

## Oral History

### Mahje and Justin

July 14, 2020

**Mahje:** Did you have your lunch?

**Justin:** Yes, ma'am. That's why I called you at 2 today, so I could eat something. Did you eat already?

**Mahje:** Yeah, I already ate because we eat between 1 and 1:30. So I cooked the \* and rice. We all had the vegetables and stuff like that.

**Justin:** Oh ok.

**Mahje:** Yeah, I'm ok. A little bit in the morning giving me a hard time. But other than that, I'm ok.

**Justin:** Oh ok, well...

**Mahje:** Because I stopped my allergy medicine. I have to take allergy medicine every day. If not, I have problems with the allergies and stuff like that...with the allergens. But I'm ok.

**Justin:** Ok, well I am glad to hear that.

**Mahje:** That's why I cook on Saturday, too. I cook Saturday the special dish called Haleem. It's mixed wheat and beans and especially nowadays we don't need red meat, so I put chicken or goat meat. But I made it with chicken, and everybody likes it and they ate. And yesterday I cooked it simple. Sometimes you can make it easily...it's very easy to make it. You can boil the potatoes and mash them out and take little oil and cut the onion in that. Slice it up a little bit and put the mustard seeds, cumin, green chili, if you want it spicy, otherwise don't put that. And the green peas and then turmeric powder and this one with a little garlic powder and mix it up well in a big pan and \*\*\* bread slice. You can put that on \*\*\* make it like that. So yesterday she

wants that really simple and make those and today we want to eat the same slice. They like my cooking.

**Justin:** Oh, I...Apparently.

**Mahje:** Ok. Did you like that, my family picture?

**Justin:** Yes, oh my gosh, yes. Oh my gosh.

**Mahje:** It was the recent picture that last eve when we celebrated the holidays. But we wear those kind of outfits. I...saree \*\*\* but rather than that, \* whenever we have some function or something like that. It's easy. Just like a pant and a long top and the scarf.

**Justin:** Ok, so the picture you sent me yesterday, was that from this weekend what you guys wore for the Jahmatkana holiday?

**Mahje:** No. It's...this is in the house we did it. Because nowadays the Jahmatkana is closed, no? So last eve we celebrated in our house and we invited my daughter-in-law's mother and sister. Because we celebrated her birthday, her fortieth birthday too those times. So we took all those, so I said, "let me send you my whole family picture." So my son, my daughter-in-law, and my two grand girls and myself.

**Justin:** Well, I definitely appreciate you sharing that with us.

**Mahje:** No problem. That's a recent picture and that's the whole family. So, you can see my whole family also like that.

**Justin:** I love it. That's great. I was like, "Oh my gosh, I love it so much." So, thank you for sharing that, it was really sweet.

**Mahje:** No problem. You know, now again the next week is coming on the 31<sup>st</sup> again. You know I told you now the sacrifice in the name of god. That's coming at the end of this month.

**Justin:** Ok. So, what do you guys do for the sacrifice?

**Mahje:** yeah, we don't do anything. But other Muslims, they'll cut a goat and distribute the meat among the poor people and among their relatives, too. But we don't do it that way. We just put money into our church/Jahmatkana. Whatever we want to do, we just put the money. We don't cut any \* or anything. But we cook good food, that is, oh yes. But this time after we eat, we can go somewhere...to the lake somewhere. My daughter-in-law told me yesterday because my birthday is coming next month, so school is opening those times, so she said, "let's go now and we can rent out a cabin or something like that over there." After the 23<sup>rd</sup>, she was telling me we would go over there and we would stay three or four days and come back.

**Justin:** ok, yeah. So, what does goat taste like? I don't think I've ever had it. I've had like, goat cheese, but I don't think I've ever had the meat.

**Mahje:** Goat tastes good. Goat tastes good. You eat beef?

**Justin:** Yes, ma'am.

**Mahje:** Better than beef. It tastes better than the beef.

**Justin:** Really? Ok.

**Mahje:** And it's not heavy like beef. But it's lighter than the beef. Because beef has lots of calories and lots of things. All the red, red you see, but in goat, you don't see so much red, red things.

**Justin:** Ok. I think I've lamb before.

**Mahje:** Less fat than the beef. Hardly we eat...six months or three months. But nowadays my son also doesn't like to eat chicken also, nowadays because of the corona virus, he's stopped eating. He likes the vegetables more. He eats the sandwich more. So we make the...i \*\*\* make the potato sliced and we make the taste at home with the cilantro, green chili, garlic, and cumin. We make the paste and get ready. So, he eats the \* potato and tomato slice sandwich and like

that. He said that he wants that kind of sandwich and we make it that way. So but you mostly eat, outside, no?

**Justin:** It depends. Like, sometimes we will cook around the house, but most of the time I think we do usually eat out, unfortunately. I know it's a bad habit that we gotta get out of. But you know, you kinda start doing something and it sticks. But we need to start cooking a little more often. But today, I'm gonna ask.... I'm gonna start the last two questions and we might actually get done with both of them, so we'll see how it goes.

**Mahje:** Ok.

**Justin:** The first one I have is gonna be, what lessons have you learned about living through difficult times?

**Mahje:** We learn that any circumstances you don't have to be panicked. And you have to be firm so you can be \*\*\* with your family, too. So, they will also be learning not to panic in those times. And live in any circumstances whether you have a lot of things from the outside or if you have a little things in the house and you have to be surviving that. And plus, you have a habit to stay at home because before the virus, we can go out anywhere, we can go eat out anywhere, but this one teaches us that any circumstances you have to survive and you have to follow the rules and what the government tells....made for you. And firm in that so the new generation learns from you. If you don't learn, if you don't do the rules and regulations and if you said, "no, I can't live without this or without that." And so, they will not learn that way.

**Justin:** Ok.

**Mahje:** So, the main thing is, you don't have to panic.

**Justin:** Mhmm. So stay calm and follow directions to keep every safe, right?

**Mahje:** Yeah. Yeah. See now, this holidays we did virtually. The head of the department call us, everybody and they gave us the blessings and everybody listen and then we did the prayer according to the new holiday's prayer. We eat together and people was dancing in the house and videos and all that they're doing it because it was online on Zoom. You can do anything when the zoom is on. So many people danced and so many things, but as a volunteer I had to wear my uniform and I had to send my picture so I made a card for the how you make a card for Christmas card, same thing, I made a card and I sent it. We celebrated that way this time. We \*\*\* otherwise, there is special days for the holidays that people gather and they eat together over there and they put the henna on their hands. But this time, we have not done anything. But some people are doing it at home, too. \*\*\*

**Justin:** So, everybody adapted to the circumstances and was able to still have a good time?

**Mahje:** Yeah. Because cooking is there. Only you don't greet.... greeting is there too. I greet my mother and my aunt who is 106 years old. And we have an \*\*\* online with our family's name on it so we just put a message on it to greet everyone. And my cousin called from India, too. My cousin and my brother-in-law and everybody because I'm the oldest in the family, now. So, they call me and greet us. Yesterday, my one cousin \*\*\* because he is working for Google or something like that. He lives in California, so he called me yesterday night and gave me a good message that my cousin's daughter became a doctor now. Is something in speech therapy, or something like that. So, it's good to know each other by calling them and greeting them. And it makes them happy also that we have the memories, still we are far, but still we don't forget them.

**Justin:** Yeah. So what holiday is this that you're talking about where you do the remembering your loved ones and all of that? Is that the...

**Mahje:** Both are the Eid. One is coming now on the 31<sup>st</sup> and one is gone last month \*\*\* May 24<sup>th</sup> or something like that. And on the 21<sup>st</sup> March, we celebrated Easter. We celebrate Easter, but it is our new year, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March. And 11<sup>th</sup> of July...and on 13<sup>th</sup> of December, his birthday is coming, whom we worship, his birthday is coming. So we celebrate that three times and two times, the Eid. We greet each other, even the Christmas, New Years, we also greet our family, too. Especially New Years. And Christmas time, my daughter-in-law is inviting friends to the house also and sometimes we go to their house for the New Years. And 12 o'clock everybody is \* and then we go home. We do like that, too. So it's not like we just celebrate our holidays.

**Justin:** Now would you say that, you know, spending time with your family and celebrating the holidays and coming together is that something you think helps you live through difficult times, as well?

**Mahje:** Yeah, because we don't see them, each other...my mom wants to see us, but we cannot go. I have been one time; I think in the month of June. I went to see and stayed one hour over there. My daughter-in-law dropped me off and she went to do some work and she came and picked me up. So, I've seen my mother but.... a year when our Jahmatkana was open, I would see my mother every Friday. So, I miss my mother, too, that way. Otherwise the holidays are there...not even holidays. In between sometimes there we call each and everybody into one place and we eat together that way. But now, we cannot do it. See I told you we wanted to celebrate my daughter-in-law's fortieth birthday, but because of the corona virus we didn't invite anybody except her mother who wanted to give her a gift. So, she came, and her mother came and we invited her sister who only lives two or three miles away from here. So, we invite her, too. Because we have a big back yard here and people can sit separately. They don't come up to the

house. We did it in the garage. So, they sit separately out there because the garage is an open space like that.

**Justin:** Mhmm. You maintained the distance and all of that?

**Mahje:** Yeah. And that's why they didn't come up. They said, "no. we are not coming up." Because after the \*, they wanted to give the gift. Then friends came on the birthday time with the car and they parked the car and they greet us. So that celebration is there and not that we did the party and stuff like that.

**Justin:** So, I also was wondering...so your immediate family, they're part of the Muslim faith, and I know another predominate religion of India is Hinduism. Do you have any friends who are part of the Hindu religion as well? Or just most everybody you know in your family Muslim?

**Mahje:** No. I have friends who are Hindu, too. Where I was working there was Hindu people working. There was Christian people who was working. And one time, it was a \* then. And I'm staying in the middle. I stayed in a town called \*. And one of my colleagues they lived in \*, it's too far, \*. And another one is living very, very far. Those times, my husband was there, and I was living with my son over there in my house and train stops because so much flood everywhere, so they cannot go to their house. So, they call and said, "what to do?" and I said, "don't worry, come to my house." And they came and stayed all night with me. I cooked for them and they ate, and I asked my son to go to my mother-in-law's house because my mother-in-law lives across from me in another building in the same subdivision. But we have two buildings in the same complex, so I ask him to go and sleep with my mother-in-law and just two girls and myself was sleeping in my house. So, it's not like that, that I have only Muslim friends or \* friends. I have a neighbor, who a few minutes before your call came, my friend from the neighbor she had gone to India and she was stuck over there because of the virus.

**Justin:** Oh, no.

**Mahje:** Yeah. So, his birthday was there and called him for the wish over there. Her name is \*\*.

He was a homeopathic doctor over there.

**Justin:** Homeopathic doctor. Mhmm.

**Mahje:** \*. \* doctor. Not that a healer doctor. But they have a yes...since lasts so many years and now they have two sons living in India. Which is outside, not inside proper Bombay. But in \*.

And one son is living next to us. So we all go together to the senior center and if not, it's because the senior center we only go three days. Monday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday we used to walk together. They'd call me or I'd call them or sometimes I send them sweets what they like, especially now in the August month, the Raksha Bandhan is coming. The Raksha Bandhan is the girls tying the thread on the brother's hand called rakhi. The brother say's I'll take care of you and hold my life and if any problem arises and if anything happens to you, I will take care of you. So I always tie to rakhi to him because he forced me to \*\*\* my cousin, they asked me to do it from the beginning. I don't do it for my own brother, but I'm doing it for my uncle who lives in India— California—and Houston, Texas. So, I always send by mail the rhaki every August when the Raksha Bandhan is there. But he forced me, he said "no, you tie the rakhi to me because I'm your brother, too." So, I always...so I ask him today, "don't worry on that day how you call me on my birthday, the same way you call me." So, it's ok for me. They are Hindu, too. And we have another in the senior center. I'm the only Muslim was sitting there with the rest of the Hindu people, we were sitting. They love me because...why they love me is because older people, don't understand English properly and they don't speak properly. So, when they have a problem, they ask me what to do or whenever our supervisor wants to explain to them, they want to learn something from them, they tell me. They ask me what they want or what they want to

do. I tell them that they want to do this, they want to do that. According to them, they understand. Now, so I ask him, “Mr. Sha, did you take part in the senior center \*\*\*?” And he said, “No I can’t understand this properly and I can’t speak, also, so I cannot participate in that.” So, I said, “They will explain it nicely, you can understand a little bit. It’s not like that. That’s why you’re preparing for your citizenship. So, you have to be motivated yourself. If you don’t motivate yourself, how can you learn more?” So, he says, “I’ll try.” I studied in \*\*\*, too. I’m not studied in English \*. But since I \*\*\* college in English \*\*\* they speak in English, they don’t speak in our language. Both of my granddaughters, they don’t know our language at all.

**Justin:** Oh, really?

**Mahje:** No. Only my son, my daughter-in-law, and myself speak our language. But with the girls, we speak English only. If you do mistake us, I’m not saying that my English is proper, but at least if you try, you can speak something.

Justin: Oh yeah, absolutely. And yeah, I think that’s really sweet that you took them to mentor them and help them. That’s really sweet to help them out like that. That’s awesome.

**Mahje:** Yeah.

**Justin:** The next question we got...Oh no, I’m sorry, go ahead.

**Mahje:** One is a \*, one is a \* lady, one is a \* lady, and one is a \*. They’re all different, different Indian, but India has a lot of states. Not one states. I’m from \*. They’re from \*\*\*. All the Indians, we sit together. They were laughing at us. They like to sit like that, I can’t do anything. Right?

**Justin:** Mhmm.

**Mahje:** What else?

**Justin:** Ok, let's see. The next one's gonna be...and it's the last one on the sheet that we have to cover and it's gonna be: What would you like to pass on to future generations? So what about your life experiences, or philosophies that you have...what do you think you could share that would help future generations who read this? How do you think you could help them? What information could you pass on that could be beneficial to them?

**Mahje:** Ok. I must say, life is not the same for everybody. It's like a \*\*\*, light and the dark, right?

**Justin:** Yes, ma'am

**Mahje:** Life is like that, too. One time you are poor but that does not mean that you stay poor. You do hard work and you have certain aim to go reach there, you will be successful one day. But if you have no ambitions, if you don't reach anything if you don't motivate yourself, you cannot do anything. First you have to motivate yourself. That "no, I have to do. I am doing it. I will do it." I started the bank, I had no knowledge of the bank, and when I started, I worked 15 years over there. The same way I said that people think when we came here to America, we didn't bring any money. We did the hard work. We saved money. And saving...everybody has to do from childhood. It's not like that way, that whatever money you earn, you spend. Whatever you get, even we teach the children also, to gift money or to give it to them, they have save, not spend every money...every penny. At least 25%, or 30%, whatever you can save. My mother-in-law's house, I was getting a dollar per day, thirty rupees. From that, also, I was saving ten rupees for my son. I have a savings account, which is every first to ten if you put the money they still accumulate it with the interest and how long ago you opened the account. That you get \*\*\* So I opened that account for my son, also. Though my mother-in-law was every now and then when we go out somewhere, she doesn't spend the money...\*\*\* my money, she was getting it. She

likes to eat outside \*\*\* we called it \*. In India \*\*\* outside between the dinner, you can go out and eat those things. She never opened the pocket, I had to spend my money from that, whenever I wanted to go to my mom's house. My mom was living in \*. And I was in \* over there. I was working honorary over there for helping the help center for the kids. So, I spent my money, but from that also, I saved ten rupees. So, when we separated from the house, I don't have money to buy the \*. We have taken the loan and whatever the savings was there previous one. My mom's house savings, I used that one. My \* pass on that time and we had to pay 800 rupees for the guests. \*\*\* and everything. So, I used \*\*\* on my mom's side and one when I married, I went the other side with my in-laws living with. And both the \*\*\* pass at the same time. My father-in-law has taken my \*\*\* and he said, "if you have money, you can buy the \*, otherwise, save it up."

**Justin:** Mhmm.

**Mahje:** I said, "If I sell it out, I'll have to use the \*\*. I don't want to do that. So I took all that money I saved for my son, I take it out, those monies and sold my new sarees I had not worn. I sold out those and I have taken the \* those \* 800 rupees, too much for us, too. It helps.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Mahje:** So, saving...the new generation has to be \* for the saving. Because in our \*\*\*\*\* and it grows, grows, grows and sold big one time. The same day I was saving, and I got some lump sum amount in my hand. So they have to be calm and cool in each individual situation. And they have to be motivated themselves for the initiative. Because these days are not the same. Today you may be poor and tomorrow you may be rich. So, don't be proud of that, also be humble and help the poor people whenever they need. See, right now, I don't ask my son or my daughter-in-law, whatever I have in savings or they give me money. My savings, I send them the money, I give them the money. Because that is my habit. You can give somebody...you know I told you

the other day to give the world your best and the best will come to you. It's everything is better, whatever you're doing for yourself that is for your children. I heard that from so many people that god is rewarding your children. So, what I'm doing, my children might be eating that fruit; the reward is going to my kids. Do you believe in that or no? I believe in that.

**Justin:** Yes, ma'am.

**Mahje:** Now my family is also my...cousins are telling me too, "you have done lots for your mother-in-law and that is why your daughter-in-law is treating you good." I always, though we lived separately, but whenever she was sick, I would take leave from my work and I help them. I go, I cook for them, or whenever she calls me "can you come help me with this?" I'd say, "yes mommy. Yes, I'll come, I'll come."

**Justin:** Do you think that's like karma? Basically like, what you put out comes back to you.

**Mahje:** Yes, because I believe in that, that if you're doing good, you'll get the reward from god, not the person. But you get the reward automatically from god. They said...my husband told me, "every time, that somebody would do wrong to you, but don't do anything wrong with them." You always do good, so they will automatically realize that they have done wrong. My daughter-in-law and all that, that time I had gone to India. They had taken the loan from me from my providence fund and they have not returned it to me. They were living in my house also; they had not paid a penny to me. They lived just free. So, now they realize \*\*\*, says, "I don't have money those times." I said, "it's ok. Forget about it." My providence fund is gone now, too because of giving them almost 50,000 rupees those times. Thirty years, thirty-five years ago. It's ok. I lost that money, but god has given more back to my son. And good in his business. And my business was good, too. When I was...when I had the dry-cleaning business. Though I worked hard in that, it is god who has us all the time. Somewhere or the other way, he's there to help you

out. And I don't know how I'm...how I have everything now. I don't have to do the hands for somebody to give me some.

**Justin:** That's amazing, that really is. You started your business when you guys came over here and basically told me you guys didn't have anything when you came over here, and you built your own business.

**Mahje:** Yeah, we worked hard, and we saved money. And then with that money we have taken some loans from the people and we paid those loans. And our first business was a gas station that my cousin's brother's wife's brother...we had taken and my son's best friend's father. They sold out the business and they cheated us too. But it's ok. We...we \*\*\* we have not lost that money. And after that, my son started another business. But our main aim is that whatever you invest, you're not losing that. And all these days what you spend and all that like...the religious things, also. My son never stopped me from doing anything's. We have a special prayer we have \*\*\* to be cooked some good food and put it there. And I always take the turn for that. And we live all the way, one and a half hours away from Decatur. We live in Carroll county all the way over there. So, I tell my son, "I have taken the turn, so I'm going there." And he says, "ok mom, I take care of the business, you go." So, I go with my husband and prepare the food and take it over there. I always do that. And still I like to be...and my daughter-in-law doesn't stop me and he also. He right now, also.... whenever we have...he knows that mommy is doing better. Whenever we go to see my mom or whenever she sees her in church, she always says, "I brought this for grandma. Take for her, take for her." She always says. And she never stops me from giving money at holidays or birthdays or Mother's Day. I give her something, whatever I have in my pocket. My son asked me, "Can I give you more?" I say, "No. I have...I'll spend from that. If I need it, I will ask you." He knows I never asked my husband also to give me money. I never

asked my son also, you give me money. Whatever they give me, I keep, I save and I spend also. It's not like I just save, save, save. Whenever I need to spend, I'm spending the money, too. For example, a few days.... last year, they had started the art classes at the senior center. So, my supervisor said, "we don't have that much." I said, "Oh really?" And he said, "save your \$20." I said, "you need your color pencils and color and all that, no? Buy it from this one. Don't worry about it." My son always says over here, the food is coming from somewhere, but I don't know. \*\*\* but my family, my son said, "mom, don't hesitate and don't save your money for yourself and you can spend wherever you want to spend, and always put the money for the food also." Although I was not eating there only drink the milk in the afternoon when I go there. I always put the money and bingo, also, they give me the...I always put the extra money. People give a dollar of it, also sometimes they say, "why do you want to give?" I want to give a dollar for it. My daughter-in-law also gives 30- or 40-dollars gift also. She said, "mom, take it take it, take it so they'll be happy." So, my main thing is that people have to be motivated in themselves and they have some aim in their life. That my goal is this one that I have to reach. And plus, calm and cool and \*.

**Justin:** I love it.

**Mahje:** If you under...\*\*\* you spend 10 cents, 25 cents. So that will help in the future.

**Justin:** Ok. That is excellent advice. I think you should probably teach a class on saving money and spending practices. I think a lot of people could benefit from that. That's probably it for me interviewing you, as far as the recorded calls. I don't know if I mentioned it at the beginning of the call, so I'll bring it up now, but it was okay that I recorded you today, right?

**Mahje:** Yeah, no problem. That's fine. They're watching TV over there and I'm in my room. I create lunch together and my son is gone to work. And my daughter-in-law knows about it. I said

I'm in my room because the TV is on and we interrupt with the TV and all that, so better I sit in my room because it's quiet and nobody is in here.

**Justin:** Ok, I'm probably going to call you next Monday around 2 o'clock and go over some details.

**Mahje:** What day is Monday?

**Justin:** Monday is the 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Mahje:** Oh ok, no problem.

**Justin:** Would 2 o'clock work?

**Mahje:** Yeah, that's fine.

**Justin:** Ok, I'll call you on Monday on the 20<sup>th</sup> at 2 o'clock and we'll go over any more details that I may have about how we're going to post this stuff up. I'm going to text you my email address.

**Mahje:** Ok.

**Justin:** Do you email at all?

**Mahje:** yeah, I have an email address \*\*\*. No the capital but the small letters and then \* at gmail.com.

**Justin:** Ok, give me a second to try and get that down.

**Justin and Mahje:** [reciting Mahje's personal email address]

**Justin:** Alright, let me repeat that back to make sure I got it: \*\*\* Well, I've got that down, I'm going to send you a form...are you able to print it out if I send it to you?

**Mahje:** Ok, but how can you send it by email or.... you can send it by mail, I can give you my address if you want.

**Justin:** Well let me find out if they want me to do that in my Friday call, and when I'll call you on Monday, I'll let you know. I'll email you the form, remember when I read the disclosure and you agreed to it? We just want basically a signed hard copy of that in case they need it for anything and so I'll just email that form over to you and if you guys can sign it and send it back that's great. And if not, I can probably work with them and have them send you a copy through the mail and send it back to us. Let me find out if she wants me to do that and I'll get back with you on Monday about that.

**Mahje:** Ok, no problem.

**Justin:** Thank you so much for spending your time with me, Mahje. I really appreciate it.

**Mahje:** No problem and anytime. Thanks for your help and thank you for listening to me.

**Justin:** Oh, it was my pleasure.

**Mahje:** Ok, have a good day.

**Justin:** Alright, bye, bye.

**Mahje:** Bye.