Video interview in Detroit, Michigan
By Alice Rothchild

Faris Alami transcript

AR: Today what I am doing is collecting stories of Palestinian experiences, experiences of the Nakba, whatever has happened with people's families.

FA: Not so different from the normal story.

AR: What I am discovering is that there is no normal story.

FA: Well, for me I was born in Kuwait, my mom and dad left for Kuwait. My dad used to live between Jaffa and Gaza and my mom was born in Beersheba.

AR: And what town was your father from?

FA: He would usually claim Jaffa if he was talking to some people, but if you don't know he'll just say Gaza. My mom is from Beersheba, she'll tell you that, but my dad will say if you don't know much, that he's from Gaza but if you know a little bit he'll say also lived in Jaffa.

AR: So he went from Jaffa to Gaza in '48?

FA: Yeah, after seven days actually, after the war finished he went back. He was at the time, he was celebrating Eid, I guess or something and he was at his aunt's house and his dad had gone to Gaza and then seven days later they took him to Gaza. That's what I understood.

AR: So his family had lived in Jaffa for how long?

FA: Oh, I have no idea. I am going to assume our roots from our family tree go from 1910, sorry 1090. One branch is tracked that way, the other branch we just don't know what. Could be earlier than that, could be after, but somewhere in the neighborhood, 1000 years, 500 years. Long enough, long enough to claim that they used to be from there.

AR: And did he tell you anything about what happened in '48 to him or the family, any details of that?

FA: Some details I have, not all the details. He would be the right person to talk to of course, but some details of course. I'm sure you've heard of this before, which is confusion and not sure what to do. And when he got to Gaza they just tried to start again in Gaza knowing that his mom is actually from Jaffa and so just settling in, and from what I understood it sounds like my grandfather had two homes. He was a businessman and he had lots of operations and lots of corporations. And from what I understood, he used to be the first authorized dealer for the oil company back when it started in the 1900's, British BP, and actually one of my friends today, that is one of my best friends who is also Palestinian from Gaza, his grandfather and my grandfather were partners in business.

AR: So when he left Jaffa, he didn't lose everything?

FA: Oh yeah.

AR: So he just recreated everything from scratch? And what kind of business did he have in Jaffa?

FA: I know we had orchards because we started again in Gaza. He owned buildings, rented them out. Then he had import/export business and the oil was one of the companies.

AR: And what was his name?

FA: My grandfather, actually Faris Alami, Faris al Hamed. I was named after him.

AR: That's a very great honor.

FA: I feel honored.

AR: So the family left; just grabbed everything and left?

FA: I'm not sure if they grabbed anything because he was displaced because of the war and my grandfather had a house in Gaza, so I think he just left everything in Jaffa and just walked. I know that they recovered some of the documents that they had, because we have family that stayed for awhile before they left. But this is only from my dad's side. There was my mom's side but that is my dad's side. I know that we lost all kinds of buildings because when we went and visited back in the '90s, '80s, sorry in the '80s, we drove through the streets and he said, "All these buildings used to be part of the ownership."

AR: How did your family get from Gaza to Kuwait?

FA: In the 1967 War and my dad moved to Egypt to study. He got his Bachelors from Egypt Mechanical and then he got a contract in Kuwait to work. My mom through her dad and through her uncle on her side got another contract to work.

AR: So she was also an engineer?

FA: No, she was a teacher. She taught, and she still teaches actually, she taught Arabic. Now she's the department head for Arabic and Islamic Studies. So she has 35 teachers that she works with or something, I don't know. So they did not know each other before, they just met in Kuwait.

AR: So the families didn't set this up?

FA: No, as far as I understood, they met there. And then they got us, their kids.

AR: So what are your memories of growing up in Kuwait?

FA: Kuwait is unique itself because I was never a Kuwaiti citizen. I was always a Palestinian.

AR: So your parents had refugee status, documents?

FA: Documents from Egypt. My mom has a refugee document also from the United Nations. My dad just never went there. Could be all kinds of challenges, pride, family name, you can call it. Probably also just never cared to register because it didn't mean anything. So you just register to register. I don't know if he wants to do that. But my mom got caught in the middle where she had to register so she did. And she does have an old piece of paper from the United Nations saying she's a refugee from 1948. But my dad is not counted as one refugee. But both of them had refugee documents from Egypt stating that they were Palestinian refugees, a travel document. Which I had and that's what my brothers had, and that's what we had.

AR: So tell me about growing up in Kuwait.

FA: So, what do you want to know? There's so much to tell. I can tell you that my parents encouraged us to go to school and to excel. As a matter of fact, without bragging, but I think you might want to know that every time I got a full grade, like A, he fed the whole school sweets. So my teachers really made sure I got As and that he got a call. So I did really well in school and I think I gained every first place or first student of the class and I did that for the whole time I went to school. I got music awards and we got science awards. Anything that they gave an opportunity or an award for, I participated. I did chess champions, science projects, poetry. Whatever they did I participated.

AR: And were you treated differently because you were Palestinian?

FA: Well, as a Palestinian you're limited of course to what you can or cannot do in Kuwait. As a student, for instance, once I finished high school I knew that I couldn't go to the university because I don't have a Kuwaiti citizenship and it's only for citizens. Since then I know that they have opened it for other people, not necessarily that school but other schools have opened in Kuwait. So I knew that my mark was 18 and then I have to find a place to go to school.

AR: And did your friends, were they all Palestinians or did you have Kuwaiti friends?

FA: I had a mixture. Mainly the school that I went to mainly had foreigners per se: Syrians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Kuwaitis, you know, things of that nature. They were from all over the place, Egyptians. So I had a mixture of friends that I would call. But a lot of them were Palestinians, sure, just because of the settings we were in.

AR: So then what happened?

FA: So 1990, fast forward…

AR: So what year were you born?

FA: I was born in ’72.

AR: So you’re 18 and you had to figure out…

FA: Where we’re going. So what had been happening was a lot of my friends and family and colleagues that I had known growing up had immigrated to Canada. So, like my best friend (whose grandfather and my grandfather were business partners), went to Canada. My uncle from my mom’s side went to Canada. So we thought we should immigrate to Canada. So there’s a big population that we know. So we started going through the process and August 2, 1990 we had an appointment to meet with the consulate in Kuwait, with the Canadian embassy. And we had an attorney appointment on the 16th like two weeks after we get to Canada to meet with an immigration attorney to see how we can immigrate to Canada. The idea was if I go to school there and the immigration started processing, in two to four years my other brother will be ready, but by that time we will be Canadian or Canadian citizens or close to it and then the whole family will immigrate together.

That was the idea. Until August 2nd Saddam Hussein took over Kuwait so we couldn’t go to the embassy and we couldn’t meet with the attorney.

AR: Tell me about when he took over.

FA: It brought flashbacks for me because of some of the stories I’ve heard or seen. I’ve been to Gaza several times and it was always occupied. So just seeing soldiers with guns and seeing tanks in the corners and hearing screams or shots. I don’t know if it maybe psychologically affected me, I’m not sure. But, all I remember is, I was arguing with my grandfather about I need to still go to the embassy because I have been accepted already to Concordia University and McGill and I need to go see which one I want to go for, just like my friend did. And he is like, “You can’t go because the troops are already in,” and I said, “OK, I’ll wait until 10 o’clock and if nothing happens, I’m going on the bus.” At 9 o’clock the tanks were driving through the streets. I know and I wasn’t going anywhere. Then the TV station didn’t come on. It was kind of scary because tanks were rolling on the regular streets. Of course, if you are familiar with tanks, they were destroying as they were rolling, with their things they were destroying the road.

AR: What did your family do while the tanks were out there?

FA: Well, the first thing we decided to do was to make sure we were all protected because you didn’t know what they were going to do. So I remember that we took all of our IDs and actually dug a hole in the base of the house and underneath it we just dug the hole and put it underneath, in case any of us lose control and we could come back and at least know where we could get our IDs. Because I think my grandfather said, that’s the first thing that you want to make sure that it’s protected, that you have an ID to do something.

AR: How many are we talking about here?

FA: My grandfather, his wife, my grandmother, my uncle, his wife, their kid, maybe five, my other uncle and his wife and their kids, five or six, my dad and my mom and my two brothers.

I'm just trying to remember, maybe 20 people.

AR: A lot of people.

FA: A lot of people knowing the secret that is underneath the house.

AR: So you prepared your identity information and then what did you do?

FA: Well what happened is a couple of days later after the Kuwaitis had now been taken over and everybody knew it and no TV. We got a knock on the door asking my dad to report back to work. They first announced it on the radio and TV and then I think he had someone visiting him, saying you better show up to work starting tomorrow.

I don't remember the details but I know he went back to work like a week later or something. And then at the same time my high school teacher called me up and said, "Can you run the grocery store?" Because the grocery stores were all owned by the Kuwaiti government, so when they collapsed everything shut down. Some of the stores were private, but most of them were owned by the government. So he called me up and said, "Can you come run the store?" I'm 18 years old but of course, (I hope I'm not bragging but) I was very clean. I always was very organized. I even organized all my awards by alphabetics, by numbers, by what they're for, so he remembered that. So he called me and said, "Can you run the grocery store? It's going to need a lot of organization skills and I think you could do it."

AR: So had your family had enough food, enough water?

FA: There were all kinds of issues. The supermarket, you can see people loitering and so they broke in and took everything out. Of course we couldn't do that, but we could see people doing it and we knew we were going to be in trouble. But just like any other family, we always had all kinds of stuff in the freezer, all kinds of stuff in the cabinets, so we were all right for a couple days. By then things started somewhat to get back to what you might want to call normal, but it's not really. But the stores started opening up. Shelves were empty but you can find certain things and start buying.

AR: So you went to run a grocery store.

FA: I ran a grocery store actually for three months and then I got in trouble. Two things happened. First, I was delivering food after the curfew to Kuwaiti citizens.

AR: So tell me about the curfew scene.

FA: Well, 7 pm, no more people were allowed to be driving or walking outside the houses until the next morning at 7, I think, or 6. I don't remember the exact time. So Kuwaiti citizens were afraid because they had checkpoints and basically they stopped the cars and asked for your ID, and if a Kuwaiti got stopped by an Iraqi at the time, you just didn't know what to expect. They could let you go, but they could also humiliate you or kill you or whatever, you just don't know. So part of the deal that I did is that I took food at home. I filled up my tank with food and then at night I just delivered it to certain people's homes, that I got a list from my teacher. I don't know

who they are, but I assume they are Kuwaiti citizens who were afraid to leave their homes. So as a matter of fact it's interesting, because after Kuwait got liberated someone stopped my dad and said, "Who owns this car?" And my dad goes, "It's my car," and he goes, "That's not true, who owns this car?" He goes, "That's not true. That car brought us food when Iraq was in war." But I used to drive it, not my dad, so he was looking for my face, but he didn't see it. So it's interesting, but so I got in trouble with that.

AR: Soldiers stopped you?

FA: Yeah, soldiers stopped me and you know basically they could shoot at you if you were driving. And they just said, "You can't do that," and I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't realize that I was doing something wrong." So I stopped that night and the next day they showed up at the store. They wanted to empty the whole shelves, they wanted to take everything down. And I tell them, "I'm sorry, I can't really give you all my merchandise because I don't have any more coming in. But I'll be happy to give you some for you and for your family if you need it."

AR: So these are Iraqi soldiers.

FA: Yeah. The police station was in the bottom stairways and the supermarket was above it. So just like 15-20 steps and you were back at the police station which was occupied by the soldiers. So when they asked me to take everything I just… In Kuwait you get a card that tells you how many people in your family and then you give them food based on that. It's kind of like subsidized in a way but everybody gets it that way. So I told them I would be willing to give them, not only for their numbers there, but also for the numbers of their family, but I couldn't just empty everything out to them because then I have nothing to come to the next day or to give to anyone else. They didn't like that.

AR: Where did you get the gumption to say that to them?

FA: I don't know. It just happened. You are in charge and I had people running to bring them food and it just felt like the right thing to do. And I wouldn't have no problem giving them food for them and their family, but it's just that I think I had a conflict thinking that if I give them everything then everyone else I know here could never eat. Because I have no more supplies and I was limited with what I had. So they didn't like that so they took me downstairs to the police station and of course you know that something bad is going to happen. And I remember it really clearly. I sat in one of the rooms in the back and he said, "If you open your mouth it will be the last word that you will say." And I could hear my parents up front arguing with the police.

AR: How did your parents hear about it?

FA: Everybody knew.

AR: Word spreads.

FA: Yeah, word spreads really fast and where we lived it was very small, one street actually. It's big, but the street that was the supermarket, at the end of the street is where we lived. So the

word spread out. Not that it's a small city, it's a big place but people know each other.

AR: What city was it?

FA: It's called F- [?] in Kuwait. It's very small. But you have to remember that now the government is not there, people knowing each other even more, knowing who stayed, who didn't stay. So it's become a really smaller community and I'm the Palestinian kid running the store, so it's not like it's a secret. So anyway, after awhile they let me go.

AR: Do you know what your parents said to the soldiers?

FA: I don't remember.

AR: What were you feeling when this was going on.

FA: I don't know. I try not to think about it too much. My mom actually, when she visited us in 2003, she said some more things that I tried to forget that I have done.

AR: Because it's so painful.

FA: It's very painful. But I don't remember really what it felt like. It's easy to go back and think now about it than it is to be living the moment. I think living through the moment at the time, I was thinking: "Can I get back in so I can finish my job for the day?" Probably that's what's going through my head. I have the line waiting outside. But I think, looking back, it's much more serious than that and probably I was thinking, "I hope that I can get out of here alive and they don't hurt my family." Because that is what is even more of a concern for me, that they might do something to my mom or dad. So I don't know, I haven't really thought about it.

AR: While this was going on did your grandfather have any memories of his Nakba experience? Did he relive anything or did it provoke old memories?

FA: Well, it provoked all kinds of stuff and that's why we lived tightly together, the way we ate, the way we hid things. It's all because of what he knew. Like he remembered, the first thing he did in 1948 was he burned all of his IDs. Because he heard that if you are caught as a Palestinian they will shoot you. If you say I am a Bedouin and I don't have an ID then you are going to be OK. So the first thing they did, they collected everything that has Palestine, or Palestine resemble, money, anything and just burned it. So he remembers that and he told me that only that time, because up 'til then they didn't really want to tell me anything about being Palestinian. It was this big, somewhat you know it but somewhat you don't, because his idea was just go to school and get a college degree and just get moving. Don't worry about what happened to me.

AR: It's a burden.

FA: So he just felt like he didn't want us to know and up until 2001, after begging, is when he wrote me one letter to explain what happened to him. Just one. One piece of paper, which I still have. So, he didn't want us to know. My parents were the same. They didn't want us to know.

They didn't tell us too much details. It's not until I realized what just had happened is when I started asking more questions. And they're like, "Why do you need to know that? Well, you can know." And I'm like, "No, not really, you haven't told me that." They'll say things, just a few things, but not really much in details.

AR: So this stimulated him to talk at the time.

FA: A little bit more maybe, but I think part of it is the same feeling that I'm feeling when I have to talk about this. It's very painful because a lot of things come to mind and a lot of things you might think that you have forgotten and are probably very painful for them to say. And I'm assuming that this was much more devastating, especially for my grandparents, than my mom and dad, because they were kind of like me. They had work, they had friends, they lived, they had certain memories that they couldn't just erase, so it's probably that. It's just the emotion going through it.

He told us that he lost one of his kids walking through the desert and then someone else walking behind him picked him up and he found him later. So just because you know, when you are running in the desert, you just don't think too much, so those kinds of things. I think it's too painful for him to sit there and just tell us. And we were just kids, maybe teenagers, not really knowing what it meant to be Palestinian, besides not being able to get a drivers license and besides not being able to go to school. All those things meant something to us but it didn't connect the dots. It's easier to get older and look back and try to connect the dots and it didn't make sense in the beginning.

AR: So they let you go and you go home.

FA: I was packed that night, two bags. My uncle who is Canadian, who immigrated to Canada before me, has taken my TOEFL degree (test of English as a foreign language, you take a test to be accepted to a university), and has taken some of my high school diploma and so on, when he left, because the Canadian embassy took all the Canadians out. All the embassies did that. So when he left, he took my paperwork and he thought Canada might not be interested in something, but maybe the U.S.

So he forwarded my paperwork to my cousin at the time who was living in Tucson, Arizona and thought that maybe he can't come to Canada, but maybe he can go to school at least and study in the US while this thing gets sorted out. So I have had an acceptance from the University of Arizona to go to school there in Tucson. It said at the time to be there in August or September, I don't remember, like a month after this thing. The last day you could ever come is October 30 or something like that. I'll have to go back and read it. But I remember the school was going to be over by the 31st. The first session of the school at the time.

They said I needed an English course before I could go to the university, saying, "We accept you but you have to take this course." So I took that, took my paper work. I remember leaving my youngest brother, Basil, with my grandparents, and my brother, my mom and dad and I got in the car and drove to Iraq.

AR: What was that like?

FA: It was scary because you are driving though check points, you are driving through, well

Saddam said it is one country so there was no border, but there was still checkpoints in Kuwait. So we just drove and we got to Iraq and at the time my uncle and his wife, my aunt and her husband with their kids, were living in Baghdad, because they used to work for an airline and that's where they were placed at the time. So we went to their house basically.

AR: Why did you leave your brother?

FA: He was too young. In 1990 he was six years old and we just didn't want him to have to be going through the road with us, not knowing what to expect. And I think part of it, now that I'm thinking about it; I think my parents were thinking, if we're all dead, at least one person in the family is alive. I think that's their mentality because of what they have gone through. But they would never probably tell me that. But I think that's really what was going though their head, that if we all vanished, at least one person… Because when they sent me, that's the message that they told me, that if we all vanish here, you're out there and just keep going.

AR: When you drive through checkpoints are you on major highways?

FA: Yeah, major highways.

AR: Is it scary?

FA: Well you can see the cars left and right on the road just being abandoned or the wheels are stolen or the doors are stolen or the seats are stolen and sitting on rocks. It's a war zone. It's an ugly scene. If you have been to a war you know what it feels like and what you see. I had kind of gotten used to it by then so we drove, all I remember is getting to my aunt and uncle's house.

AR: What did your parents take with them?

FA: The two bags and maybe some food. We used to go somewhat camping, day camping, just for the day and then come back and we had that refrigerator where you open up to store some stuff, and I think that's what we had in the back seat. And we just drove. I don't remember how many hours, but we got to Iraq and then to Baghdad, and went to my uncle's, my aunt and her husband's house and their kids, two or three of them. The next morning we went…

AR: Did they know you were coming?

FA: Oh yeah, yeah. They knew we were coming. They knew that I was coming to leave because we had asked them if they could help us get to Jordan because I have Palestinian refugee documents from Egypt, so Jordan doesn't acknowledge it as a passport. So therefore we just had to make sure that they would talk to someone that they know, to make sure that I could go at least through. So he already talked to the consulate or someone like him, because a lot of embassies closed but they had someone representing them. So what I remember is that we went the next day to the embassy.

They took my paperwork. I showed them the acceptance to the university; that I just need to go from Jordan to the United States and the only reason I have to go there because there is no US embassy in Iraq that I can go to apply for a visa. And he said sure, and they gave me a

visa. It's a transit visa. So it's not a visa to visit but a transit, which gave me a problem actually. So I said goodbyes and took some pictures and left.

AR: What did that feel like?

FA: You know, you are so young that you don't know and you don't really appreciate what it means. But it was the first time that I ever left my parents for a long trip. Not knowing when I am coming back but knowing that I will. And just seeing my mom's face, I will never forget. I'm sorry about this, I didn't realize it was going to be this emotional for me. [tearful]

AR: So your mom knew that she might see you again, that she might never see you again. She didn't know what was going to happen right?

FA: Yeah. Wow. I'm shocked.

AR: Take your time.

FA: Well I will tell you something that will make you laugh at least. So I got to the point of entering Jordan and then the soldier, or the checkpoint guy, I don't know if he was a soldier or not, I don't remember, said, "You can't go in." I said, "I have a visa, what do you mean I can't go in?" He goes, "You have a transit visa so do you have an airline ticket or anything like that? Or a visa for another country?" At the time I had already gotten into, I think Greece, who gave us a visa because we were going to go to Canada through Greece so we had already gotten a visa to Greece.

So I told him, "Yeah, I have actually a Greece visa, that's where I am going to go next." He goes, "But your acceptance is to the United States." I said, "I understand that, I need to go to the embassy so I can talk to them." He goes, "Well you don't have a visa to go or an airline ticket so I'm not going to let you in." I said, "Can you check, can you call anybody? I mean, I have an uncle in Jordan you can call, he'll sponsor me." He said, "I'll make some phone calls but you're not going in." I said, "OK," so he put me in jail. It's like a transit jail, so they're like cells everywhere. And then someone else came into jail a few minutes later and I think there were lots of us because there were tents set up between the two borders and I assume there were a lot of them just like me that just tried to go in, didn't go in.

While I was there the lady after me actually had a newborn. And I'll never forget it because she said, "He is my son." And he goes, "Well you don't have a birth certificate." And she goes, "Well he was born in Kuwait," and she's Jordanian. And he's like, "If you don't have a certificate, I can't let you take him in." So I just felt really angry and I think I said something to him, made him probably ticked to me. I think I might have said, "Just remember this could happen to anyone," or something like that. And I don't think he liked that coming from a teenage kid. But a couple hours later he released me and a couple others like me and we were just at the border wandering around. And a taxi cab said, "I'll take you if you can pay me once we get there," because I didn't have money. And while I'm in jail, a Jordanian guy, that I met there said, "If you want to leave your bags you can and when you come back, you can just pick them up from my house." I said, "That would be great."

So I left my two bags with him and I had no bags to take with me so it made it easier if I had to walk or if I had to catch a hike, hitchhike with someone or something. So he gave me his

number and I gave him my number and I left. And five other people were with me. We bonded while we were waiting. I don't remember them or what they look like but I just remember five of us because we sat in the car, crunched. Because we were all going to split how much it was going to be.

At the time he had already called my uncle in Jordan to say that I already have your cousin here in Jordan but I am going to send him back. So he called my mom and told her, "He's in custody but they are going to send him back but we don't know when." I think it was the middle of the night when I arrived and I remember my mom being so happy. I got back and knocked on the door and took the money and paid the guy and let him go. I just stayed in and then the next day my uncle said, "Maybe we should go back and tell them you're approved to go in, to visit, not just to via…"

AR: Not just transit. So you're back in…

FA: Baghdad. In Baghdad, the next day I think, or maybe the day after, I don't remember, we went to the embassy and the gentleman was there to speak to the phone, call someone in Jordan. And he said, "Yes, it's right, that you have been approved." So the visa was stamped and he took his handwriting and wrote underneath it, this is approved by such and such person for him to go in. So my parents were freaking out about the border and said, "We're going to fly you in this time. We're not going to let you go through that because it might be the same guy."

So I flew in the next time from Baghdad to Jordan. When I got there, I got pulled over, pulled in by the immigration, customs, or somebody, and they questioned me for about two hours.

AR: And what did they ask you?

FA: I remember they asked, "Why are you in Jordan? How long do you plan to stay? Who do you know in Jordan that we can call?" That's all I can remember, just basic questions. They probably were harassing me somewhat. I'm used to it. It was like habit. So a couple hours, they let me go and they wrote on the pass, the refugee document which I still have a copy of: "Must report to the nearest police station within 30 days, within three days." So they gave me three days to stay in Jordan before I could leave again. I called my uncle who was in, Dr. Bashir, in Jordan. And I said, "I'm in town what should I do?" And he said, "You have to go to this hotel because it's the closest one to the United States embassy. You could walk there and you need to be there at like 5 am." So I said, "OK, makes sense."

So I checked into the hotel and I walked to make sure that I knew where the embassy was. It was like 3 o'clock in the afternoon or something so there were some people wandering and I asked, "What's a good time to come?" and so on. I knew my way and then I went back to the hotel and I think I went and had dinner with my uncle and his family. He said, "Once you get your visa just come back and I'll get you a ticket." I said, "Great!" so just hang out and then I just went back and slept at the hotel and woke up the next day and I think it was 4 am when I went in. I'm an early person so I don't think it's good or bad but it was. Then I was number five actually. I'll never forget I was number five.

At 9 o'clock the embassy opens up the doors and then the first couple of people got rejected and I remember the first guy specifically ahead of me, he is coming to do a masters degree or something and she told him, "You don't have sufficient something," and I thought,

here comes a Palestinian, no state, from Kuwait, no country that's called Kuwait, with certificates that show that I have money in Kuwaiti dinars which means nothing to them. So I gave her the financial aid documentation, high school transcripts. I gave her the acceptance to the University of Arizona. And she said, "Have a seat," and I thought, that's what happened to the other guys but they got denied so I'll wait. And like 15 minutes later she came and I wish I remembered her name or who she is because she said, "You have six months to go in. So she just gave me a visa. It still gives me goose bumps. She gave me a visa, saying, "Based on…" I remember her clearly saying, "Based on your science and high school degree, grades I am going to give you a visa." So something I did right, and that's study, so I better study more. So she gave me the visa and I went to my uncle within I think the same hour and he said, "Go to this airline ticket place right there across the street and they will have a ticket for you." And the ticket was the next morning, so I was there literally actually two days in Jordan.

I flew from Jordan to New York City and I arrived October 31st, 1990. I did not know such a thing called Halloween night but I learned really quickly. I actually thought everyone dressed like that all the time because when you got to the airport you didn't see much of it, you saw some costumes. But when I got to the hotel they were having a party and you know, they like invited everybody and at the time I think they used to allow people behind the counter to wear costumes, so they were all dressed like an angel, a devil, something else and I'm freaking out of course thinking, "Wow, this is really weird. And if I have to fit in, I probably have to look like this." I didn't know, I just had no idea, so I remember actually putting the two bags against the door because the guy actually who took my bags did have them and I called him up before I left from Jordan which is a blessing too.

AR: Do you remember the plane flight?

FA: The plane flight?

AR: From Jordan to New York?

FA: I was petrified, lots of reasons now that I already had seen what could happen. And going to a place that I've heard, the only thing I remember is the magic car. I don't know if you remember the show where the car talks. What is it called? But we used to call it the magic car, which basically the car talks to you and you turn right, your doors open, Knight Rider. I think that's the name of it. So that's all I remember. Or Mr. T. Those were the types of shows that I was seeing. So I had this vague wrong impression of what it's all like. Then you hear about the shootings and the guns. And I come from a country that don't have guns. And in Gaza we definitely didn't have any guns.

You see them around and I definitely don't like them. So it was just all these thoughts coming to my head thinking, OK, this probably a one-way ticket and I'm going to be dead before I ever can make it back. I was really scared but I knew that New York was just a stop before I go to Tucson, because my cousin's there. And then New York was so different from Tucson. I don't know if you've been to Tucson but…

AR: New York is overwhelming coming from Boston. I can imagine what it would feel like.

FA: Coming from Kuwait. So it was very scary because in Jordan my uncle has been to the US

and he said two things you should worry about: "Don't give your ID to anyone. Make sure that you hold on to it as well as your luggage because they are going to try to steal it, buy it, sell it, while you are standing. And make sure that you keep your ID because if you lose it, no one is going to talk to you."

It was probably great advice because there are all kinds of people moving around and when I got there I had specific instructions that I still have that said, go to this counter and ask this and go to the hotel. And the next day, go to the hotel and ask them for this and go back to your flight. So I had very specific instructions and once I got to the lady I remember she said, "No problem, we'll get the shuttle to take you." He gave me like 100 dollars in cash. So I could use this for transportation.

So…I lost my thought. But anyway, I remember putting my luggage against the door and sleeping that night. I don't know if I slept or not, but sleeping in the hotel and then waking up. Because I was so afraid that those individuals with the weird costumes would just knock on my door because I just didn't trust them. Then I flew the next day to Tucson. I think two days already…The next morning.

AR: You must have been exhausted.

FA: I think I was just thinking about my parents and my brother and what they're doing and where they are at and I couldn't call them to tell them that I'm OK, or anything. It was just like I got completely disconnected. And then I had my cousin's number so I called him in Tucson and I said I'm here in New York. And he said, "Just once you get to Tucson step outside and I'll be out there to pick you up." And I thought, he must be crazy. Because I just saw the airport and what it means to step outside thinking it's like a New York City. And when I stepped outside in Tucson, I was literally in the street so I was the only person standing out with two bags, so I was pretty easy to spot. Of course he knows who I am besides that, but just the thought.

AR: What was that like to see this person?

FA: It was joyful because you know he's my cousin and he's actually my mom's cousin but we were, you know, I'm sure you know all Palestinians are cousins, so it's first, second, and third and step cousins, all cousins. And we just hang out together, so it was really a relief. It felt like a release, a relief because I just saw someone that I know, and it's been for the whole trip, it had been seeing all new faces and all new things and everything's new. So it was comforting, but it was painful at the same time, because now I know that I am really far. Really far.

So I think I called my parents in Iraq because they were still there waiting, and told them that I am here with my cousin. It was really emotional because I think my mom knew that this could be a long journey. I'm not sure, but she was just freaking out, and my dad too. I remember for the first time ever, I saw him crying. Well, I didn't see him, but I can hear his voice. So that was the last time I ever talked to them from 1990 to 1991 or later in '91.

It was tough because now I have to call uncles and family members that I've known, heard of, but really the relationship with my parents, not with me. And some of them I've known because they've liked what I've done through school, that they rewarded me. It was calling them, asking for money basically. Saying, "I'm going to school can you help support me in that?" One of them I already knew that he was going to support, because he already came to Kuwait and said, "If you are ever in college, you just have to call me and as long as you keep

these grades up, I'll make sure that you are taken care of."

So I called him, Uncle Adnan and he said, "You are in the school?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "OK, give me an account and I will wire you the money." So I gave him my cousin's account number and he wired money the next day or so. And then I opened a checking account. I remember that was a really weird feeling, because you don't have checking accounts and checks, you just have cash in Kuwait. My dad might have an account and I had a savings account. I remember that because he took us to the bank to put money in, but I never wrote a check. So my cousin taught me how to write checks and how to do all that stuff. So that was it. That's how I got here in 1990. I don't know if that answers your question.

AR: So then you went to college.

FA: I went to college for about three months, 'til December, and then I learned that I can go to a community college and save a little bit of money, so I started applying for that, but in the meantime, I think I went to a special school for testing the English, the TOEFL. So I registered for that for a couple of months. At the time, the war in the US was building up, the war, so when January hits I actually, I remember I couldn't talk to my parents. No one could even communicate back to them or whatever.

AR: So they went back to Kuwait

.

FA: They went back to Kuwait. Yeah. You can call but they would always give you like a busy signal. It was really weird. I don't remember what happened, but all I remember, my funding source got cut off for a couple months and then it came back on in January. The first payment that he gave me went mainly to the school. I didn't calculate for me any money. I didn't know. I just said, this is what it says you have to pay so I asked him for that. And he did that but I needed some money to live, so my cousin at the time was giving me some money, but then he left to go back to Canada because he graduated. I didn't know he was going to be leaving. But I went for a couple of months to learn how to pass the test and I then enrolled at Pima Community College and I thought, OK, I could maybe finish the first two years there and then transfer back to U of Arizona. And then I think in June of that year is when Kuwait by then got liberated. My dad had talked to my uncle that he is going to take care of everything because they are giving money back to the people that lost money before we learned that, they weren't going to do that to everybody, but certain people. I think for three or six months I lost funding and stayed in the mosque for a couple of months.

AR: Stayed?

FA: Stayed in the mosque and floated in the mosque for I think it was two months and then I went from friend to friend's house for about two or four more months because I didn't have any money to pay rent. I might have had maybe 500 dollars the whole time. So I just….

AR: And the mosque had a place for you to sleep?

FA: Well, they had a place, I remember, because they had a place for when they had a visiting Imam or someone from out of town lecturing. They had one room. It really is not set up for

someone to be living in it but they allowed me to stay because they knew I just had nowhere else to go. And then one of the guys that I've known he said, "Why don't you come stay with me 'til this gets settled?" and then I did for about two months and then his roommate freaked out and said, "If this guy doesn't pay rent he needs to be out." And I think he fought for me but I overheard the other guy, one time I was sitting having dinner with them and he said, "You know people have guns here," and he just had to say that to me and I just knew that I had better leave. So I left and they were arguing that night when I was sleeping because I could hear them. "Why would you do that to a kid?" These people were doing I think their PhD or Masters I don't remember, so one was from Tunis and one from Algeria. I remember the Tunisian guy was the one who hosted me and the Algerian guy did not like me. So I left and I think I went back to the mosque for a couple of months. I think it was a total of six months, so with two bags.

AR: You're a real wanderer.

FA: And then funding started coming and then I went back to school. I think this was in March and I went back to school in September and I went to Pima Community College for about two years or so, before, no, one year, 1991. I started in September, I don't remember honestly. A year later, so 1990-1991. Either a year or two years later, I don't remember anymore. When I took almost all the courses that I felt needs to be taken there before I could transfer…

AR: How did you get from there to here?

FA: From Tucson I went to Phoenix, Scottsdale area, Arizona for a couple of years. At the time, the business I was working in moved me to Phoenix, so I moved to Phoenix. All this time of course, because I never finished my degree, which by the way in 1991, after I learned that my dad has lost his status in Kuwait because Kuwait got liberated, basically they said anyone that's not Kuwaiti is being ordered deported. I think they specifically deported Palestinians, like my uncles, my cousins, my grandparents. They gave him a piece of paper that said, you are ordered to leave Kuwait.

AR: And where did they go?

FA: He didn't go anywhere. If you stayed, you paid penalties because you are breaking the law. My uncle got deported physically, ended up in Iraq. My grandfather got… In Kuwait up 'til 1990 there were probably 220,000 Palestinians. Kuwait today has probably 18,000, to give you an idea. So a lot of them got deported or left on their own terms knowing that other people were being deported. The community was huge and the community now is not even remotely close of 10 percent, what it used to be. So like my grandfather and my father and my grandmother and my father and his wife, my mom, they all started planning for this. So they started selling things and started getting rid of stuff or shipping stuff, some of it to Gaza. But the challenge was that they couldn't go to Gaza because they had to get a visa from Israel to go to Gaza because they're not Palestinians. So I remember that very clearly.
So my uncle ended up, one of my uncles ended up in Jordan and in Iraq. One other person, they just went and got visas to go visit Gaza and they just stayed. They have home, they own homes in Gaza but they couldn't go. They don't have papers. They were not counted in the 1967 War. So they don't have what's called "[Arabic word]" in Arabic. I don't know what it is in another

language.

AR: It's an identity card.

FA: OK- it's an identity card saying you were here in 1967 but they weren't. So they just went and stayed illegally in their homes. My mom and dad were planning to do the same, so they actually started rebuilding their house and finishing it up in Gaza. And they shipped their stuff because they were counting on it. That's when I applied for political asylum in the United States because I thought I can't go back to Kuwait, which I was hoping to do, and there's no Palestine so I need to make sure that I don't break the law. So I applied for political asylum in 1991 and was denied because the judge said I could go back to Kuwait. I tried to appeal it and this is a long story. It's a whole 'nother story. But the denying of the political asylum led to two years later in 1993, to order of deportation which was standing from 1993, although I feel I never broke the law because I came as a student, took classes, and applied for political asylum when I felt it was the need to, but continued to take classes because it was the justice to stay as a student status. The gentlemen who ordered me deported felt that because I stopped school for one semester, which is true I did, that I should be ordered deported, which is, by law you are actually allowed to stop for two semesters and stay in the country as along as you are planning to enroll again, but he didn't care, so I got an order of deportation in 1993.

AR: To be deported…

FA: To Kuwait.

AR: They didn't want you.

FA: They didn't want me. So I said, I would love to go to Kuwait, you know it's been two to three years since I've seen my parents. I was really homesick. I started learning about being here but I was still a young kid. I didn't have much friends, so I thought, that would be fantastic. And they didn't give me a visa to go to Kuwait. And they tried I think for about two years before they gave up and converted my order of deportation to an order of supervision, which basically meant that every, the officer that I originally first met with, every six months I had to come to report to say I'm here.

I just had to show up and they just signed a piece of paper saying you reported and then you just left. I'm assuming that they were working, trying to figure out Kuwait. Then I think in '97 or '99, I remember they basically said, come every quarter, they kept changing it. Depending on what was the political thing to do. It was monthly, sometimes, it was quarterly, some other times it was call-in, sometimes you don't have to show up. Some other times you have to be in person.

So I complied with all of that because my goal was not to break any laws. So in 2000… Throughout all these years, occasionally I got letters threatening me, saying that, show up to immigration tomorrow or next week with so much luggage and you ready to go to Kuwait. They were all fake alarms because Kuwait always said no. In 2006 I got a letter stating the same. But then of course, my wife and my kid and you know I just felt… You know, before when they came I was really excited because I was like, great I get to leave. But when that letter came I just wasn't excited.

AR: So when did you get married?

FA: 2003. So when that letter came in 2006, I freaked out, because it came on Friday night. It said I had to be at immigration on Monday morning at 8 o'clock with 40 pounds of luggage, ready to leave to Kuwait. I showed up, everyone thinks I was nuts, but I didn't go in personally. I had the attorney, my wife, and everybody else go in and I stayed at the McDonalds actually across the street to see what they really were going to do. Because if they were going to do something I was like, maybe I can go to Canada. But I'm not going to Kuwait now. Of course they said no, I just needed to show up in person and report and Kuwait had said no again.

AR: So what is this repeated threats to send you to someplace do to you? Do you ever feel grounded?

FA: It's not a feeling, it's reality to be ungrounded. I could never leave the United States. My refugee documents expired in '95. I know that some of my friends have tried to renew it and the Egyptian embassy basically said, "You're Palestinians, good luck with your Authority." You can go get a passport, and then they got to the Authority and they said you have a laissez passez and they say, "No we can't give you one because we have to approve it by the Israeli government."

I actually applied for one and they denied me a Palestinian passport, the same reason. According to the United Nations by the laws of the Israeli government, I'm not eligible to be in Gaza or the West Bank. It's not that they don't want me, it's just that they have to comply with the law, international law, that I have to be counted for by United Nations, which I'm not. I never filed for being Palestinian refugee. I just, I am. So it's not, it feels like it is a threat because from 2003 I remember my officer almost every quarter, that I went and reported, he was taking photos of me, he was taking finger prints of me. And three or four times and the first time he said, "I'm going to try to get you a passport from Kuwait." And he said, "I'm trying to get you a passport from Israel, I'm trying to get you a passport from Palestine. I'm trying to get you a passport from somewhere but someone's got to take you." And that was his mentality.

AR: He wants to get rid of you.

FA: Yeah, his job is to deport me. I understand, but I am lucky that he didn't. And they move around so much they got another officer three months later.

AR: So where does this case stand now, is it ongoing?

FA: It was up 'til two weeks ago. I don't think I told Barbara, but two weeks ago the judge… we had a court… and this is a long story too, but the court was supposed to be last year and then moved to January and now into March. We went to court, basically, and the judge dismissed the case. So, now the file is closed from order of deportation. Now I just have to go through the legal procedures adjusting status to the immigration office.

AR: Can you become a US citizen?

FA: Now I'm on the path to do that but up until two weeks ago, no. The picture that the immigration officer, the deportation officer, painted for me was his goal is to deport me and then years later I could come back and apply for adjustment of status. There are some waivers that you can apply for while you're gone. But you can imagine if I applied for while I'm here and I didn't get them, I couldn't imagine if I'm out there trying to get them. That was the ideal situation, ten years be gone somewhere and then come back. But now the threat is gone. It was just actually March 10th or 11th.

AR: So what did you do when you heard the news?

FA: I think I was still in a loss. Because I told my wife, you know, for 18 years I have reported, for 18 years I had to show up, for 18 years, my adulthood all I've ever known is that I have to report to someone. I have to show my ID to somebody. I have to… I think I have mixed feelings right now. I'm not sure what to feel. I have no idea what it's going to be like, because even before that, living in Kuwait, I knew I was Palestinian so it's not like I had a status. So I don't know yet, I really don't. When he told me, he called me like two days later to tell me that immigration had called him, to the attorney, and said that he no longer has to report. I said, "Well what do you mean? I don't have to go physically in or I have to call in? Because I have to call in every month but every three months I have to show up." He said, "Nothing, you just don't have to do anything."

AR: So you're used to being sort of a criminal, treated like a criminal.

FA: Yeah, at least feeling like that, like I did something wrong. So I don't know, I really don't know. I think it's going to be exciting. It's going to be amazing. I just don't know what it feels like yet because I am still waiting for them to really say that. He sent over the form but he's waiting on a paper to come to say you don't have to do it… so until I have the paper I'm calling in because I've had that before, they said you don't have to do anything and then they say no you're supposed to. You told me not to do it so I didn't do it.

I like remember one time they said you have to report every six months. So I didn't show up every three months, I showed up every six months and he was not happy. "It says right here, you told me." He goes, "Well, he didn't give you a piece of paper saying that." I said, "No, but I just wrote notes," and he goes, "Well, you have to be here." And I said, "OK, fine." I always comply so I don't know how it feels not to comply. But, I always comply, so it's something I don't know if I should have been complying to, so I don't know, I have mixed feelings about it. I don't know, it definitely feels weird to know that no one's going to show up at my door to pick me up. Because I've always had that in my head and you hear about it occasionally and it's always a reminder that it can happen to you. Those letters coming in the mail saying show up with 40 pounds of luggage. I think I have three of them that I saved. That piece of paper in the back of it that says, "Subject reported," you know that I still have since 1997, I think, so 11 years. And if you lost that, I've seen what happens to people who lose it, so just holding on to it. So I don't know. I don't know if I can say right now. Maybe a year from now.

AR: And have your parents come and visited?

FA: Once, in 2003 when we got married. After we got married, they came and stayed with us for

two months.

AR: What was that like?

FA: I wish I could repeat it because I was so busy. We had just moved from Arizona to Michigan and gotten married, living in a very tiny home. We used to have a nice place in Arizona, but in Michigan when we moved here, I had a 700 square feet house, one bedroom and newly wedded. So actually, my in-laws, which I am blessed to have them, took them into their home because they have a bigger house, and room for guests, and they stayed there for almost six weeks out of the eight weeks, and I moved things around in our new place that we just moved to, to accommodate them. And then I was busy because I had a job that was demanding, very demanding. Certain days I had to be there from eight in the morning 'til ten at night. So you know, I stopped by every morning before I went to work and saw them and I stopped by every night before I went home and saw them. And of course, hang out with them every minute that I didn't have to go to work, with my wife and my in-laws and other friends. They have some friends here actually that used to live in Kuwait with them. So that's one of the reasons I wanted to move to Michigan. They're Iraqi Culdians and they used to be our neighbors in Kuwait. I remember we were upstairs and they were downstairs and we were to the left and they were to the right.

AR: There are identity questions, a lot of them, so if someone said, "What's your identity?" what would you say?

FA: If you talk to me in Arabic or any other thing…you will know that I am obviously Palestinian.

AR: What does that mean, "obviously Palestinian?"

FA: Just the way I talk, my language, the words that I use. How I talk. How I handle myself. The dialect that I use is definitely distinguished, the way I eat, the food. How I treat other people, how I think of the world, you will know that I have Palestinian identity in me. If you work with me, my wife goes, you would think I am from here, some work ethics is from being Palestinian, like which I am trying to still change, which I am challenged with, such as giving too much. Not saying no to certain things. My wife thinks that's from my dad and my mom.

AR: Your wife is from?

FA: She's from here, she was born in Birmingham, Michigan, so we have a blessing thing. When we actually got married, we had a minister and an imam marry us. So I am really blessed to have her and be part of my life and me being part of her life, and our kids now.

So my wife tells people, I buy into her bind, "He's Palestinian from Scottsdale," and that seems to really present who I am. I am definitely Palestinian; definitely influenced by different cultures I lived in and most likely, Scottsdale, just because I lived there the longest.

AR: Your brothers, where did they end up?

FA: My two brothers are in Kuwait still. I think what happened after a year or so, Kuwait just overstayed, Kuwait made them pay a penalty, and just stayed. And you have to have a sponsor, so my brother had a job so they sponsored him, and my other brother was so young, he was under my parents' sponsorship and as long as they were working, he had a place.

AR: So, then now your father is not working, he is in Kuwait, and he can be deported at any time?

FA: No, that was all over. Obviously they don't want anymore of us there, they still don't give me a visa, actually in 2006, after that letter came. Senator Carl Levin investigated. We asked for his help and he sent a letter to see why this is happening and he got a letter from immigration saying, actually, Kuwait just said no and will continue to say no. And the reason why is that he was a refugee in Kuwait, so why should we take another refugee back in Kuwait when he is in the US? So the Kuwaiti government feels that this is the place where refugees should go to, not Kuwait, but they're there. I would love to go visit them.

AR: Haven't seen your brothers?

FA: My one brother came, actually, here when I was in Arizona, for two years he went to college. I tried to take care of him for two years. I wanted to be around family, so I actually begged him to come here. And he did, he went to two years community college and then he went back to Kuwait, because the last thing I wanted him to do is face what I'm facing. So when he finished I said, "What do you want to do?" He said, "I want to go back and get my bachelor." So he went back and got his bachelors and now he is working on his MBA. He works fulltime as well. So I got to see him, but my other brother I haven't seen since 1990. He has a wife and three kids. My wife has seen him because my wife has been to Kuwait twice with the two kids. I am very blessed to have someone like her, that's willing to take an eighteen hour flight with two kids alone and to go be with my family. So she's done that twice, once with the first born and once with the two. The first time she took her mom with her and stayed with her two weeks. It's very brave move but I appreciate it and I know they do too.

AR: Where is home?

FA: I don't know, I don't know where's home. I definitely feel connected to my grandparents in Gaza, my uncles and aunts and cousins, two of them came on scholarships from Clinton, one of them studied for six months, one of them finished her MBA here, both of them from Gaza and they always have told me, "You are more Palestinian than we know even Palestinians in Gaza." So I have never lost contact, I talk to my grandparents in Gaza I would say on average once every two weeks.

AR: Since the war?

FA: Oh yeah, I have heard from them every day since the war, the days I could call or they could call. So I feel very well connected to them. I wouldn't think that I am not from there, because I feel that connection, I've been there, I know the images, I see the images, I feel the images, and I think about the images all day. So somewhat that's a piece of me.

Would I ever want to live there, I'm not sure. Would I ever want to be part of it? Absolutely.

AR: Do you speak Arabic to your child?

FA: My two kids, actually my three-and-a-half year old son and one-and-a-half year old son writes his name in Arabic and recognizes all the letters and all the numbers and can read certain words and of course speaks fluently to me in Arabic. He switches back and forth, like he knows, I was telling him a few things. He thinks I'm dumb so he translates for me. So say something in English, he goes, "Babba this means that," and I'm like, "Thank you," which is fine. I'm going to take it as much as I can. It became tougher as he started going to school and I am the only person in the house that is doing that. My wife supports that, so encourages it. She asks him, "What does that mean in Arabic?" If she asks him something she says, "Why don't you tell Dad what is that mean?" So she really is very supportive, that really has helped his development, but he can read words in Arabic, can write his name in Arabic, can definitely speak Arabic and of course everything with English is the same. Here's the same thing with the other one. He already says Arabic words, a few of them, and he definitely understands Arabic because I talk to him only in Arabic and my wife supports that and I know it is a pain.

AR: Does your wife speak Arabic?

FA: Yeah, she knows a lot of words. She actually can speak a little bit, she enrolled in some classes, somebody taught her and she learn on her own and she goes, "Nawa's teaching her now." So it's great, I don't think their identity will be ever lost.

But as far as me, I also feel, living in Kuwait so long, there's a piece of me that hates the fact that I was there. Because of all that happened, but there is another piece thinks I can, my family's there. But of course I have been here for 18 years, so this is all I know. My dad always reminds me that, "You spent your best time of your life in the US, so whether you like it or not, you've given the US the best of your life. I don't know what else will come after that, but you've given it there and you've learned it from there."

AR: Half way, there 18 yrs, here 18 yrs…

FA: Yeah, in October it will be 19 years, definitely 18 years alert: your first five years you're, you don't know anything. Even 18 you don't know anything but you think you know. So far I always tell my family, my mom and my dad, when you are a teenager, I thought I knew everything. When I hit 20's, I knew I knew everything. Once I hit 30's I realize I really don't know anything of anything. If I know anything, I really don't know it.

AR: It only gets worse.

FA: I'm assuming it does, just because of the trend. Wow, I have so much to learn, so much to give, and so much to learn, that's all I know.

I don't know if that answers your question about identity but I think definitely Palestinian, definitely born in Kuwait, and definitely from here, I am all about citizenship for the world.

Maurice: [cameraman] One question, Gaza during the incursion, what happened to your grandparents?

FA: Very disappointing, very disturbing because my grandmother actually talks to me a lot lately about her childhood and about how Jewish neighborhoods used to move in, playing soccer, sharing food, she is actually still disappointed about what is called disengagement, when the Jewish people left Gaza. Because she felt they should just stay and become Palestinian citizens and they should cut off their relationship with Israel. That's how she felt. So she feels strongly about Palestinian identity as Christians, Muslims, and Jews living together, and that's how she envisions it. So she felt really disturbed when they uprooted them, because I'm assuming she felt the same pain she felt when she got uprooted. So it's very disturbing to her what is happening, because to her it's bloodshed, definitely on the Palestinian side, a lot more than the Israeli side, no doubt about it, but also it's bloodshed, so she didn't like that.

Maurice: What is life on daily basis, do they rely on UN?

FA: Not yet, they have a store up front that they own, they run a grocery store. We also have some farm land that is not destroyed yet, three dunams that they can bring some food from, not much. I know that she had problems getting medicine, a lot of problems with medicine, and problems with power, even good days they might get 12 hours. Water was miserable too, so I remember talking to my grandmother from my mom's side. She said they were cooking and I said, "You can't be possibly cooking, can you tell me how you are cooking?" She goes, "Well, we have created a little fire place outside, so a couple of rocks, a couple of pieces of wood, and you burn and you cook." So both of them I think feel they have been put backward, I don't know, a thousand years, because they live in this nice house, but no power. You have to cook outside, no running water. My grandma from my mom's side actually has a 248 phone number, we have linege, so actually I can call like I am calling someone in Michigan. But when they don't have power, there is no internet, so there's no phone. So that's a problem for an average person, for anybody.