about his brother, his younger brother. A lot of stories, and they're really funny. Um, I don't know.

(WHAT ARE SOME FUNNY STORIES THAT HE TELLS ABOUT HIS LITTLE BROTHER?)

(smile) OK, there is like this kind of food we have, it sorta looks like, you know, poop, yeah, and so my, my uncle he goes around and he, he was carrying a sandwich and it has these things in them, and he drops them and he goes back and he picks up... You

know what I mean. (smile) And he, my dad comes up to him and he's like "what are you eating". And he goes "a sandwich". He goes "well that stuff inside it is not really what you're thinking it was". And he gets mad and he has to go buy another one. (LAUGH) So yeah. (LAUGH) He couldn't notice the smell, but my dad did. Yeah.

(OH MAN. DID, WAS YOUR DAD ABLE TO STOP HIM BEFORE HE TOOK A BITE?)
Yeah. He was about to take a bite. (OH MY GOODNESS) But my dad was there.

(THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN BAD NEWS)
(laugh) (HE WOULD HAVE THEN REALIZED THAT THAT WAS THE WRONG THING)
(laugh) My dad can make up stories all by himself. He just makes us laugh. Just by looking at my dad, I can laugh. Like I am now.

(WELL THAT'S GOOD. ARE MOST OF THE, HIS STORIES POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE ABOUT IRAQ?)
They're all positive.

(THEY'RE ALL POSITIVE)
There is barely anything negative. I mean the only negative thing is about Saddam Hussein.

(AND MOST OF THE POSITIVE STUFF IS ABOUT THE FAMILY)
About family, the culture and all those different stuff.

(YEAH. WHAT DOES YOUR FATHER SAY HE MISSES ABOUT THE CULTURE?)
Well, he misses to go to the Masque, like, it's kinda like a church. Cause here we, it's not really a masque, we just have it and it looks like a church. Um, the stores there, the places he can go and visit, the famous people. Their graves. Um, and practically his family.

(YEAH)
My mom hasn't seen her family for 17 years.

(17)
Yes. And I have never seen my grandma before. My whole family, I have never seen them before.

(UM, DO YOU GET TO TALK TO THEM?)
On the phone? Yeah, every week.

(EVERY WEEK)
Um hum. (yes)

(DO YOU GUYS HAVE A STANDING APPOINTMENT WHERE A, A DAY AND TIME?)
No, it's just that whenever my dad doesn't have anything to do, we just call them.

(YEAH)

And talk to them. I might go to visit sometime this year.

(THIS YEAR)

Um hum. (yes)

(ARE YOU EXCITED?)

I don't know. (smile) I'm nervous. I mean I've never seen them before and they have never seen me.

(WHEN PEERS ASK YOU, UM, ABOUT YOUR CULTURE, WHAT STORIES DO YOU TELL THEM?)

Mostly... I don't know. See they tell me sometimes like what do you like about Iraq. That's like the main thing they always tell me. And I just say the, everything. And they just go away, I guess. (YEAH?) They want more information and I don't know what to give them. Yeah.

(SO HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IRAQ?)

Right now? Not really good. Cause about the terrorists and all those people fighting. Yeah. And my mom is scared to go back because, you know. Yeah.

(THERE IS A LOT GOING ON)

But where she's going there is a few, not a lot. I mean not in Baghdad, like Baghdad is really bad. But in Basara it's really quiet there. And there is barely anything. Her brother works in the army. And she's scared. She says "why don't you just quit?" and he's like "no, cause I wanta...", you know, something about Iraq. He wants to make it keep on happening.

(TO BUILD IT?)

Yeah. He has a dream. He wants to be a president or something like that. Yeah.

(SO WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT LEAVING SAUDI ARABIA?)

We were all happy. (smile) We thought it would be a better life here. But it was actually harder than we thought. Um, my uncle used to come to Saudi Arabia with us. Now he can't come cause we're in America. I don't know, it's just different. We feel like, I don't know, my mom like sometimes she will just sit in her room and cry. Yeah.

(IT'S HARD)

Yeah. I feel homeless(?) sometimes too.

(YEAH. UM, SO WHAT DID YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU OR WHAT DID YOU HEAR YOUR PARENTS SAY ABOUT AMERICA BEFORE YOU CAME HERE?)

Well, they wanted to move to America cause from the fights that we had in Saudi Arabia. Um, (pause) I don't know, there was dogs chasing after us sometimes in the middle of the night. Um, I don't know. There is just too much to say. (smile) I don't know

what to say. Yeah.

(WHATEVER YOU FEEL LIKE SAYING)

I don't know. (smile) (pause)

(WHY, WHY DID YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU YOU LEFT SAUDI ARABIA?)

Because they said that they felt that America would be a better life there, not as much fights. And maybe like my dad can get a better job and support our family.

(WHAT PREPARATIONS DID YOU GUYS MAKE BEFORE COMING HERE?)

What do you mean?

(UM, WHAT DID YOU BRING WITH YA? WHAT DID YOU DECIDE, HOW DID YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU WERE GONNA BRING WITH YOU...)

See, my brother, I mean my uncle, he was gonna come with us but then he said no because he didn't wanta leave his family. And my dad said, um, I mean we just brought all our clothes. We brought a wagon with us and suit cases. That's all we brought. Everything else we left for my uncle and he took em back to Iraq.

(HOW DID YOU GUYS COME HERE?)

By an airplane. (smile)

(YOU GUYS FLEW)

Yeah. Because there was like an ocean. It's too far away.

(UM, WHERE DID YOU GUYS FIRST LIVE WHEN YOU CAME HERE, WHEN YOU CAME TO AMERICA?)

We used to live in Texas cause we had like friends from Iraq that came to America too. And (pause) we went to them, my dad was really scared. He didn't know where to go. Everything was so different. The ground was not as dirty as it looked. He thought it would be all desert-y like he thought, but no. And yeah. We had, for the first two months we had to live with my cousins.

(IN TEXAS)

Yes.

(HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE IN TEXAS FOR?)

Two years. Not a lot.

(WHAT BROUGHT YOU GUYS... WHERE DID YOU LIVE AFTER THAT?)

After that we came here to Lincoln, um, because my, my dad's friend, he lived here. And he came to visit us and he said "why don't you move to where we're living". And my dad says "I don't know if it's gonna be better than this". And so my dad went on a trip to see this place and he liked it more than Texas. Cause it's not really violent like Texas. There is like fights and stuff. And he said we might come over here, and we came here.

Yeah.

(WHERE DID YOU LIVE IN TEXAS? WHAT CITY?)

In Dallas, Texas.

(IN DALLAS)

Um hum. (yes)

(SO A REALLY BIG CITY. SO HOW DO YOU LIKE IT HERE IN LINCOLN?)

I don't know. It's OK. I'm bored sometimes cause I see everyone else have a grandma and I don't. I don't know.

(IT'S KINDA LONELY)

Yeah. We mostly go to the house. Like we stay in the house a lot or we go to the mosque. That's all we do.

(HOW DO YOUR PARENTS MAINTAIN THE CULTURE, THE, UM, CULTURE YOU HAD BACK IN IRAQ HERE IN AMERICA?)

They said before we left we, um, my dad told my mom that like over there we're not gonna take any religions, we're just gonna stay with our religions. We're not gonna pick up any other things. Um, (Pause) and yeah, it really did happen. I mean we don't see... Like people say that Jesus is the sovereign(?) God. We say he's just a prophet. He's not the sovereign God. Yeah.

(SO YOU REMAIN, YOU, YOU, UH, YOU HELD ON TO YOUR RELIGIOUS...)

Yes.

(UM, IS THERE ANY, ANY OTHER PART OF THE CULTURE THAT YOU HAVE BROUGHT OVER HERE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN?)

The way we dress. And the foods we eat. We didn't change anything. Yeah.

(HOW ABOUT, UM, ENTERTAINMENT. MOVIES, MUSIC, TV, THINGS LIKE THAT)

Well, things like that, we watched American movies sometimes. Not like all the time. We mostly watch Iraq movies. My dad and, and my mom understand them better. Um, (pause) I mean it, if the movies that we got have Arabic subtitles on them, we would have been able to understand them and stuff, but that's not...

(IS THE MUSIC DIFFERENT?)

We don't listen to any music.

(YOU DON'T LISTEN TO ANY MUSIC. EVEN HERE, NO MUSIC)

No.

(SO YOU HAVE HELD ON TO THAT. DID YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC THERE?)

Hum um. (no)

(NO. SO YOU HAVE HELD ON TO THAT.)

There is like this, see like back then, um, people used to listen to music and stuff. Now we don't because like, because famous people died, and we have held this, I mean next month is black month we have. We have to wear all black for 10 days and then after that we either choose if we wanta wear black or we can change the colors. We can't wear any red. Um, yeah.

(IS THIS A RELIGIOUS THING OR A CULTURAL THING?)

No, it's a religious. (IT'S A RELIGIOUS THING THAT YOU DO)

(UM, HOW HAVE YOU FELT OTHER PEERS HAVE TREATED YOU BECAUSE OF CERTAIN DIFFERENCES, SUCH AS FOOD OR MUSIC OR DRESS?)

I mean if they tell me what kind of music do you listen to, I just say I don't like music, I don't listen to music. And they'll say "wow" you know, they're just like shocked by I don't listen to music. Um, people are nice around here. I mean they won't do anything bad or anything. I don't know.

(SO YOU FEEL PRETTY, LIKE THEY'RE RESPECTFUL?)

Yeah. Its not like Texas at all.

(WHAT WAS TEXAS LIKE?)

In Texas they would say "why don't you just take off this or else we'll make you take it off". You know, in school over there they said that if I don't speak English, I have to bring my cousin or my dad with me. So like the first month my cousin who lives there, she came with me, and she had to miss the school, one month of school.

(TO GO TO SCHOOL WITH YOU?)

Yeah.

(AND HOW IS THAT DIFFERENT FROM HERE?)

Here, I did not feel scared like I was in Texas. I understood a little bit better. Um, people here were nicer than there. I mean over there if I like say something, and I misspell a word or... Like if I talk not like the way people talk here, they will just yell at us and stuff. But here, they are just correct us here. They just say (inaud).

(WHAT WAS IT LIKE, UM, GOING THROUGH ELL?)

Level one and level two was relay hard for me. I didn't know anything. And at home if I needed help, nobody would help me because my parents didn't speak anything either. Um, (pause) level three was easy, level four was easy. And fifth grade, I passed out for level five or got out cause I was loud in that class. (SMILE) I did it on purpose too. (SMILE) Just to get out of that class. And so now I don't have ELL. I mean Olga, now all my other friends got out of ELL this year. Now I got out in fifth grade.

(HOW DID YOU FEEL OTHER KIDS TREATED YOU BECAUSE YOU WERE IN ELL?)
They had no problem with it.

(UM, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT, DO YOU FEEL... LET ME TRY TO WORD THIS. I HAVE IT IN MY HEAD, I JUST GOTTA WORD IT CORRECTLY TO GET IT OUT. UM, HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT HAVING TWO DIFFERENT CULTURES; ONE AT HOME AND ONE AT SCHOOL?)

(laugh) That's hard. See, we spell backwards. Like people say, we go from left to right. In Arabic we go from right to left. And once I tried to spell cat and I spelled it backwards and so I got really mad and frustrated. And so now I, I used to go to Arabic school but now I'm out of that class because I passed it. But its gotten easier for me. When I started, like when I went to Arabic school, um, it was hard for me to write in English and in Arabic. But now it's really easy for me. It just became easy all by itself.

(UM, DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE ABLE TO HOLD UP YOUR VALUES PRETTY EASILY BOTH PLACES? AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL?)

See, at home my dad says we can't speak any English. He won't let us speak any English cause he wants us to start talking Arabic or else we'll forget how to talk in Arabic. (UM) And here we just speak English. He says you only speak English if you're out of this house.

(DOES THAT, DOES, DOES YOUR CULTURE AT HOME AFFECT WHO YOU CAN BRING HOME, FRIENDS YOU CAN HAVE OVER?)

Sometimes. Like not all the time. I barely, I mean I invite friends, they barely come over. Because, you know, we think, they think that my dad or my parents would get like they would yell at me and I would get in trouble. Like Olga, one time she says "I'm gonna come over" and I was like "OK", she's like "but what if your parents yell at you". I'm like "they won't yell at me", it's just that, you know, I don't know.

(WOULD IT BE OK WITH YOUR PARENTS TO SPEAK ENGLISH AT HOME WITH A FRIEND, WITH ANOTHER FRIEND?)

My parents don't speak any English. I mean my dad, he speaks a little (inaud). Um, like at work, he's, like he's gonna become a manager, I don't know how, he doesn't speak or write any English. But he's fast at doing things. Like he, like one time this other manager he gave him, um, this big sheet of meat to cut in pieces. He cut it in less than five minutes. And so, cause he is, his experiences in Saudi Arabia, taught him here that he can do anything faster. And now he gets 9, 9 dollars and I don't know how much cents in an hour. And so about a thousand dollars a month.

(WELL THAT'S EXCITING)

(smile) But then half of them go to bills and stuff.

(OH, WELL, YOU KNOW, WE ALL HAVE, WE ALL MAKE LOTS OF MONEY THAT GOES TOWARDS BILLS. IT'S WHERE ALL MINE GOES. UM, WOULD IT BE OK WITH YOUR PARENTS IF YOU SPOKE ENGLISH AT HOME WITH A FRIEND?)

Um, they don't mind. But I can't speak with my sisters any English, or with them. (smile)

(YOU, YOU NEED TO SPEAK ARABIC WITH THEM)

Yeah.

(HAVE YOU HAD TO TRANSLATE FOR YOUR PARENTS BEFORE?)

(smile) Yeah. For, uh, my sisters all the time if there is a conference or anything. They'll just make me come with them, even if I don't want to (SMILE) and translate. I've done that since (pause) third grad. (THIRD GRADE, WOW)

(HOW DO YOU LIKE TRANSLATING?)

I don't like it at all. I just don't like it. I don't know why. I mean cause it's hard. See like people talk in English, it's hard for me, you know, to explain in Arabic. But I've gotten better at it. Um, my dad, I used to translate for him, but now he doesn't, like he doesn't, he won't take me with him anymore. Cause he wants to learn all by his self. And my mom, she still takes me.

(UM, WHAT HAS YOUR FAMILY DONE, HAS YOUR FAMILY DONE ANYTHING TO BECOME MORE AMERICAN?)

Not really. (NO) I mean we don't go to the movies. We don't go to performance, to the circus. We don't go to all that stuff. We just stay at our houses. And sometimes if we have like a holiday we go to the mosque and we celebrate it there. It's really fun there and...

(HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LINCOLN, UM, PROVIDING RESOURCES FOR CULTURAL ACTIVITIES?)

It was, I mean they're nice here. Like in Texas, we, they made us build our own mosque. Here they just, they just have this place and they said we just can rent it.

(IS THERE MORE OR LESS OF A POPULATION, UM, HERE THAN IN TEXAS OF PEOPLE FROM YOUR RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OR YOUR NATIONALITY?)

I don't know. I think it's just equal. I mean there is people there, there, people all over America that came from different countries. The only reason we moved, my parents moved from Iraq was, um, my dad used to work in the Army for Saddam Hussein. He was just a driver. And he, my dad told Saddam Hussein if he can quit. And Saddam Hussein says "if you quit I'll kill you". And so my dad said "then I won't quit". And so my mom said "why don't we just move out of Iraq without him like seeing us". And so we just snuck out of Iraq and we went to Saudi Arabia. That's why I was born there. Two years later I was born.

(TWO YEARS?)

Um hum.

(WHEN YOU TALK TO FAMILY MEMBERS ON THE PHONE, UM, DO YOU TALK ABOUT AMERICA? LIVING IN AMERICA?)

We just say that it's hard. They think that life is easier here. We tell them it's not, it's harder. But they won't believe it. Cause I mean they, cause like once in a while electricity would go off there. Um, the water would go off and they see that here that nothing goes off. So they, we probably have a better life. But we tell them no, it's not like there cause there is places that we wanta go there that we can't go here. (UM HUM)

(SO THERE IS PLUSES AND MINUSES)

Yeah.

(UM, WHEN YOU TELL THEM STORIES ABOUT AMERICA ARE THEY MOSTLY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE?)

We don't just, we don't tell stories to them. I mean we just talk about people here like how nice they are. Um, (pause) see there, there is a lot of people walking. Not a lot of driving. Here it's mostly driving. And we just tell them that we just drive in a car. My grandma says that America is a lazy place cause they don't walk.

(UH, I WOULD HAVE TO AGREE – SMILE. SOMETIMES I AM JUST TOO LAZY)

See, there is not a lot of people that are lazy in Iraq cause the whole house, they have to clean it, everybody has to clean. They have to help. And if they don't clean, they get kicked out of the house, to go do something else. (YEAH) You know, and they can come back. But here, I mean at home people like sometimes just leave all the chores for their parents to do. And here no, I mean like in our house everybody has a job to do. We have to do it or else, you know, we don't get things that we want to get. There, we have to do it if we want to or not, and we don't anything. Like no reward, no nothing. Yeah.

(IF ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS OR COUSINS OR RELATIVES WERE GOING TO MOVE TO LINCOLN, NEBRASKA. WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM ARE FUN THINGS TO DO?)

I don't know. (smile) I mean (pause) it's just a mosque, we can go there. It's like, it's like a big family there in the mosque.

(WHAT WOULD YOU, HOW WOULD YOU TELL THEM TO PREPARE TO COME HERE?)

I don't know.

(PROBABLY BUY LOTS OF CLOTHES FROM THERE)

Yeah.

(HOW ELSE COULD THEY PREPARE?)

The only way we get clothes here is from Michigan(?). People bring like, um, truck drivers, they go in Michigan(?) and they buy Arabic clothes for us and they sell it in

stores here so we can go and buy. There is not a lot of stores here. There is only like a couple, like five. Not a lot to pick from. And like one dress is \$65. One dress.

(CAUSE IT'S GOTTA TRAVEL AND ALL THAT)

There in Iraq, its only \$25, but here 65. In Michigan(?) it's, I think it's \$30. Yeah.

(WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU TELL THEM HOW TO PREPARE?)

I don't know. Just tell them that they should, um, hold on to their religion and their culture.

(IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO TELL ME ABOUT MOVING HERE OR YOUR EXPERIENCE HERE?)

(pause) No. I mean that's all I have to say. But if it was my parents you interviewed, they would never stop talking.

(THEY LIKE..)

They just had, they will just have everything to say. They will just tell you everything. It would take about like three hours. I don't know. I just feel so lonely cause I don't have any relatives here. (YEAH) Yeah.

(YOU KNOW, I GREW UP AWAY FROM MY FAMILY AS WELL. WELL, MY IMMEDIATE FAMILY. WE LIVED IN CONNECTICUT AND MOST OF MY FAMILY LIVED BACK HERE IN THE MIDWEST. AND SO I DIDN'T, I...)

Did you have to fly to get there?

(I NEVER, YEAH, I HAD NEVER MET MY GRANDFATHERS. THEY BOTH PASSED AWAY BEFORE I EVER MET THEM)

One of my grandpas passed away. My dad was only 12 years old. He was killed. And by Saddam Hussein. Because he, he left the army. And they found out and they caught him. My other uncle, um, he also left the army. They caught him and they cut off his ear. So now he lives with one ear.

(YIKES)

And so when I go to Iraq I promised Mr. Hengie(?) that I will take a picture of him and show him. Yeah.

(CAUSE HE HAS ONE EAR)

Yeah.

(WHAT WOULD YOU TELL ELL STUDENTS ON HOW TO, UH, HOW TO LEARN ENGLISH BETTER?)

Concentrate and listen to the teacher. That's how I learned.

(BECAUSE YOU LEARNED IT REALLY FAST)

Yeah. I've only lived here for 8 years.

(YOU SPEAK GREAT ENGLISH)

Thank you.

(SO IF OTHER ELL KIDS WERE TO READ THIS, MAYBE YOU SHOULD TOSS THEM A POINTER, SO THEY CAN LEARN IT AS FAST AS YOU DID. WHAT WAS THE HARDEST PART OF ADJUSTING TO SCHOOL HERE?)

When I first came here I didn't have any friends or anything. People would always talk about me behind my back, because I have this on. They didn't know why I had this on.

(WHAT IS THAT CALLED?)

A scarf.

(A SCARF)

Just a scarf. In Arabic we call it Hedja.

(HEDJA, OK. I, I, I ONLY ASK YOU THAT BECAUSE, UM, ANYBODY WHO LISTENS TO THIS OR READS THIS LATER WILL NOT KNOW WHAT YOU WERE POINTING TO)

(smile) (AND SO I HAD YOU SAY IT SO THEY KNOW WHAT YOU'RE POINTING TO. SORRY, GO AHEAD)

It's OK.

(AND SO THEY'D ASK YOU ABOUT...)

Yeah, they would just say, they thought that I was bald inside, and I really actually have hair. And I'm just no different than anybody else. I just wear this scarf. It's just respect.

(YEAH)

For us, we just think it's just respect. Um, yeah.

(SO THAT WAS HARD TO ADJUST TO THAT)

Yeah, but then when I started making friends, I told them about my stories and stuff, and they just said "wow, we thought you were the opposite of this" and they would just go and tell other people and that's how I made friends.

(IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH ME?)

No. (smile) No. (smile)

(ANYTHING ELSE ON YOUR MIND?)

Um um. (no)