

Transcription by: Emily Gengenbach

Interviewee: Ahmed Mastto

Location: Yazidi Community Center

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Ahmed Mastto [AM]: Uh, first thing, uh, my name is Ahmed Mastto. Uh, I came to Nebraska. In June, 2016. So it's three years on feel months. I basically, I came over here just because the Yazidi community are here. So like I have a couple of friends, a couple of cousin over here, so just, I want to be close to them. And they did help me for the first couple of weeks, uh, because like, you know, it's, everything is different. From there. So I just want to be close to them basically.

1:04

AM: Yeah, I saw a genocide and everything was bad. I was in camp like more than a year, almost two years in camp in Northern Iraq. And, uh, really the life was very bad. Just the whole family live in one tent and the tent is just. Few feets longer and width.

AM: Yeah, me and my family in one tent, we were six people, four kids, me and my wife. We used to live in one small tent and it was really bad. But before that I was a translator, for the U.S. army. So that's why I still have a chance to get here. Uh, so I applied over there in, in Northern Iraq. I applied there and I got my VI visa.

2:03

AM: Uh, I used to be a English teacher in Iraq. Uh, so for like seven years, I used to be a English teacher because I graduated from college of arts, English department specifically. So

whoever, uh, graduate from that specific department, he can be she or he, or she can be a teacher. Uh, because, uh, in Iraq is English as second language. So I was one of the teacher, English as a second language in high school.

AM: Yes. Uh, we started in fifth grade, so like my age was, um, 11 years old. We started very simple, like basic like alphabet or numbers or small grammar. And then it's developed with us. So basically it's a 40 minutes every day, English as a second language in middle school, high school. And then after that, I went to college of arts, English department

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AM: because I loved English, is why I chose the English.

AM: Uh, Romeo and Juliet.

Interviewer: Cool. So you like Shakespeare?

AM: Shakespeare? Yeah.

AM: Yeah in August, 2004. Okay. And I started a couple of years and I worked like two years on a few months. And then I went back to my job as a teacher.

AM: The, the kids, they, they like it. U.S. army in Iraq. And the, they were very good because whenever they came to our area specialists in Sinjar, it was a kind of safe area for us army. They give candy to to kids and

4:00

AM: the kids loved them.

AM: No, absolutely. No. I have not. No idea about Lincoln at all or Nebraska, even. I didn't know it is in South or North or in the middle of a few days. But just because I have a friend that needs it, the community, that's why I choose it to come over here directly even. I didn't know anything about it.

AM: Yeah Yeah I think, I think they are really doing great job on the. Mo, uh, they study a LLE or English as second language something. So they teach them, uh, that like, uh, to improve their English. So it's, I see, it's very good. In general Lincoln public school, they are good.

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AM: Yeah. Uh, almost same, but just the, everything in English over there. It was everything in Arabic and like mathematic some, some subjects in Arabic, but over there almost same, but in. In English, like different language. So that's why I kind of confusing for the students.

AM: Uh, I was working in Molex, so after a few months I got here. And, uh, I went to Molex. I was working over there for part time.

Interviewer: What is Molex?

AM: It is like a small company in like by airport. Very close to airport.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, what did they do? What kind of work is that?

AM: Kind of pro production. It's like a part of cars, trucks. Smaller stuff, the fracture and that.

Interviewer: So you had some experience in manufacturing, are you helping?

AM: Not really. Just the, like the orientation.

6:00

AM: They, they told me how to do this stuff. It was kind of simple, basic stuff. And then I move it to YAZADA. You know, I'm working as

Interviewer: Full time?

AM: part time for now.

AM: Uh, over here, we, we basically, we help people, uh, who like, they cannot speak English, read, write in English. I basically, Yazidi community who cannot speak English? So we help them like apply for a job, uh, fill out applications, uh, uh, pay bills. A lot of the small stuff. Copy fax to the judges. Uh, if they didn't internet with something, so we help them with this stuff. Well, when the people came over here, I basically that they have a lot problems, so they didn't know the rules. They do not know the rules and the application, a lot of stuff. So we help them with this, all

7:00

AM: of the stuff. Yeah. It's like, uh, they need to do some application for job or medical application, so we just help them.

AM: It's very good. It's very simple. Like to get your driving license, it's very easy to move. It's very easy. There is no, a lot like a lot of bridges or crowds or rush hour, so we don't have it. It's very good. It's kind of a little bit closer to our area to Sinjar. We used to live. And, uh, that's why we, we, we didn't see a lot of stuff after we lived for a couple of months over here. So like, everything is simple, but the first couple of weeks, or even a couple of months, sometimes it's a little bit hard. But after that is, it's very easy that the city is very easy. The movement that people are good. We have no problem with people.

8:02

AM: Uh, like Lutheran and Catholic. When we came over here for the three months. they kind of client, we become their client so that the helper has to go to appointments. They help us to go around, went to, to get enrolled in school, or if we have kids less than five years with daycare and then like some other stuff. So the first three months that they, it was very good. They helping us with application takes take as like are for people because there was a class English as a second language over there. So when people that don't know, they help them to go over there, show them the way. And you enrolled them over there and some other smaller stuff.

Even sometimes like culture, if they needed to, they go to some churches to bring them to their home. So they have plus special for first three months.

9:05

AM: Uh, you know, in August the third, 2014, they came to Sinjar. So at that moment we were few families. Like, I'm talking about my relative, my cousin, my aunts, my uncles and, and we, we went to Northern Iraq directly the first day. We didn't take anything just like our clothes is on some other bit of water. That's it. So right though, because we don't have a time because, well, when they reach whoever they just killed them or kidnapped them. So we just here and I have

caught up that time. Good. My family also gets out. We just run to Northern Iraq. And my uncle and his family, they went to mountain and they stayed in mountain, like 10 days over there with no food. No. And my aunt and her family, they were living in South Sinjar And so when they try to come to mountain before they come to mountain,

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AM: got, damn like ISIS captured them. And, uh, they kidnapped her. She has a three sister, sorry, three daughters. ISIS took them away when captivity on the stage, like they still with, um, with ISIS more than a year, and then her husband and the son, because he was all, uh, more than 18 years old. So they killed both of them. Yeah, my aunt, my aunt's husband and her son, my cousin, so, and the other three that they, they captured them and to them, to ISIS captivity area. On the, like they do all bad stuff. They sell them, rape them, and then, uh, fortunately like they could escape in a way or another. And so, but, uh, like the government over there, they paid them back, pay them back, like each one, like \$10,000. So after they got home, they give them 10,000 on.

11:00

AM: To somebody. I don't know who exactly, because there was a kind of secret that people just bring them from ice area to safe area. So the three of them that are released after that

AM: They went to Germany because there was a program in Germany, like the survivor. They could go to German school, they apply for that program and it was like 1,100. The survivor that they went to Germany. So they all went to Germany in that program specifically. So they are living in Germany with their little brother and mom, my aunt.

Interviewer: You stay in close contact with them?

AM: Yes. Yes. I connect with them.

AM: Are they from, from a lot of them, but, uh, you know, that he just got killed few weeks, few days ago. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi He was Iraqi. But

12:00

AM: Muslims Sudanese um, basically the ISIS, there are a lot of people, Sudanese Muslim Sudanese they helped them. And even the people from around the world, they contact them with another, like in a way or another. So they just get them on the fight with them. And there was basically a lot of people from Iraq and Syria, but there was some other countries, there was few people from each country so that they help them. And I think like ?? and ??, they give them money. They help ISIS. I think.

AM: The The They, they, focus that is because they are Muslim, they don't have a book from somewhere. Like they did it on this thing. We are confident or like bad people. So when they came, they just killed people like 30,000, they kidnapped around three for more than 3000 on, there is

13:00

AM: a 2,900 They still in captivity and We don't know anything about them, they still alive or somewhat in jails or don't know anything about basically that they hate Yazidi. I don't know why, just because they are not Muslim, I think, or

Interviewer: minority

AM: ideology, stupid ideas they have, I think.

AM: No. Yeah. Even before that, yeah, we know we are Yazidi because we, when the kids like our parents, they, they teach us how to be Yazidi . How is he doing? Like, we have a couple level on the. We have, uh, like some, our like event is, and a lot of stuff we know we are Yazidi but just, yeah, because when that happened, they focused in easily. It was really bad. And even before that, with Christian in Moseley area, they didn't kill them. They just, uh, let them to go

14:00

AM: leave everything and just go. But when they come to Yazidi they kill them. They kidnap them and. The wrist, the left area. And so even after that, they stolen everything.

AM: Uh, I don't think so because, didn't not say it's not good. And even like, I have a couple family, they still over there, my brother and they, they just live in small tent and the light is not good. It's just small tent. I have, I still have some family or their cousin. Many of nephew and nieces and family. So I still have.

Interviewer: It's are they trying to come to Nebraska or to Germany or

AM: they try it, but so the immigration bond, so they cannot,

AM: uh, after, uh, Mr. Trump's Ban like two years ago, something, yeah,

15:00

AM: from that, it was very slow. It's really slow. Yeah. I applied for them, but they cannot come over.

AM: I think it's like very simple, very simple to go anywhere. It's very easy. And, uh, we have a lot, uh, Yazidi community over here. So we have, uh, some event is like August 3rd and fasting and some other parties like the new year. And it's very simple because we, I have friends over here. I know them a long time. I have couple of cousins over here, so I think it's basically, everything is very easy. I think

AM: it it's. We see it's kind of important. I three days fasting like the first, uh,

Interviewer: So it's ???. You follow, fasting eve

AM: Yeah. I was just fasting eve.

16:00

AM: Or first of all, And, uh, it's uh, after, uh, December 12th, the first, uh, Friday after that. So it kind of be our fast eve. So basically what we fast three days and the fourth day is a fasting eve

Interviewer: festival or something.

AM: Yeah.

AM: I think it's just one of the main, uh, Yazidi, uh, culture and, uh, uh, Oh, unlike everybody go together, come together. They make party food music. So I think it's very good. And we do day because like the kids who are born over here or when they were kids, when they move it over here. So I think it's very important for them to learn that we are Yazidi that you are different from others.

17:02

AM: It's a little bit challenging because the people, if we didn't teach them, they do not know like they are teachers like that, that the kids for now. So, um, it's in our, like we learned in our religion, we cannot marry from the others or stuff like that. So some of the kids that they don't know. So this kind of challenge and the many others. So it's a kind of not good.

AM: Uh, I, I disagree with that. I, so, because we are a religion, like, is it the only thing we want to stay or is it the religion? So. But like after the, you know, generation after generation, they just change mind or they see it's okay. But like, for me, no, I, I see. It's not okay. So we are born Yazidi we want to stay Yazidi. So even like you see at the other people like Christian,

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AM: they want to, because I'm like, was them, they want to be, so it's just like that. But I think like everybody does like that.

AM: I teach them even like simple stuff with their age. So like, we are like the, our, our language, we call it just Kurdish Kurmanji and we cannot go like marry with the other one. If they are under bit like all the likes, 15, 16 years old, we just teach them. Basic stuff on this hour, like three days fast and the four day new year. So we teach them the basic idea about Yazidi. So, uh, we take them over there physically. Like we have a party on. You saw the party, it was in the park over there. So we teach them, this is our new year. We call it, we call it ?? or like a Wednesday ??

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AM: So we teach them And we take them physically there. And even the fast event, a festival, what I mean, and, uh, the best, this, the main tool. So we take them physically and we teach them. Uh, even before we go over there, we teach them, Oh, we're going to do this, this, this. And after that, like we ask them a simple question, Hey, this hour is this our new year. So they, they know from like physically, because you know, the kids, the teenagers they know from to see. So we teach them that way. And even sometimes at home, just smaller stuff.

AM: Uh, I think, um, it's very easy to get over here cause uh, we have a lot of like, like Western, what do you call it? Middle Eastern, uh, shops or market, what we can

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AM: do, uh, like they have a lot of stuff. So we, we, we bought and we make it at home. I think it's not, there is no difficult, big difficulty to get the food.

AM: Basically we just call it ???. And the, our privates like mix it, meet with the other stuff. So I, I, this may have two, favorite, or it could take on the ???. And the over here, there is a lot good food, uh, special fish. I love eating fish and nice pizza. Okay. And Canes. I love canes because the food is good.

AM: I like, uh, as I told you, uh, first couple months, it's really hard to leave because everything is different.

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AM: A hundred percent from there, like, uh, the life, even the taxi is like to get a taxi. It's really hard, but over there, no, you just go to a street and. Sign your hand on the taxi. We'll stop it. So it was a little bit hard to get a taxi first couple of weeks and no, like the other things is, is good.

Like, especially with driving license, it's very easy to get first, you know, the permit and then driver license. It's very easy. But I think because we have a lot easier to communicate over here, it's a kind of a simple to live over here. And that's why I love it this simple about because it was in Sinjar. It's almost same. So it's almost the same simple we have over here. So that's why I didn't see a lot of difficulties.