

“FROM PALESTINE TO BROOKLYN”

FOR LESSON

Migration
StoriesNARRATOR **Zein Rimawi****RIMAWI** We — you know we had the war, you know, the 1967 war.RUN TIME **7:04****STRONG** Right.**RIMAWI** And that war we ex— we expect — we expect to win the war.

The Palestinians will go to their homes, because they — they — we have in the West Bank, Palestinians who came from Haifa, Jaffa, these cities. And so, 1967, they were ready to go home. And we were surprised that — they call it the Six-Day War. I call it the Six-Hour War. In six hours, everything — everything finished. And the Israeli army, instead of coming from the west, they came from the east. So, at that age, I — I tried to understand, "Why? Why keep losing? Why — why — why we Arabs and Muslims keep losing, keep losing?" I thought from the books we study at school. So, I thought, "This is the books, what we study, is no good." And so, I start to read a lot from outside, not from the schoolbooks. I remember, I keep — I tell my kids, even I try to lose — when I — when — when I got accepted in Germany — to lose the knowledge I gotten from our schools. Because I thought, "It's too old." And then one of the reason we lost because of this knowledge. So, when I went to Germany, I was so surprised. I was so surprised. The first test in math, algebra, we take, in college, the one we used to take in eighth grade! And from 27 students, only one girl passed. So, I was so surprised. Then when I started studying more, oh, no, no, no, nothing wrong with our books. Nothing — nothing wrong with the curriculums. Oh, no, no, no, something else wrong. And I start to be more religious from there. I said, "Something — no. It's not — it's the knowledge. It's not the books. It's not — it's not — no, no, no, no. Something else." So, I start to be religious. I — I start to — even to understand our culture, and — and — so this make — make it — make it more difficult for me.

STRONG More difficult how?

RIMAWI To live there.

STRONG Oh, in East Germany.

RIMAWI In East Germany. Because at that time when we lost the war, I start to — a little bit — to keep away from religion. You know, we live in a village. My — my father is religious. He go — he prays five times. So, the whole village, we can say, they go by religion. So, I — I — I start to, a little bit, to keep away, little by little, little by little. I used to — to fast. I used — but when I went to Germany, I found this is what we took in school is equal to what they — we are taking now in college. I say, "Oh, no, no, no. That's — I mean, that's not in our religion. It's not the books. Something else — I have to find it."

And I change. I became more religious.

STRONG What do you remember about your life in Jordan and Lebanon —

RIMAWI Oh —

STRONG — during that war?

RIMAWI — in Lebanon, it — it — you feel like you are human, being in Lebanon. 'Cause it's a free country. At that time also the Palestinians, they have power in Lebanon. Of course, the — the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] were there. So, you feel really you are hu— the first time in my life I left the — a — a — a human being in Lebanon. Because when you are in Jordan, you are not — you are nobody. Even though, even though my — my uncle, who's the brother of my father, used to — used to be the prime minister of Jordan. Yes. But I never liked it. I never felt like I'm free. The same thing when you go to Palestine. You are — you — you — even — you are not a human. You are not a sub-human. You are nobody

there. You are nobody. Anyone, any soldier, male or — or female, she — she or he can take you from your family, ask you to take your clothes or hit you or to stand up for — holding your hands up and — and you cannot do anything.

They don't like your face — "Where are you going?" "To Jerusalem." "Go back."

So — in — in Palestine, well, it's very hard. It's my — my country, my land, my homeland. But very hard. Very hard. It's — you feel very, very sad there. And angry. In Jordan, it's totally different. It's — it's controlled by the police there. You cannot say anything. You — when you go to the cinema, you are watching the movie, the first thing comes the picture of the king. You have to stand up. You don't stand up, six-month jail. Yes. And so — [laughter] so I never liked it. In Lebanon, yes. It's free. It's a free — and a student. The — the — the student's life is good anyway.

STRONG So, you came here to Brooklyn. What was life like? You came to Bay Ridge first?

RIMAWI Yes. I came to — when I came back from Raleigh?

STRONG Yes.

RIMAWI I came to Bay Ridge. I lived in Bay Ridge, 92nd [Street] and Third Avenue. Nice apartment. Yeah. Then when I — when I got married, 1988, I lived in Bay Ridge also. Senator [Street] between Ridge [Boulevard] and Third. Nice apartment. Nice area. At that time, I remember I used to pay \$517. Which is what you ma— less than you make in one week. The rent of the house, \$517. Two bedroom. Now that house, or that apartment, I'm sure it's more than \$2,500. So, you have to work the whole month to pay the rent. So, this is what — how change here, in — in — in New York.

BIO Zein Rimawi was born in 1954 near the city of Jerusalem during a period of changing political boundaries. After studying engineering in Lebanon and East Germany, he immigrated to the United States in the early 1980s. He settled Bay Ridge and co-founded both the Islamic Society of Bay Ridge and the Al-Noor School, the latter of which his children attended.

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