

Emily Gengenbach

Name: Khedir Qassim

Location: Yazidi Community Center

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Interviewee: My name is Khedir Qassim, and what actually brought me to Nebraska is I can think of several reasons. Uh, first is family. I've had my parents and my other two brothers who have been here for. Quite a few years. And I was, uh, with my other brother in Houston. So at that time I said, it's time to kind of, uh, get re renew identification and just kind of stop being away from each other and just living together. So that's how actually the main reason

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Interviewee: I moved to Nebraska. And the second reason is, uh, while I was thinking of that, I found out. A great job. And I was at the in line with, with that movement. I was actually, um, talking to people that, you know, the people that I work with right now, and finally I got approval and they gave me an offer. I started working with them. So two great reasons, I believe.

Interviewee: What brought me to the United States is being a part of that special immigrant visa program and for being a cultural adviser and interpreter for the U.S. armed forces back in Iraq, when they, when the U S forces in, came to Iraq and took their dictatorship down, felt like. As a part of, of our ethics in finding a good job and

working with them and helping them. So after a few years, things got really changing.
Um, you know, they started calling us

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Interviewee: betrayers and, you know, coming after us and killing us as interpreters and cultural advisors. So a main reason is actually just to find a safe Haven and, you know, breathe the democracy and just come live in the United States.

Interviewee: I lived in Houston for quite a few years. So like, end of February, 2013. That's when I first got to United States and to the middle of April, 2016. When living in Houston, I wasn't very heavily involved with the community back then because Houston is a huge city. You can consider international city, you have people from pretty much everywhere and it's rich with oil as you know, a lot of oil companies and gas, uh, When I come, came here. I mean, I, when working with YCC and, you know, dealing with other people here

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Interviewee: and there, I found actually it's more, I just feel comfortable and more secure here in Nebraska. Honestly.

Interviewee: So before I moved here, um, like I finished my, I went to school and I finished my, uh, primary school and elementary, like elementary school. They call it

here and a high school back in my hometown ?? it's in North of Sinjar mountain. And then, um, I moved to college and I started the college just right before, like two years or three years before the, um, U.S. come to Iraq and, you know, take the dictatorship down at that time. I was like in third grade and I, um, I started, um, almost almost done, uh, in 2003. I only have the one year left. I was in third grade and I mean, third year college, computer science. And then after all that,

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Interviewee: you know, I, I decided that I need to find a job in. I started working, um, in serving the U S military as a cultural advisor and an interpreter. So primarily I was doing that job and, you know, just going back and forth. But then for some reason I couldn't because of the security, I couldn't finish my degree. So I had to actually kind of resign from that job and go back to school and get my degree in computer science. So I couldn't back go back to the, originally to the, to the. the university that I first got enrolled, which was Mosul university because the security was not stabilized. And, um, I found this other university in Kurdistan, which is called university of Soleimani. So I went there and I finished my degree and I started, uh, getting a career there actually as a teacher assistant until I moved to the United States.

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Interviewee: So my job here, um, I just kind of stick with what I know and what I am aware of. So I stick with it and computer. Um, so even now I do, um, it support and MIT specialist for, for this company that I work with right now. Um, Nebraska municipal

power pole, still doing it. Um, end user support, hardware support, uh, security, you name it, everything that, I mean I can do, I would do it.

Interviewee: so that will go back the, I back in 2014 when ISIS, you know, uh, Attack our villages back in, back home in Iraq and us as a group of young. And we already knew each other from high school and back working with the military back in Iraq, without that we need to get together and do something for our community back home.

And that's how actually I got involved

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Interviewee: with my friends and, uh, they started uh YAZADA and then few years later, I think a couple of years after they started this Yazidi community center. And, uh, I thought it's like a part of my duties to be with my friends and help them with what our community here at Lincoln needs, just to kind of bridge some gaps and, um, help them with whatever I can sometimes if they need me translation or cover somebody or, I mean, whatever comes handy, I'll be more than happy to do it. And I know, like I said, Uh, being a part of this community just to be integrated with the American community and be like an advocate for my community. Um, so that's actually one of the, one of the main reason I actually joined the YCC.

Interviewee: So before I come to the United States, before I even,

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Interviewee: I had some friends here, they were always saying Nebraska, it's like a. It's rural. Like we already know there is a big community lives here, but, uh, whoever we talk say and why would you, why don't even think about going to Nebraska. It's all like rural areas. And it's like in the middle of nowhere. So it's like, okay, well that was the first impression. That was the stereotype that it's very rural. There's no nothing in there. You can hardly find a shop or something. Then when I first came, I landed in Houston and you know, we've had people here back and forth. And then when my family came here, that was, I've never been to Nebraska before. Then when my rest of my family came here, like my parents and my other brother, they stayed with us for about three months, three months. And then we, um, we thought that it's not a good place for them because they, especially like parents that are elderly. And they told us that there is a lot of, um, elderly people in my community that they can get along. They can, well, the house in this kind of get, you know, uh, acquaintance with each other. So, uh, my other brother was here, the older one

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Interviewee: when he first came from Iraq. You just came straight to Nebraska. So we were going to be talking back and forth and, and then, uh, after they moved, actually I came here for visit and it was no, I mean, we, we are, we are not used to snow back in Iraq. So actually I didn't say I did that. I didn't like it. I actually started to like it. And then every six, seven months, my brother and I, we would make a trip and come back and forth. So I started to like it and that like, okay, I live, I love four seasons. And it's less

stressful traffic. So it's like, yeah. So actually I liked it. So the stereotype that I had before, or has changed completely. So now if people ask me, what do you think about Nebraska? I would think that all the good stuff about Nebraska, I think that's just my personal experience.

Interviewee: Yeah. It's a hard question. It's a tough question. Um, The whole reason for this center to

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Interviewee: be open is to preserve the Yazidi culture. That doesn't mean that we will not be willing to integrate to the American community. That's the whole reason for this center to be open is to actually be more open minded and be integrated to the American community. Um, I think for the next a few years, or next decade, this thing will be changed. Uh, the people might be more open. And, uh, there, I believe there are some already people that, who are already dating people from outside the community, which is, uh, I mean, no one can actually force anybody not to do something. I mean, if you are 18 years old and above, I mean, that's, you're absolutely your own decision. Um, but you know, as a part of our culture in order to be more, like I said, um, stick together and to preserve this culture, we would prefer, I personally prefer that. People start dating from their own community and be open minded

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Interviewee: and friend with everybody else. So, um, but I think, like I said, just this could be changed and I'm pretty sure it's going to change, but it's just something that we have to accept. Because the whole, the whole reason for us is we could, we were, we were born and raised as Yazidi and part of the Yazidi religion, just like any other religion, um, is that we were, we have our own privacy that in order for us to be as easy, we have to be born, uh, from a Yazidi parents. And if, if any, one of those is not, um, valid, when I say valid is like, you have, your mother is Yazidi, but your dad is not, then you can't actually be. Pare nowadays is Yazidi rules. Um, so that's, that's the cool, like I said, this is the whole reason that we want to be still like all together, sticking together

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Interviewee: and preserve our culture and, uh, reflect a good image about our society to the American, uh, culture and be part of that community.

Interviewee: So a part of that is the, what YCC, I think did a great job. Is it the community center here. They, at the beginning, they started some English classes and some, uh, basic religion class. And, you know, native language Yazidi class too. Um, Those kids who would come and they will, we have teacher that would teach them some, you know, tell them about the customs and traditions, especially for those kids who have not seen Iraq. I mean their home, their parents home, uh, I should say, um, of them who were like born here, born and raised, they know nothing about that. They

might still, speak the language because her, his or her parents speak, um, Like the language

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Interviewee: at home so they can pick some here or there, but we are afraid that if there is not a real, a well planned or a roadmap that a lot of this will be actually vanished. So we are doing our best through YCC and through the Yazidi community. And there's a, another is Yazidi committee. I believe that, you know, they, they are in charge of that in a cemetery. We are trying our best to come up with some other plans, like something that everybody agree. Uh, and I should say, like, be more involved, especially when it comes to customers, the tradition, people meet each other quite often, uh, weddings, uh, you know, those holiday holidays for the Yazidi community that they all gather and celebrate. So those are the things that we are still trying to focus and, you know, fight for. So people know, and you know, this new generation know, okay,

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Interviewee: what's going on? Why do, why are we celebrating? So that's how they can get, you know, accustomed to the, to the, to this, uh, thing. Like they know it's, it's an Yazidi holiday, it's this, this and that. So people, so young kids will ask and then there is an answer for that.

Interviewee: I mean, we were just a small minority and we are still a small minority and we are very well known. We've been aware, uh, the peace, the most peaceful, you

know, uh, minority probably in the entire Uh, globe. Um, we were still kind of looking at some, you know, some, some people are looking at us as like a third, fourth degree, uh, person, like we were not first class person or stuff like that, but I mean, we were, we were still okay. I mean, we were living, I mean, uh, we were discriminated that a lot of us were not being accepted to be like a part of, uh, um, At that time,

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Interviewee: Saddam has his own, uh, bath party, uh, you know, um, institutes, I, when it comes to the government, like the, like what they call here, FBI, like Saddam's, uh, system was kind of really unique and complicated. So if you Yazidi, you are not be accepted on those hiring. Um, positions, I should say. Um, we were okay. Like we were accepted to the colleges. We were allowed to go to, uh, do our normal work, but we will still like, kind of like an abandoned, uh, minority. After 2003, we were looking like in a bigger eye that we would be able to engage and, uh, Get out rights, just like any other minority and just like adding other, uh, Iraqi citizen, you know, and being, not just be looking at a third class citizen or fourth class citizen. And unfortunately this is, this didn't happen. Uh, we still feel like we,are,

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Interviewee: uh, abandoned and, uh, the college that I went to, um, I wouldn't say it had problem with, but there were still some kind of difficulties here and there. And then when I moved to the second university, everybody was everybody actually welcomed me. I mean, it was a, it was nice. I loved the people over there, even though it's not from my

own city, I should say. Um, but people were really generous and people really happy that I moved. And, um, I feel like I, I was not even a stranger. I feel like I am. From that town or from that city, which was Soleimani. So my experience was really, I mean, you could ask somebody else who can have a different story, but for me, I didn't really feel like it was a great experience.

Interviewee: Yes, actually. Yes. Uh, although they were also Kurds, I mean, they were Kurds and they already, and they call us that you are the original of Kurds.

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Interviewee: That's what they. They've been telling. I mean, um, uh, but at that university, actually I learned a lot. I got the chance to go and apply for like, um, uh, some scholarships and I got accepted. I was one of the nominees to go, uh, you know, um, visit the LG electronics, uh, headquarters in South Korea for three weeks. And then after that I become a teacher assistant. I feel like I'm, I was like, just, just like any other. Employee or citizen from that town that I'm just like one of them. And then I, you know, pursued my, my job and I got that scholarship with the Berlin technical university. So I was sent overseas again to Germany for seven months. And I was even given an opportunity to study abroad in UK, uh, for a master's degree. But then I decided to come to United States because. If I were to go

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Interviewee:there, I still have to come back and have like five years work in five years because I was gone. It just like a contract between me and the government in ministry of higher education. That's what they call it. That I would need to comply with that contract five years. If I get my master's degree, I have to go back and work at that university five years. But then five years I thought of it. It's like too long. I'd better. Take this opportunity and go live in the United States because I can just be like living in limbo between my hometown, which was not safe. And between here, I would just go and live with my family and just find my new life there.

Interviewee: I think the university that I graduated from has done a really great job. They actually really prepared me. I mean, it's all on you. I believe me. I mean, if you go to Harvard and if you don't do your Your homework.

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Interviewee: And if you don't do your job, it's impossible that you're going to do this and this and that. So it's all on you. So I think, uh, I think the university is very well known and, and I think, uh, I did my job as well, and I was willing really wherever prepared, uh, the, the, the way the system works back there is completely different. 180 degrees. Different than what it's works here, but like I said, it's all on you. And I think I was well prepared when I come here, especially, you know, being traveling to other countries and, you know, traveling around Europe. I was, I didn't have that culture shock to be honest. So when I came here, I was already, I was, I was fresh. I was not like, uh, coming off the school and didn't find a job and they start different job. I know I started

exactly what I was working for same field it, and I just keep growing and growing. So, so my experience was perfect.

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Interviewee: Yazidi is unfortunately there's a lot of factors and I'm not a politician and I'm not like, uh, A political analyst, analyzer, or analyst that I can tell you exactly what's going on. But my point of view is like, uh, I think it's just people don't don't. I mean, they just don't want us to get to that level. Like we are before ISIS attack our villages or towns in Sinjar is Yazidi. Like in Sinjar and Shanahan and Basha, which is those three major areas that were the Yazidi. These are actually resided. We were close to six, 700,000 people. So par, uh, Iraqi constitution law that each a hundred thousand, uh, each a hundred thousand people, you have to have one, uh, parliament member. And we didn't get that, even though we got three or four

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Interviewee: here and there, but they were not. The true Yazidi voice, I think, uh, that we're somehow attached to some political agendas here and there. And they were basically just like employees waiting for, by the end of the month to get their salaries, to be honest with you, they didn't really do well for their nation and for their religion and for their, um, and that's something that being, you know, everybody's different. I mean, I think a lot of factors are contributed to that. It's because you are not independent, you don't have a true Yazidi voice. If we can get someone who would come from the heart of this event after 2014, when we were attacked and who lived all this, all these, you

know, drama and suffered a lot here and there, traveling and asking for help on there. If we can find somebody who would. Ethically,

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Interviewee: you know, earn people's trust. I think, I think that's how we can actually have some real Yazidi the members and representative in the Iraqi parliament. And this is not going to come easy because of the, no one can trust the government. No one can trust the highest commission that's in charge of, uh, Iraqi elections. It's all about, uh, what's called pro quo. You, you, you do something for me. I do something for you. So, so it's like this exactly. Believe me. It's it's all like that. So, so it's hard. Yeah. If you not have the power, if you don't have a back, then it's hard to really represent some people from your committee truly in, in that, you know, high sensitive position. And that's what we actually now suffering. We don't have anybody. We only have one and that one cannot do much.

Interviewee: People are aware now

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Interviewee: people like social media and this internet can open people's mind. And they, they, I mean, if you go and ask like a 10 year old kid, they will, they will tell you exactly what's right and what's wrong and what and how it should be. But like I said, the influence, the influence and the region geographically is now kind of shared between, you know, Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. And then the two big poll US and Russia. And

they both, you know, contributing with their own role. So it's a very tough situation. And for, for us to survive, we will have to stick with something. Otherwise we would just be like, just like try, just trying to survive and, and have our. Like, uh, nose, a little bit above the water, not to, not to like sink. I mean, that's the whole, that's our situation right now. We will have to find like an ally that will get us outta there.

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Interviewee: And unfortunately we haven't found that truthful, faithful ally. Every time we support somebody, they will turn their back on us and stab us in the back. And it's just a matter of mistrust now.

Interviewee: Absolutely I think that's something really concerning where people, and we have people living there now in the mountain, in my hometown ?? and, and other neighboring towns by the Sierra border and just like, Days or weeks ago we heard that the Turkish air force, they also attack my hometown. Uh, they have been attacked like airstrike couple of times. And actually this is really concerning and yeah, those innocent people, they were losing their innocent people for, for nothing. I mean, I mean, what's going on. There is no mass destruction depends over there. There is no ISIS over there. I mean, you're really, I mean, it's, it's very concerning, so it's, we, we feel discomfort about what's going on right now, actually. And we hope something can.

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Interviewee: happen in the near future to end this.

Interviewee: Yes. Uh it's. It's not just that. I mean, we feel that we are now a big community and we kind of find home here. Um, so it's, it's very difficult for people to, to take their deads back Iraq, to Iraq, it's cost \$15,000 and it takes a lot of time to do that because you have to go to the embassy and, and, or consult and sign papers and, and you pay for somebody who would, you know, accompany that would, that dead body. And it's not easy. So us having that land is, is a part of preserving the culture as well. So that way we know that we have land here, people would go there, they go visit their, uh, their ones on those holidays. And, and, uh, th that's the whole major reason that we had that actually cemetery and bought their land.

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Interviewee: They were, uh, kind of, um, skeptical. They were worried about that this land will turn to like a mosque or something that they would be preachers and, you know, then they didn't know. And they never know about us. I mean, it's a, no, we are not that type of people. Our people went there and talk to them and they said, we are just a peaceful community. We just, we, we just have this piece of land for our, you know, to be a cemetery and we have the license and everything. And. And somehow actually they, they, after that day, after they talked to them, their idea has changed. And they said, okay, well, they didn't know about that. And I think since then case was closed.

Interviewee: Yes. I think it's offensive and the thing, a lot of people have to know that not just because I look different and I speak different language, or I look like middle Eastern that I am

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Interviewee: a terrorist or I'm a bad guy. I mean, you would think about people in the middle East. Uh, there is, you know, Uh, probably, you know, tens and probably up to a hundreds of different ethnicities, sex and religion who are not just, you know, the religion of, of the dominant. You know, we understand that Islam is the dominant religion there, but not everybody who is Muslim is a bad guy. Not everybody who is middle Eastern is a bad guy. I mean, we, we, we have to, live in coexisting and, uh, humanity, humanity was actually. Finding everybody. I mean, why did I move to the United States? Because I wanted to find humanity. I want to be treated well, and I want it to be, uh, respected. And I want it to be, you know, given the responsibility of what I want to carry on my shoulder and the same time, what I can offer to the committee. So we, we, we hope that not just Nebraska community,

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Interviewee: everybody in, in, in this country, um, look at people in the middle East. Like in a different way. I mean, not everybody's Osama bin Laden and they want to kill a kill here, here and there and do some bad stuff. I mean, it's a good idea to screen and deep screen people who are coming to the States just to be sure that they are not bad, but at the meantime, we hope that they will not make this as a reason or as a, uh, um, um,

Something that will stop people coming to the United States from those areas because there's people who have fled the war. There's people who have just become homeless, no family there, the majority of family members were killed by airstrikes and stuff. So I think those people need some safe Haven and be treated just like humans. So, um, my personal experience. Since being,

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Interviewee: living here since living here in Nebraska. Um, my interaction with people, I think Nebraska people are very helpful and they have good heart towards that. And, uh, this is just my opinion. And I think, uh, there is a lot of other people. In this country that have that carry the same heart and the same thing towards immigrants, it doesn't matter where they come from from Ukraine, Russia, from the Middle East, South Africa, whatever. Um, I think those people should all stand together and advocate for immigrants because this country is actually built upon those principles that people can come and search for democracy. And look for the American dream. So I believe everybody should give him the opportunity at least once to live there.

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Interviewee: I, I wouldn't say that I don't, I don't want to return is always an option if there is a need and that need will be associated with, like, you mentioned security, stability, and Uh, some other factors. Um, I don't have any plans at the moment actually to move. Uh, I think I'm good at the moment, but like I said, my options are open just to just personally me. Um, I think it's, I think I can go visit like visiting is always good. You

grew up somewhere. You always miss those places, no matter what, uh, especially for elderly people here, I think it's very good for them if they can. And if they can afford, you know, it's very expensive to, to fly overseas and go to the Middle East. It's like your, your, your cheapest ticket could be a thousand dollars. That's if you are very lucky, that's the cheapest then.

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Uh, what are you thinking about when you go on summer or some other vacations time, which is \$2,000 or \$2,500. So, so I think it's always, uh, not a bad idea to leave that option open and. You can go back and forth. That doesn't mean that you are abandoning your community and your loyalty to the United States. That doesn't mean that, but I mean, people that's one of the that's one of the, uh, second amendment is to, is the life is the freedom to assemble. So if you want to assemble anywhere within the United States and something, I think that's, that's a right that you have to keep. If you think that you are safe, I wouldn't go right now. Like I said, it's not safe. I would not Go back and live there.

Interviewee: Actually, I missed a lot of things about there before 2003, uh, people were just like on those holidays, like, which we will have in next couple of days, we will have our fasting,

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Interviewee: um, the nice thing about those days, even any, if I were, if I was anywhere, like I was in ???. Yeah I was a teacher assistant. And even if we were with the main military base with the Americans, they will let us go home and have those moments with our family and friends and our community. And I remember like those days, like you just go out and just walk and everybody's like other streets, they just walking and everybody's helping each other, especially like the The feast Eve where people can share food and happiness and, and blessing. Um, I miss those moments actually. And when everybody's in the town and your relatives, your friends coming by, you go by visit your uncles, your aunts, and so forth. Um, unfortunate. We, we, I mean, we still have those stuff here, but

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Interviewee: not as. Much is where we have back home. So, so those, one of the things I actually missed. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewee: Uh, yes. Yazidi just started to have their own channel. I believe satellite channel. I think there is now two all three of them. Uh, there are some others that through some other parties or supported by some other, uh, political parties that they try to, you know, advertise for the Yazidi and we care about the Yazidi, but, um, I don't think they, I can call them true Yazidi, you know, channels or satellite channels. But like I said, there's actually like two, uh, We can call Yazidi, either way. They're fund They are funded by some, uh, Yazidi businessman who just eventually passed away. Uh, it's called I think ?? TV

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Interviewee: And, um, every once in a while, actually I, I watch it sometimes if I have time. And, um, but other than that, we don't have that many channels and I think it's a good idea for them, especially who live overseas, that the show those, you know, Holy places, they have those interviews with, you know, the Yazidi figures and they kind of tell them and educate them about the religion and about the, you know, what's going on in the area, as far as policy, um, cultural events, those kind of stuff.

Interviewee: So my wife, she speak Arabic. Unfortunately she doesn't speak, although she's Yazidi, but she doesn't speak Kurdish. So in, in, in home now we have two languages, honestly, besides English. So it's three languages. So the communication with dad is, is pretty much Kurdish. And with the wife is Arabic and say, the world is English. So I speak three languages every day.

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Interviewee: Uh, it was sometime at the beginning, very stressful job because we were just, I was just getting hired and there was a lot of terminologies that I was not aware of and I was not. And at that time, not everybody has a cell phone and a Google translate or, or you, you didn't have that technology available. Right on your fingertips. So it was very difficult at the beginning. So what I had to do is I had my notebook and every time there's something new, I would have to write it down and just practice it. So it was a challenging job and it was, um, also a stressful job when we go out. Not just that, it was

also a dangerous job because we just, we just never knew at what time and what second, somebody will shoot us in the head sniper, or we'll have a roadside bomb that will go off. So.

Interviewee: Uh, I didn't see very close to me, honestly, but I saw like happened to my buddies.

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Interviewee: I didn't see it happen to me. I remember one of the situation that we got shot at when we were like in the field, looking for those insurgents who were crossing the border between Iraq and Syria. And they were just like random shooting. Uh, I didn't know what to do at that time. I didn't have a vest to where I didn't have a helmet. That was like a kind of late 2003, actually. And, uh, I did it just jump on the ground and just hope nothing bad is going to happen. And it took about 10 minutes and then my buddies luckily came in and they found me and they showed me like a sign. I still remember that you have to do like this. So when, when they were like searching and doing like running those spotlights, make sure who's, who's where, who's what. So they told me, always do this. That means you are one of us. I didn't have vests, I didn't have gun. I didn't have any, those of those kind of things that will, um,

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you know, those vest things are aware and they will glue that. They know that this is you for, you know, the stuff that you wear when you work, uh, on the street. So when lights, what they call him,

Interviewer: Reflective reflective,

Interviewee: like, like these things that you have on your shoes. So we didn't have those types of things. So basically all you gotta do is say, okay, do this and you will be okay, nobody's going to shoot it, show them the stuff.

Interviewee: honestly, I don't know. I, I, I don't think I, my personal view, I don't think they give him a good opportunity to defend himself. He was a dictator anyways, and, and I think he, I think they should have probably given him more time. Um, to reveal more facts to the Iraqi people, um, and uh, him hanging that way, I think sent a message to a lot of leaders in the Arab world that you will face the same thing if you don't treat your people well.

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So I think that was a good thing, honestly. Uh, but I just thought that if they were giving that child more time, just. More, just more facts will be revealed to the Iraqi people or in the Arab world specifically would be probably a better idea, but.

Interviewee: I think is Yazidi. These have significant impact in the Lincoln community. I think by, um, by offering a lot of jobs. Um, a lot of Yazidi is now our full time employees.

Um, the go to school, also a lot of their kids, they are smart. They do a good job at schools and very peaceful community. They never, they never did anything bad. They never, uh, I mean, when I say never, I mean, everybody's not the same, but for the most part, as you say, peaceful community, um,

38:00

Interviewee: they add a lot of culture. And people were not aware of that, that thing even exists until like we opened that the center with the YCC here. And we have that Congressman who comes in every once in a while, when we have those events, they would come and we have a lot of other American friends that they come and share those and become our advocates. So I think the Yazidi have really enriched the, um, Lincoln community with all these aspects that I just mentioned. I believe. Beside the food.

Interviewee: It's always that. we were like a special case, but I still, mine. Mine still took about. Almost for the Visa. The moment I went and interviewed, it took me exactly about seven months for my visa to be approved and be available, to be picked up. And before that the papers and chief of mission approval and, and hearing their email here and there and get

39:01

Interviewee: you all stuff together. So the whole process took about, I would say about a year.

Interviewee: Yes, it's actually every year it's getting harder and harder. And especially now with, with the Trump's administration, I think, uh, uh, since he became a president, I think we only have three or four families only from the Yazidi community came to United States. I believe that as far as, according to my information, that what I see I could be wrong, but, uh, in the past we used to have like every month. At least two, three families coming. And that was really a good, uh, thing for us because, uh, we want, uh, people who don't feel safe and they feel that they're abandoned and we want them to come somewhere. If not us somewhere else, Canada, Australia, but specifically we're talking about U.S. I think it's more strict now. I think even for me, uh, uh, bringing my wife, just like a simple example and a real life example.

40:00

Interviewee: Uh, even though I wasn't a citizen at that time, it still took care about, uh, close to two years, uh, through legal immigration, not, not, not just, and being like a part of all this, uh, special immigrant visa and serving a US military, being a cultural adviser and being a faithful citizen to the United States army and the government. Um, We were hoping that they will. And on top of all that being a persecuted minority, we were hoping that they will give us a better opportunity for our families and loved one to come and find peace in this country. But unfortunately, that hasn't happened yet. Um, I hope this will happen sometime soon. Um, just like Christians as well, because those two minorities are the ones who actually paid the lion share. When they were persecuted by Islamic state, like by Yazidi were the number one who, because our women and children were

41:00

Interviewee: enslaved, but the Christian at the same time, their homes, their properties, their money, it's all gone.

Interviewee: I became a citizen exactly. July 9th, 2018. A little bit over a year now.

Interviewee: It was one of those special moment in my life. I was very emotional and, uh, I wouldn't lie to you that I cried when I become a citizen. And those, I mean, when I say cried, I didn't cry, but I, I had those tears coming out of my eyes of being, uh, a U.S. citizen. And it was a special moment in my life. So I feel like now I'm. I'm in a better place just to be, to be sure I'm in a better place I believe.

42:00

Interviewee: I've always been an advocate and, um, I always tell people, especially American friends that. This is who we are Um, and if they are interested, uh, I usually share some links and some real life stories with them. And that's how I have, uh, some of my coworkers actually now the year they know all about the Yazidi, um, because of me engaging, talk with them and asking me where I come from and those kinds of stuff. So I, I tell him what I have. I tell them where we suffer. I tell them where we come from. I tell them about our culture. About our history about, uh, you name it. So, and a lot of those people, I would say a hundred percent of those people I talk to, they feel really

passionate and compassionate about that and how, uh, how we peaceful, uh, how peaceful we are.

43:00

Interviewee: And, um, they always get intrigued and interested about learning more.

Um, and I have. Quite three friends right now, even at work that they are everyday, they ask about even my life and about our Yazidi community here and how they do it and those kinds of stuff.