

## “RAISED TO BE QUIET”

**NARRATOR** **Shahana Hanif**

**FOR LESSON**

*Growing Up  
and Fitting In*



**HANIF** But I think also I was raised to be timid and to be quieter and not push back, because my sister, in comparison, was not like this. So she fought back all the time. And she was getting into trouble. But for me getting into trouble meant like I was doing something wrong. And getting punished was not good. So, like, I didn't want punishment. So, for me I knew, like, the tactic was to just stay quiet. But it's just such a contradiction to realize, like, wow, like, staying quiet means my needs won't be heard. But then when I want my needs to be heard, there'll be consequences. So, what is right and what is wrong?

**RUN TIME 3:24**

So I was in constant battle with myself, like, just realizing, like, okay, Sabia is the rebellious one, and she gets in trouble a lot. I have to keep up this facade, almost, of being good and being a good girl and, like, staying shy and introverted to be accepted.

**STRONG** What was she doing to be rebellious? Like, what was she getting in trouble for?

**HANIF** So, we – the only times that we could play outside were during the summer months. And she just loved running around. She loved just getting into little issues with other kids and, one time, like, slapped a kid. Like, so there were things that she was doing that we were taught not to do. But she was also, for me, like, the way I see it, was confronting her feelings. So, if somebody hurt her, she was taking it in her own hands, whereas for me if somebody did something to me I was more likely to go to my mom. And she wasn't.

So, but it's really realizing that she did what I feel all of us should have been prepared to do [laughter]: to respond, to confront, to communicate feeling hurt.

And so, in those instances, she would get punished because my parents also were not good at communicating with other parents and often put all of the blame on us, like we were bad kids. Or she would get told, like, be like your sister.

And then there were just other things. She just loved — she was such a — she still is a free spirit. And one time, like, the ball went to the street. And she, like, ran to get it. And then, I guess a car or a bike — I’m not remembering which — had sort of just touched her. And so she got a little hurt. And, same thing — like, she took a different route in sort of figuring out how she can protect herself and went to our childhood friend Saira’s place. And then, like, her mom took care of her.

And she was like, “You can’t tell my mom.”

But then, like, I got the message. And I was like, “You have to tell her.” Like, “You got hurt.” And so, like, I had this very much — like, I felt like my parents were everything. And I needed their approval. I needed their — like them to save me.

**BIO** Shahana Hanif was born in 1991 in Brooklyn and raised in Kensington’s Bangladeshi community. After a health crisis as a teenager led to a diagnosis of lupus, she went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in women’s and gender studies from Brooklyn College. While there, she became involved in intersectional activism and community organizing, especially with the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence and Naree Shongothok: Bangladeshi Women Organizing for Social Change. Hanif has worked as director of organizing and community engagement for New York City Council Member Brad Lander.

**CITATION** Hanif, Shahana, Excerpt from oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, April 17, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.15; Brooklyn Historical Society.