

Video interview in Boston, Massachusetts
By Alice Rothchild

Jamal Aruri transcript

AR: Tell me your name...

JA: My name is Jamal Aruri. I was born on April 26, 1997. I was born in Massachusetts. We grew up in a town called Dartmouth, Massachusetts which is right next to a city called New Bedford, which is one of the largest cities in Massachusetts.

AR: And do you have memories of what your family told you happened in 1948?

JA: Well, when we were growing up, Palestine was really very, very central to the house. My father had dedicated most of his life to Palestine. He was a professor of political science at what was then Southeastern Massachusetts University, which is now UMass Dartmouth. Along with that he was a specialist in the Middle East, was constantly writing books, traveling. At young ages we knew he would always go away and he would do stuff that we knew was important. I don't think we had a complete grasp of what he was doing until we got older. But I think that when I started approaching high school age, starting to learn the conflict a little bit more, it became apparent to me. And obviously I was tutored by my father in this area, that a great injustice had occurred involving the Palestinians and that essentially what had happened is that their land was taken by Jews who later formed the State of Israel.

AR: So did he talk about his family in particular?

JA: He did talk about his family in particular. He was born in Jerusalem. His father was a high school teacher. And his family, which consisted of a brother and two sisters, would really fluctuate between Jerusalem and the village that they had grown up in called Burham. Burham is out in the country.

It is a small village that if you were traveling from Ramallah, you would take one road that would pass Birzeit. And if you kept following that road, you would eventually go into Burham. So my father, if you ask him where he's from, he would say that he was born in Jerusalem, but his family identified with this town called Burham. Now Burham, was on the West Bank. So they were not, let's say, directly affected by 1948 in the sense that they were not forced to flee their homes as those Palestinians who lived in some of the towns that later became Israel were. But there was a large influx of people who had fled to the West Bank, to Gaza, and my father has told me stories of families who came to Burham, who were taken in his house, who lived under the trees, who lived in mosques, who were taken into homes. I do know that my parents, not my parents, rather, my father's family did take in a woman whose family had fled Dayr Yassin, whose family had all been killed in that massacre, had no place to go, who was taken in for a period of several months.

AR: So here you are in America, were there things that... How did you learn firsthand as

a child growing up in America?

JA: Well, I grew up in a town that had no Arabs in it. There were no Arabs in my high school except my siblings of course. Of course there were no Palestinians in my town. But I had this funny name, which was Jamal, which was usually mispronounced Jamol. And that really made me sort of stick out in a sense at school. I was immediately given a nickname by my mother, Jamie, which most of the people in my family and my friends called me. But certainly on the first day of school when they were calling out the names, the name Jamal stuck out. It became apparent to friends and people that we were Arabic. It was a little bit different. Again, there were no Arabs, there were very few Arabs in our town.

And we were always told and always schooled at home about the significance of what had happened to the Palestinians. And at an early age we had a real emotional attachment to Palestine simply from a sense of unfairness to what had happened, that essentially outsiders came in, had taken over the land and the indigenous people were forced to flee. I think later, as I got older, that emotional attachment also had an intellectual component to it as I was able to read more about the conflict. I traveled to Palestine in high school, not in high school, rather in college. And then later when I graduated from college I became sort of more politicized as well.

AR: Were there Muslims in the school?

JA: There was one other Muslim family. They were Bangladeshi, but that was about it. There were maybe about one or two Cape Verdean families, but the town that I grew up in was predominantly white. I don't want to say it was conservative because that would be wrong, but I want to say they were conservative Democrats, some Republicans.

AR: What was it like when you were a kid?

JA: Well it wasn't as traumatic as one might think. Number one, I didn't have an accent. Number two, I took part in all the sports that the other kids did. Number three, people would tell me that I didn't look Arab. Why don't I look Arab? Well, "You're not dark skinned." OK, but not every Arab is dark skinned. And I had an older brother who was very involved in sports, got me involved in sports. And we fit in pretty well in our town in terms of Little League and Pony League and basketball and football and baseball. I played all of those sports. I was really an ordinary American kid, but for this sort of background that was a little bit strange, a little bit different. It was there but, most of the time in daily interactions with my friends, it really didn't interfere much.

AR: And so on Christmas holidays and stuff like that, was that a time you felt like an outsider or did you just...

JA: Well, that's an interesting thing too because my mother is Lebanese Catholic. She's Maronite. So she supported Christmas, celebrated I should say. Maybe supported is the wrong word, celebrated Christmas. So when we grew up, we celebrated Christmas as well, certainly not as a religious holiday but more as, well, this is what you do, kids get

presents, everybody is getting them. We certainly weren't complaining when we were opening them on Christmas day, but in terms of a religious holiday we really had no idea the significance of Christmas in terms of its relationship to Jesus and Easter, none of those things. We didn't go to church.

AR: Did you have a religious education?

JA: No, we didn't. You know, we were always told by both of our parents that we were secular people; however, when you get older if you decide to adopt a religion that you are comfortable with, that's a decision that you can make as you get older. We were a little bit different in that sense. There were a lot of Catholics that we were friends with growing up in terms of school friends. They went to church. They went to catechism, Sunday school, all those things. There was a, I wouldn't say significant Jewish presence in our town, but there were Jewish students there who would go to the synagogue. There was a synagogue about a mile from our house. And there were some students who didn't identify with any religion, but the majority of kids that I knew growing up were Catholic.

AR: Do you remember when you met your first Jewish student and how that felt?

JA: You know, I have this memory of being on a playground in elementary school and getting in an argument with a Jewish kid, and somehow it evolving into a fight saying, which materialized as, "No we were there first. You were there first." I can't give you any more specifics than that unless I am going to make them up, but I do remember that. But I had Jewish friends growing up; my siblings had Jewish friends growing up. We really sort of took the position that, let's just not talk about that issue because it would have created a divide, and let's concentrate on some of the things that we have in common.

AR: And did you get to go back to Jerusalem or to Burham?

JA: The first time we went back was in 1972. I was five years old. My father was on sabbatical from UMass Dartmouth, and he was teaching a year in Kuwait University. Kuwait University is in the country of Kuwait. It's in Kuwait City, or thereabouts. We spent approximately a year in Kuwait. I was five years old. I have very hazy memories of being in Kuwait. I know my mother hated it, couldn't wait to get out of there.

AR: Why?

JA: Why? She felt very isolated there, very isolated there. It was a very patriarchal society. It was also a society where you were expected to have company on a daily basis. Everybody smoked, so you can imagine that. My father's brother, my uncle Said was living in Kuwait at the time. He had worked for General Electric and that's where he and his family had grown up. And we were often told to go to his apartment afterwards where he would receive guests, and they would be smoking, and the women would bring the food, and the men would be talking.

It wasn't the most progressive environment, and my mother really didn't like it,

and I can see now why she didn't. I don't think my father probably liked it all that much either, but it was a good opportunity for him to teach for a year in the Arab world. We then, from Kuwait, made our, which was my first trip and my siblings first trip to Palestine, and I do have some memories of being in Burham. I remember, let me tell you a little about the house that we live in, in the village. The house was a structure in which two families lived. My great-grandfather had a son that was my father's half uncle. His family lived on one side of the house, which is on the left side of the house, and our family had grown up on the right side of the house. In the back yard there were chicken coops, and there were rabbits. And there was an outdoor stone fireplace that you could bake bread in.

I remember going out every morning and getting the eggs from under the chickens. And my brother really loved to do that too. So my aunt, who was pretty much the head of the house at that time, would send us out, and we would retrieve the eggs, and we would bring them in. And then we would want to do it again, and again, and again, so 20 minutes later we would go out, we'd get the eggs, we'd bring them in. Half-an-hour later we'd go get the eggs; we'd bring them in. It wasn't until later that I found out that my aunt kept on putting the same eggs underneath the chicken!

There was a donkey there. And I got kicked by the donkey. So there are pictures of me during that time with a sling on my hand. I remember being kicked by the donkey and we were told, don't stand behind the donkey because if you stand behind the donkey, you're going to get kicked. So of course I was five years old at the time and so what I did was I stood behind the donkey to see if this was indeed true, and I got kicked by the donkey. I remember being outdoors a lot. We didn't spend very much time indoors. People there didn't spend a lot of time indoors.

There was, I remember a dinner that we had where an entire lamb was cooked on the rotisserie over the open flame. I remember this incredible structure which was in Arabic called an *a-* which was made of trees and tree branches basically like a fort or almost like a shape of an igloo that was made, and some of the villagers would go in there and even bath in there. And I thought that was strange. So we had some good times there. My memories are a little bit foggy. I think they are restricted to thinking about things that kids would remember like the chicken story.

AR: Do you remember getting in or getting out? Did you go through the Allenby Bridge?

JA: You know, I'm sure we went through the Allenby Bridge, but that I don't recall, getting in or getting out. I don't think there were many, so obviously we had American passports, so things were easier for us getting in or out than they would be for Palestinians. I don't think many Palestinian Americans were flying into Tel Aviv at that time and getting in that way. If I had to guess, I would say we went through the Allenby Bridge.

AR: And did you get to Jerusalem, or did you just stay in the village?

JA: I would say we stayed in Burham. I don't remember going to Jerusalem then, but I did make a couple of subsequent trips when I was older in which I went to Jerusalem. Well, the first one was a trip that was run by what was really the first Arab American

organization in this country, which was the Arab American University Graduates, the AUG that my father and people like Edward Said had founded. And AUG during this time, this was in 1985, was flourishing. They were very relevant. They had a lot of conferences. They had books and press that they had published. And they had sponsored a youth trip to the Middle East which was largely financed by the government of Kuwait. And I remember my father saying, “There’s this youth trip going on. I think you and your brother should go.” I was freshman in college at UMass Amherst and my brother was a senior in high school. He was eleven months younger than me, and we were a little bit hesitant to go, but decided, let’s give it a shot.

We had gone there with a group of approximately a dozen other Arab Americans, some Lebanese, some Palestinian, some Syrian, some Egyptian, etc. who really had a lot of the same background as we did and a lot of the same feelings of being in between two cultures, East and West. That was really a, I don’t want to be dramatic and say life changing trip for me, but it really opened my eyes to Palestine, and it was really the first time that I was able to spend significant close time with other Arab Americans. And I got to know them very well, and I’m still in touch with a couple of them today. We had spent a week in Kuwait, which was sort of very nondescript, and we’d go to what Kuwait had to offer, which was not much. They had an amusement park there. We were treated to very beautiful dinners and things like that, but Kuwait University, not Kuwait University, rather the government of Kuwait funded this trip so we went on Kuwait Airlines. And then we went to Jordan after that, and we went to Petra and Jerash. We spent some time in Amman.

We had met with and seen a lot of Palestinians. Jordan, as you know, has a very significant Palestinian population which is probably higher than native Jordanians. And then, we spent a week there, and then the real trip really began. We went to the West Bank. We crossed over the Allenby Bridge and most of, this was in 1985, yes 1985. Most of the kids we were with were given the same treatment as me and my brother. By treatment I mean the so called security that was ushered out at the bridge.

Basically, you cross this Allenby Bridge, which has historical significance. And you go over, it’s this little bridge and this little river, and you’re like, is this what people are talking about? You go on the other side and at that time there were no joint Palestinian-Jordanian security arrangements or anything like that. The Jordanians were on one side, the Israelis were on the other side. You crossed the bridge and then you would see the Israeli flags all over the place, and you would see the Israelis with their guns and their military fatigues, etc.

There were long lines there with Arabs, traditional Arabs dressed with, many of the women had head scarves on, the men had [?], and those people were in a very, very long line. We had American passports. We got through a lot quicker. And the process of going through with one’s luggage is unbelievable. It’s almost like a scientific experiment. They pull all of your clothes out. They put their hands through every single thread of fabric in your clothes trying to determine if there’s anything in there at all. And I am telling them in English, and they’re insisting I speak Arabic, which I don’t, “You know that there’s nothing in my bag.” I’m young and a little bit intimidated, but at the same time, I’m a little bit pissed off. So I’m sort of playing it like that.

Once the entire luggage is dumped out, it’s gone through, etc., it’s... The suitcase is then sent off to be x-rayed. So most of the people that we were with, in fact all of the

people that we were with were allowed to get on the bus, except my brother and I because our last name appeared on their computer for a number of reasons. My father is very active in this area, and I have a cousin T- who is very active and spent years in prison, and the name popped out on the computer, so that warranted additional questioning. So we were brought in a room, again asked why we were there, all sorts of questions that seemed to be repetitive and we seemed to be giving the same answers. We're here with a bunch of Arab American youth. They're on the bus; they're waiting for us. We're going to see some family here. But every answer you give them prompts five or ten additional questions about things that seem to you to be innocuous, and probably are, but it's part of the process of harassment.

Then my brother and I were strip searched. We were the only ones in the group who were strip searched. And then our shoes were x-rayed.

AR: What did that feel like, you're a teenager?

JA: It's, it's, well, obviously it's humiliating. It's humiliating, but at the same time when I look back on it now I'm mindful that we got first class treatment compared to the other Palestinians who probably had gone to Amman to visit family. For them, it's an adventure. It's an entire day getting across the bridge. And in many cases they can be turned back because one of the border patrol persons might be in a bad mood. So it's humiliating but at the same time I think we understood that we had it pretty good in the large picture.

AR: How did the other students react?

JA: Well, I think they were pretty aware that my father was really active in this area, and we had a couple of adults, one of whom was the executive director of AUG at the time, Susan Z- who was probably briefing them while they were on the bus as to why this is happening. So they didn't seem too... They seemed to understand what the reason was.

AR: So then you get in. What's it like to be there?

JA: Well, you get in and then you're almost immediately in the town to Jericho which is, you know, a cool place. In terms of Palestinians there, they're dark skinned compared to other Palestinians. And we then went to Jerusalem. We stayed at the YMCA in Jerusalem, and spent a couple of days in Jerusalem. We were visiting different towns and cities in the West Bank.

AR: What did it feel like?

JA: Yeah, I mean it felt wonderful. I probably had some of the same feelings of anyone who would go there. You read about this stuff, you see pictures, but when you look up and there's the dome of the Al Aqsa or the Wailing Wall it's... It captures you. It overwhelms you in a great way. We went on to the mosque. We were told we had to take our shoes off, which we did. We went into the Dome of the Rock. I didn't pray. I don't know how to pray. I have prayed on subsequent trips there, not knowing how to do it but

just sort of wanting to really take in that culture. And it's breathtaking, it really is. The shopping is fun, and the interplay between you and the native Palestinians is fun. Of course as soon as you set foot there, they know you're a tourist. And I would say some things in Arabic, and I would really try to over pronounce my Arabic accent, which I think even tagged me as an American even more.

The children there are unbelievable. They just run up to you and they all have smiles on their faces. They see you with cameras and they, this is back in 1985, so cameras in the West Bank weren't all that common like they are now, and they want their picture taken. They crowd around, and they'll sell you gum. You've experienced these things when you're there. It's wonderful. We had an itinerary. We went to the town of Nablus. We met with the mayor of Nablus, whose name is Bassam Shakaa at that time, who I believe is still alive. He had a leg blown off by a bomb that was set. I don't know whether it was in Palestine or outside of Palestine.

AR: Set by Israelis?

JA: Set by Israelis. I don't know whether it was the Massad, but it was some type of... I knew at the time, I don't know now. And the feelings that we got from the people that we met there was that we're fighting this occupation. We'll continue to fight this occupation, and there's no doubt in our minds that eventually we'll be free. We'll live in equality, we'll live in dignity, and we'll live like the Jews live in Israel. We'll have our rights. It was a real sense of resistance, that this is not something that we're going to accept. That we're going to fight until we achieve justice, just like every other people, a lot of upbeat feelings from talking to different people, people who had been through a lot. People who, I mean, the poverty there is incredible.

We did go to Gaza. I won't touch on that now, but we went to refugee camps in the West Bank and the poverty there is unbelievable. The homes that people live in are very, very modest. If you go into a refugee camp they're not even really homes. They're more like structures that have been haphazardly built with whatever can be built. The children are, often times have a lot of dirt on them, more so than you would see on kids around here. There isn't a wealth of food that they have, although wherever you go they pull out the fruit and the coffee and the tea. And for people like me who are affected by caffeine... I was up so many nights because if you refuse, it's like culturally unacceptable.

And you talk to people there and everything that you do that you take for granted such as going to school is a problem because the military's everywhere. The Israelis were everywhere at this time. This was pre-Oslo. They were in the cities. They were in the towns. They were on the outside. There were checkpoints. So wherever you go there were soldiers with machine guns and fatigues and the heavy military artillery. So just going to school let's say, for example, can oftentimes be an endeavor in terms of where the checkpoint is, what soldier's going to hassle you at this time, what's going to happen.

And of course the teachers are dealing with the same type of humiliation. Travel there is just very, very difficult in terms of always knowing where the checkpoint is, and going around the checkpoint, but then you're at a different checkpoint. You're dealing with soldiers that are a lot of times your age. I was a freshman in college when I'm recounting this story. I was 18 years old, and these soldiers with these military fatigues

and these guns who were barking out orders looked to be about my age, maybe a couple years older. And you know as a kid growing up, in the US or anywhere else, you take orders from adults is generally how society works. Here you would often see young kids, Israeli soldiers, basically ordering around older people.

And you can hear the arguments in Arabic between some of the older people and the soldiers. That was in 1985. That was before the Intifada had, the First Intifada had erupted. I returned to Palestine in 1990. So the First Intifada had started in 1997. That was a really wonderful trip. I was on a delegation of a human rights organization called PHRC which is the Palestine Human Rights Campaign. And I was with other activist people from churches, different peace and justice groups, etc. And I was maybe one of two or three Arab Americans on this trip. The rest were Americans who were affiliated with different peace and justice organizations that were working on this issue.

We went through the Allenby Bridge and I got the same treatment. It was almost a retelling of the old story except my brother wasn't with me. They got through quickly and again I went on the bus and people were asking me what was going on and again I was explaining to them my name's in the computer.

This happened to me again recently. I had just gone to Palestine this past summer, but through the airport. So anyway, this was a really nice trip because the Intifada was really running strong at this point. And we spent a lot of time with different organizations that were really fighting the occupation; doing everything they could to not be dependent on Israeli products. People in Palestine would buy Israeli products because it was really the only thing that was available. It was cheap. And it's very difficult to live and not deal with Israeli products. We went with agricultural relief committees that would go out to different farms and talk to farmers who were planting different crops to be used to feed Palestinians. We went with medical relief committees who would respond as quickly as they could to stone throwing Palestinians who would be shot by Israeli soldiers, with either rubber bullets or with live ammunition. There were all of these grassroots organizations whose goals were to disentangle themselves from the occupation, to not be dependent on Israel and to rid themselves of the chains. It was a very, very hopeful time. There was a lot of resistance. There was a lot of camaraderie. There was a lot of feelings as though we are really going to get rid of the occupation this time.

The other thing is that the shift in the struggle had really in my mind shifted away from Tunis, where the PLO was centered, and into the Occupied Territories. The Intifadas, as you probably know and as a lot of people know, came as a great surprise to the PLO. They were actually caught aback by it.

It was nice that the people living under occupation weren't taking orders from Tunis where the PLO was located, and they were living very comfortably. It was a very bureaucratic, overly bureaucratic, somewhat democratic but largely undemocratic organization. And it was the complete opposite of it. It was grassroots. It was democratic. It involved women. It involved youth. There was really a great amount of hope at that time that we're making progress. And very important, it was on the front pages and on the television screens in America. Kids throwing stones, taking on soldiers, it was the old David/Goliath on its head.

I mean the propaganda that we were fed from the Nakba was basically that this was the David defeating the five Arab armies, which is something that has been completely discredited. Now it was clear that the David this time was the Palestinians and

the Goliath was the Israeli soldiers. There were a lot of demonstrations. I was a little afraid. I have, every time I go on these trips, I have relatives. And my relatives were involved in organizing the Intifada and taking part in the demonstrations, etc. So I would go out with them in the streets and watch from a distance, the stone throwing, which would then be followed by tear gas canisters, rubber bullets. I really tried to stay away from that.

My mother was very, very afraid when I was there, and I thought to myself, well I don't know if I am going to do any good if I come home shot or something like that. But these kids were really, really brave, and you could see in their faces that they felt as though they had nothing to lose. That they had been humiliated enough and that they were making strides. And when you see a young kid pick up a stone, and he's as far away from an Israeli soldier as I am to you, and he's confronting that soldier with that machine gun, and it's incredible, that kind of bravery. But I think it's also telling about the amount of repression that would cause kids that age to confront soldier, and you know many of them were obviously killed and many of them were maimed. It was a time of really great hope and it was a really nice trip.

AR: And then you went back this summer?

JA: Yeah, I went this summer. This summer was the first time that I had been back since 1990, and the situation to me had changed quite drastically. This summer was more of a family trip so I didn't get out to different towns and villages.

We weren't part of a delegation that had met with anybody. I hadn't seen my family there for quite some time. I have a lot of cousins there that I can now keep in touch with because of email and facebook and all these things that sort of bring you close together even though you're on skype and you're miles apart. I went there with my father, and we spent most of our time in Ramallah. The situation is completely different.

First of all, Jerusalem is completely cut off from West Bank Palestinians. You can't go there unless you happen to be a Jerusalem resident, or you happen to live in an area like my cousins do, which is somewhat between Jerusalem and the West Bank. And for some reason they have a Jerusalem residency. So Jerusalem is completely cut off from West Bank Palestinians. Well, Jerusalem was always the center of Palestinian life. And back in the days that I had gone in 1990 and '85 when the occupation was in full swing, Palestinians were allowed to travel to Jerusalem.

That's not the case now. So what's happened is the center of political, social life has switched to Ramallah, which is the town that we had stayed in. I stayed with my cousin T- who is a physicist, and who was adopted by an international as a prisoner of conscience years back, and who is very active in Palestinian movement there, and so is his son. So when I went to downtown Ramallah, I was really flabbergasted by the amount of stores and restaurants and commerce and hotels. Ramallah's a different place than I think most of the West Bank. It's somewhat westernized. There are times when you'll be walking through Ramallah and it might feel like you're in Cambridge. Again, there's lots of restaurants, there's hotels. Things tend to run smoothly. There's big houses. It's somewhat of a modern city and really I would say five times as big as when I had last seen it.

We did a little bit of traveling, not much; however, I told my father when we went

there, you know, I haven't seen Israel proper and I have to see it. So that was arranged. Arranging a trip like that is not like arranging a trip here where you might decide to go somewhere that might take an hour to get to like Boston or whatever. We had to have a taxi driver who had Jerusalem plates. We were allowed to go into Israel proper at that time, however, we weren't sure because when we had arrived at the airport, it was during a time in which...

AR: Ben Gurion airport?

JA: At Ben Gurion airport. This was the first time I went through Ben Gurion airport. And got the same similar treatment that I got. In fact they let my father go very quickly and they held me up for quite awhile. And it's just because of my age. At any rate, yeah, they were stamping passports West Bank only. And there was a period of time where they were doing this and this was sort of the beginning of this time when they were doing this.

So I was insisting with them that I was the son of, I want to go to Jerusalem. I'm going to go the West Bank. So luckily, after, I would say two hours of haggling... We had a driver waiting there for us and my father was waiting and my cousin was there waiting... I was able to get through. In fact I joked with my cousin after that, the first person I saw when I got into Palestine was you because they showed me a picture of him on the computer when they were interrogating me. So you know, "Who's this guy?" I said, "I haven't seen him in years." Last time I saw him he was five years old. Of course I knew exactly who he was because of facebook, etc. But he's got long hair and he's sort of like an American hippie.

He was doing a lot of work on the wall. Not to digress but he was doing a lot of work on the wall and he was involved in an organization that was raising money for youth programs in Palestine. And what you would do is you would send an email to this program as to what you want written on the wall. And they would write it for you, they would take a Polaroid shot, and they would send it back. So you have all these revolutionary messages on the wall, and it was a great way to raise money. So that was his crime and that's how he found his way into the Israeli database because he was active in this. So, finally I'm let through after the questioning. "What do you do?" "I'm a lawyer." "Did you go to law school?" "Yes. You can't really become a lawyer unless you go to law school." Finally I'm let through.

But to get back to the original point, I told my father I wanted to see Israel proper because I hadn't seen it. So we get the taxi driver who has Jerusalem plates. He's in Jerusalem and we're in Ramallah. So he has to go through the Qalandia checkpoint, which you've been through, and can only be described as an absolute zoo, like putting a checkpoint in the middle of Fenway Park when one of the games is just getting out. I mean, it's just, it's crazy. And you see people on foot trying to get through and there's an interrogation room and there are people in cars and they're looking at the plates, but depending on what color plates you have, you can still be questioned.

We had yellow plates so you can go through. But of course there's a long line and the people there drive crazy. People are driving on the sidewalk and there's people selling things to eat there at a checkpoint because it's something that just takes so long to get through. And there's just one exit. It's like a tollbooth but there's only one toll. So

you can imagine in this country if there's a huge amount of traffic, and everybody's trying to get to the same spot and there's just one toll that you get through, and of course it's not just a matter of paying your toll. Sometimes there's this question that takes place. "Get out of the car." Cars are searched, etc, etc. So he has to get from Qalandia to Ramallah. So he has to get through there and he has to pick us up and we have to go back through the same thing.

Of course when you're in Jerusalem and you're trying to get to Ramallah it's much easier, when you're trying to go the other way, it's much harder. So luckily, he speaks Hebrew pretty well. And we're able to get through. We drive to Haifa, and that's our first stop. My first trip to Israel proper. And get out at [?] and take a look at the coast of Haifa, and it is absolutely breathtaking. I grew up on the ocean. Dartmouth, the town I grew up in is on the ocean, and spent a lot of time on the water as a kid. This coast is absolutely breathtaking, especially the view from[?], and stunning too. Stunning in the sense that you're, you feel as a Palestinian that you're in Palestine yet it's been overtaken by Israel. And it's really become a westernized city. So we then went to Akko. Went to a famous mosque in Akko, I forget the name of it now, walked around there and mingled with the people.

The interesting things about being there is you will be driving around, and you will see the tall buildings in Tel Aviv and Haifa and these different places and you'll feel like you are in any Western city, San Francisco, Boston, New York, whatever. And then you'll drive a little bit further and you'll start to see the neighborhood deteriorate. You'll start to see buildings that are in disrepair, streets that are in disrepair, etc. And then you start to see the Arabs. This is the Arab minority in Israel that was once the majority. Now it's probably ten to twelve percent of the population. And it's very similar to being in this country in terms of being in an area that seems very affluent with the people dressed up in suits and going to work and lots of commerce, etc. And then you drive a little bit outside or to a different part of the city and you see people of color. Very, very similar.

To me as an American that's what really struck me, and you begin to realize that the plight of the Palestinians is not just relegated to those living under occupation or those living in exile or those living in refugee camps, but the Palestinians of Israel are themselves really are a minority living amongst a majority, that for the most part doesn't want them there. And of course their schools are underfunded, their towns are underfunded, their roads are underfunded, their infrastructure's underfunded. They're not allowed to buy land for the most part. Most of the land in Israel's owned by the Jewish National Fund. And there is the typical racism that any minority would find when they're amongst a majority. And I remember sort of feeling in a sense that they were as victimized as the people living under occupation or in exile. And I don't think I gave that a lot of thought before.

And it's, I think very difficult for them. They have different difficulties than Palestinians living under occupation. Palestinians living under occupation are amongst their own people, they speak the same language, etc. You have Arab store owners that will have signs in Hebrew. Most of the Arabs there, most of the Arabs there will speak Hebrew. They're, I think doing their best to fit in to Israeli culture because for them it's a means of survival. But they're Palestinian. They speak Arabic. They're really caught in between this dominant culture and their own culture. So that was to me was a little bit

heartbreaking, but it was nice to see the coast.

We then traveled to Jaffa and ate at a wonderful restaurant by the sea. And they have all these different kinds of fish that they bring out. And you go to the restaurant, and of course it's not like ordering here. The owners pretty much tell you what you should get and this and that. And they bring out all this extra stuff, and you don't know if you are paying for it or not, usually you're not. And then we headed back. But we had left early morning, and came back late in the day.

And it was almost like we had gone into a different world in that one hour. You're going from villages. Of course when we were there we went to our village of Burham a bunch of times. It's about 25 minutes from where we're staying in Ramallah. You're seeing Arabs. And you then go into an area that looks very much like Boston, like I said, New York, San Francisco, etc. It's almost as though you've gone from east to west in a matter of hours. You see a lot of soldiers at bus stops. The dichotomy between the West Bank and Israel proper is like you're going to from east to west in an hour, an hour and a half; from a third world to a first world country.

AR: So you're from the West but your family's from the East, so how did that feel?

JA: I'll tell you. It's funny, when I'm in this country and people say what are you, I'm Palestinian. People want to know what your ethnicity is. When I go to Palestine, I'm an American. My family knows that I'm Palestinian, but they know I'm an American. My Arabic is really shumpy, really, not as good as it should be. I learned a little bit of colloquial Arabic growing up and then I took modern standard Arabic, what's called the *fushá* in college, but I didn't use it once I left college, and I forgot a lot of it.

AR: Any idea why your parents didn't teach it to you?

JA: Yeah, because my mother didn't speak Arabic. My mother is Lebanese American. She was born in Springfield, MA, so it was never spoken in the home. English was the language spoken in the home. So I never learned Arabic. Tried. It's one of those languages like any language that you have to use a lot and I didn't.

There were times when I spoke a lot better Arabic than I do now. But I mean, being in the West Bank, you know, wearing shorts, walking around. Walking around, there's nobody wearing shorts. So I stick out as an American there. It's funny because when I'm there I'm attacked as an American, and when I'm in America people ask me what my ethnicity is, I say I'm Palestinian. It's an interesting sort of phenomenon.

AR: So you have children?

JA: Yes, I have four children. We have two boys and two girls.

AR: How have you shared your...

JA: Well, it's sort of a, it's sort of in progress now. In fact it's something that my wife and I talk about now because our kids are getting older and they are starting to understand some of these concepts. So the first thing we did is we named all of our kids Arabic

names. My wife is Lebanese. She's Lebanese Muslim. And our oldest daughter, L- is thirteen. She's going to be going into high school next year. She is starting to want to know more about Palestine, and we've given her some stuff to read. S- is our second son. He's going to be twelve in March. He's starting to ask questions. Then we have a daughter [?] who's eight and a son Z-who's seven.

And they're a little small, but they're very cognizant of the fact that we're Arabs. Number 1, they have Arabic names. Number 2, their [Arabic word], their grandfather, they know he's done a lot on this area, and written books. They go to his office and they see his books. They're cognizant that we eat a lot of Arabic food around the house. We listen to some Arabic music. So they're getting it culturally. I'm hoping they get it politically and intellectually as they grow older. My father recently had his archives published at his university. They had a big reception for him over the summer, and they had asked my daughter and my oldest nephew to speak about their grandfather, and much of it was about his work on the Middle East and about Palestine. So, they're starting to learn.

AR: And how do their peers treat them?

JA: Yeah, I'm not... I think their peers treat them fine. I think there hasn't been a complete connection yet amongst their peers to their background. It's, I think their growing up is very similar to my experience growing up in that they have Arabic names, but again they're very much immersed into American culture. Religiously speaking, I am adamantly secular. My wife grew up in a very conservative Muslim household. She was somewhat of a rebel but still follows some of the Islamic guidelines. Not as many as some might think she should, but... She's, I think she has a lot of secular instincts as well, but I think a lot of these traditions don't die out even if you think they ought to.

They, you know, realize they don't go to church or synagogue or anything like that. If you ask them what religion they are, they'll say they're Muslim. They realize that we're not religious and we continuously tell them that, you know, it's really a requirement, a necessity, that you respect all faiths and all religions and those who don't believe in God, etc. So they, I think are fitting pretty well into the town we live in.

We live in a town called Andover, which I think is generally progressive. It's also a different time than when I was growing up. I think a lot of the sort of outwardly racist things that kids would say now, they know that you can't say that stuff in school without there being repercussions. There's more, I think, celebration of difference, and I think schools are doing a better job of tolerating different religions and different perspectives and different ethnicities, etc. And I think the school system that we live in is doing a good job of that as well. But I think your question is well taken, that I think that at some point, you know, we're ready for one of them to come home crying that someone said that they're a terrorist or someone said Arabs are bad or someone said Muslims are bad.

AR: Or a "You can't go out with my daughter," thing.

JA: Yeah, or something like that. You know, the stereotypes when I was growing up of Arabs were similar to the ones growing up now: that everybody's wearing the sheet over their head, you know, all women are covered, they're these oil rich billionaires, the

Sheiks and the terrorists. But you know, I grew up prior to 9/11, so the terrorism stigma now is much more prevalent than when I was growing up, so we're cognizant of that and we're trying to make them more aware of their culture and their background.

AR: So what were you going to say about Bar Mitzvahs?

JA: Oh I was indicating when we took the break that my two oldest kids have just come back from a couple of Bar Mitzvahs and were really impressed at the whole ceremony and the party afterwards and the number of gifts that were given out and things of that sort. I think that there are a lot of times, and I think that this was probably true growing up for me too, that there can be a real affinity in this country between Arab Americans and Jewish Americans because we both share the same perspective of being minorities in what is dominantly a Christian country.

AR: Commonality?

JA: Right, right. Entity, cooperation, right. So I think that there's really some commonality there in terms of being a minority and sort of, you know, people say all the time that Israel is defined as a Jewish state, and the United States is very much a Christian state. It's not as vulgar as it is in Israel where it's really a matter of law there. But culturally and sort of socially, we really do live in a Christian country. And I think we feel that a little bit less living in the Northeast. I think if you go out to the Midwest and you go out to the Bible belt there, it's probably much more pronounced.

AR: So at these Bar Mitzvahs, did your kids notice what the liturgy was and how Israel was described in the liturgy?

JA: They didn't mention anything about that at all. There's, you know, we are very cognizant of the fact of our kids to really teach them the same way that I was taught growing up. It was really enforced upon us by my father and by my parents that our enemies are not the Jews. That Zionism is a political movement that some Jews adhere to and that many non-Jews adhere to, and that is essentially what we take issue with because it has led to our disenfranchisement. And the distinction was always made there. And we try to do the same with our children that other people's cultures and religions and beliefs have to be respected.

And I think we're probably now getting to the point with the two older kids where they're just starting to learn about Israel and Palestine and these types of things. And we are very careful to let them know that, again, there were these historical forces that were involved that had a great part in this thing evolving. That the Holocaust was really one of the central reasons that led to the massive immigration into Palestine and the people that ended up victimizing the Palestinians, many of whom were victims themselves. It's something that I think that they're getting. It's not a black and white situation. There's a lot of grey that's in there and we want to just make sure that our children understand that.

AR: Do you remember meeting an Israeli or having interactions with Israelis and how

that went?

JA: Well, yeah. I mean, when I was at UMass, Amherst, I would say probably in my sophomore year, I became very, very politicized, myself and another. I was getting older. I was studying political science and reading a lot of stuff that my father had written and that other people had written. And I was on a college campus that was very radical, that was very leftist and progressive. And I thought to myself, well, this is the time to come out of this, you know, American shell and you know sort of do something that was positive on this issue. And I had gone on the trip too, in 1985, which was my freshman year in college that really opened my eyes to what was going on there.

Myself and another graduate student had started up an organization called the Palestine Solidarity Committee at UMass Amherst and we had a lot of people who eventually became involved throughout the five college area, a lot of whom were South Asian. There weren't a whole lot of Palestinians at UMass Amherst at that time, although there were some. We became very, very active on the issue. We invited speakers, we planned events, we tabled, we had rallies, etc. Again, this was a really good time to be an activist because this was during the time of the Intifada. I graduated from college in 1989, so from 1987 to 1989 sympathy with the Palestinians, I think, has never been higher.

Mainly because of the television images of kids throwing stones at soldiers and soldiers responding with live ammunition, which I think became problematic for the pro-Israel lobby in this country, only because it had confronted people in a visual manner on their TV screens. And people could look at that visual of a kid throwing stones at a soldier and a soldier firing back with live ammunition and they could make their own assumptions as to what was presented to them. So it was a really great time to be active, and we did a lot on campus.

AR: Did you meet Israelis on campus?

JA: There were Israelis on campus that I had met who were quite more thoughtful on this issue, a lot more liberal on this issue, and understood infinitely more than a lot of Jewish students who were involved in spreading propaganda. There was one Israeli, Charles L- who now is involved in this issue with some organization who had served in the military, and he was one of our central people involved in the Palestine Solidarity Committee. It was good to have him on board because when we were being denounced by one of the pro-Israel students, he could really look at them and tell them, "Listen, I lived there. I was in the army there. I didn't just go on some trip, my Birthright trip, and hang out in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and you know, go to a couple of restaurants and bars and then come back." So, you know, he was a good person to have, and there were a few other Israeli students that were there whose take on the whole issue was much less overtly Zionist than were some of the political members of Hillel and some of the Republican club members who were opposing some of the things that we did.

AR: Do you think of yourself as a refugee or how do you think of yourself?

JA: Well, I think if I were going to call myself a refugee, I think it would really be a sort

of, a little bit overly dramatic. No, I'm not a refugee. I wasn't born in Palestine. I wasn't forced out like so many refugees were. However, I can identify with the story, I think, in a way that doesn't require me to have actually lived through it because of the fact that Palestine was so central in our house growing up and that in fact, that my father really dedicated a lifetime on this issue, endless hours writing, speaking, traveling, going to different places and small parts of America, speaking in this church or that church or this university or that university. He was traveling a lot.

Growing up, my mother was really left with the load of taking care of four kids and feeding them and getting them going. When my father was home, he was wonderful and contributed in those areas greatly, but you know because Palestine was so central to us, it's easy to sort of feel the pain of Palestinians who lost their homes and who aren't allowed to go back and you know, they're really, the refugees of 1948 are really in the worst plight I think of all Palestinians. You have Palestinians living in Israel now who are Israeli citizens and are really second and third class citizens.

You have other Palestinians who were living under occupation; however, there is some degree of autonomy in certain places like Ramallah and these different types of places. These are people that are at least on their land and for the most part still have some or most of their property. They are also the people that if there is a settlement, will benefit the most from a political settlement, if it is a just political settlement. I think for the refugees, they not only have been dispossessed of their land, of their property, and are forced to live as refugees, but I think that there is a real feeling for most of them that, if there is a settlement, they are going to be short changed. And I think that the current Palestinian leadership has given every indication that this is an issue that will be compromised if most of the Occupied Territories can be regained.

AR: So if someone asked you, where is home? What would you say?

JA: Well, I think if someone were to ask me, where am I from, and usually when people ask me where I'm from I pause for a second because I don't know whether they're recognizing my Arabic name and they're asking what my ethnicity is, or whether they're asking me where I grew up, or where I currently live. So I always pause to decipher what the question really means.

And if they're asking me where I'm from, in other words, what my ethnicity is, I always tell them I'm Palestinian. And it sometimes dawns on me that I don't mention the Lebanese part, and I'm half Lebanese. I always thought to myself, why do I always say that I'm Palestinian and not Lebanese? And I think the answer is, I'm sure the answer is because there's really, I think, a duty on my part to say I'm Palestinian, to let the person know that there are Palestinians who are comfortable in America, who are like you are and I are, and we're not just a bunch of raging lunatics who are setting bombs and killing people indiscriminately. And it always generates a response. It's almost like a provocative answer when you say you're Palestinian. You're answering what your ethnicity is, you say you're Irish or you're Swedish or whatever. Not that these people don't have compelling histories, I think that they do, but it's a whole different response that you get when you say that you're Palestinian. And people always have sort of a response, some of them,

AR: What kinds of responses?

JA: Some of the responses range from, “Oh wow, that’s great, I always thought that they got the short end of the stick.” Other people will say, “Well, are you a terrorist?” and then they’ll laugh. Other people will say, “Oh are you Jewish?” So you get responses that range from ignorance to racism to sort of camaraderie or affinity. But you always get a response. “Where is Palestine?” will be some of the responses. Or people will say “Oh, you mean you’re from Israel?” “No, I’m not, I’m from Palestine.” It always generates a response. It always generates a response and the response usually generates a conversation from those who are interested. It can often be an opportunity to give people some basic information about what happened to the Palestinians that you might not have that opportunity otherwise.

AR: So in terms of home, what would you say?

JA: Well, I think in terms of where is home, the United States is my home. It’s where I was born; it’s where I grew up. It’s where I started a family; it’s where my business is. All of the central parts of my life: my family, both the family that I grew up in, my brothers, my sister, my parents, and the family that I started, are all based here. So yeah, this is my home. Right now my home is Andover. It’s a town that we live in and my kids go on the bus to the Andover schools. They play sports in Andover; their friends are from Andover and yeah.

But at the same time, I don’t identify as an American as many people would. And I think the reason for that is that I’m very aware of this country’s role in the plight of my people, the Palestinians. And very aware of the fact that a settlement along the lines of two states or a bi-national state or let’s just say self-determination for the Palestinians in whatever form it would take, would have occurred despite this country’s financial, diplomatic support for Israel, military support for Israel. And that is something that’s very difficult also with regard to this country’s foreign policy, not only in the Middle East, but previously in Latin America. It’s something that I disagree with strongly and it’s very difficult to embrace America. You have to make a distinction between the neighbors and friends that you have who are Americans who are good decent people, who aren’t out to hurt anybody, and the government of this country, be they Democratic or Republican, who essentially are interested in expanding an empire, and who are interested in controlling, not only the Middle East, but every area that has geostrategic significance to this country. So it’s, it’s something that you never feel completely comfortable with.

I remember when we moved into our house in Andover about four years ago, and the American flag was flying out front from the previous owners. And the first thing I did was I went out and took down the flag. Not that I’m ashamed of this country, but I think that when you wave the flag in this country, it really is a sign that there is support for the military in this country and part of the government that have been very, very forthright in denying peoples’ rights around the world, and who promote a system that is very discriminatory towards the poor, the minorities, and the disenfranchised. And that’s not something that I want to associate with.

AR: Is there anything else that we missed?

JA: I don't know, I think we covered a lot.