



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Immigrant Alexandria: Past, Present and Future*

Title: *Interview with Narges Maududi*

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Location of Interview: *Narges Maududi's home in Woodbridge, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Apasrin Suvanasai*

Transcriber: *Apasrin Suvanasai*

Abstract: Narges Maududi was born in 1979 in Kabul, Afghanistan. She arrived to Alexandria, Virginia in 1991 as a refugee with her immediate family. During the interview she recalls her first impressions of Alexandria, her education starting in the sixth grade at Francis C. Hammond Middle School, and her various jobs within the city. Narges explains how her family has succeeded in remaining connected with not only each other, but their traditional culture and family traditions.

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INTRODUCTIONS & EARLY MEMORIES OF HOMETOWN 00:04	
Apasrin Suvanasai	My name is Apasrin Suvanasai and I'm going to be interviewing Narges Maududi. It is June 9, 2015 and we are at Narges's home in Woodbridge, Virginia. All right, so let's start with where you were born.
Narges Maududi	I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan.
A.S.	And, how do you spell Kabul?
Narges Maududi	K-A-B-U-L.
A.S.	Okay. Can you tell us what your home was like in Kabul?
Narges Maududi	Well, growing up the first few years was really nice. We lived in— It wasn't really the city, but it was right outside the city, so it was kind of suburban. So, we lived in a home. I lived with my grandparents, my mom, my brother, my uncles, and my uncle's wife. We lived in a single family home that had I think, if I can remember correctly, seven or eight bedrooms. And, it was a pretty big house. We had the maid's quarters and then we had separate quarters for the driver. So, it was a pretty big house with a big yard. We had lime trees, you know, like the vineyards, but had them all around the house and it was a gated home; the yard was pretty gated and secluded from other people outside. It was a really nice big home.
A.S.	Sounds nice. What was the community like that you grew up in?
Narges Maududi	It was a pretty close knit community. In Afghanistan, especially in Kabul, there are two halves, you're either rich or poor. So, it was a little mix of each. Like, you have mansions that are secluded from outside and they're gated; we had a few neighbors like that. I grew up in a predominantly military family, my grandpa was a general, my dad was a pilot for the air force, my uncles were all in the military, and our neighbors were of the same background. So, they also worked for the military or were associated with the government [King Zahir Shah government.] So it was pretty much all of the same type of families and since we're Afghan people, we're pretty, what is called? We're not individualist, so we're collective and we live pretty much with the immediate family. Like, I had my grandparents, my mom, my uncle and his wife, and my other uncle that was single, and it was me and my brother. So, it was a lot of us in one house and it was like that in every other neighbor's home. People that were literally across the street were more poor, so they lived in apartment style homes. Then,

	<p>on the other side we had a strip of shops: a pharmacy, we had an ice cream parlor, we had a couple restaurants, grocery stores, so it was like, a little town within the city. I don't know if that makes sense, it's like nothing I've seen here. It was really nice, everybody knew everybody. You know, if I wandered off outside then everyone knew who I was; I would never get lost. So, it was pretty safe.</p>
<p>EARLY CHILDHOOD & EDUCATION 04:50</p>	
A.S.	<p>Let's get into your education. So, what was school like?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>So, my first school I remember, I think back in kindergarten, my brother is older than me, so he was I think in first grade. It was a really nice school, but it was split in half, so all the kids from kindergarten to sixth grade would go from like, seven [to] twelve [noon] and then at twelve o' clock you were released and then older kids would come in. So, it was a pretty big school and it was much like schools here. It was co-ed [co-educational]; we did have uniforms.</p>
A.S.	<p>What were your uniforms like?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>Just like here. I remember white stockings, little black — or was it blue? Navy blue skirt with a little sweater or you know, the white button down shirts, and the guys would wear the same thing except with pants and black shoes. We had to put our hair in either a pony tail or two braids for girls. They guys, they had to keep their hair down, nice groomed. Um, I don't remember if my brother had to wear a tie; he might have, but I can't remember. So yeah, it was much like here and we didn't have any school buses, but we had a personal driver and nanny that would drop us off and pick us up. A lot of the school kids in the neighborhood would walk back and forth and sometimes we would walk with them too. The school was pretty close.</p>
A.S.	<p>Any special friends you had throughout school that really stick in your memory?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>Yeah, I had a couple friends. I've always been really— Um, maybe because I grew up with a brother and I didn't have a sister. So, most of my friends were guys. I remember this one particular kid that I was really friends with. His name was Ayat, I think. I was like four or five years old [laughs.]</p>
A.S.	<p>How do you spell it?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>I think it's A-Y-A-T. So, he's one of the kids I remember and then,</p>

	outside school I had a lot of friends. Much of the neighborhood kids were my friends.
FAMILY TRADITIONS 07:07	
A.S.	Were there any activities that you did outside of school?
Narges Maududi	Yes, what did I do? Well, we did home tutoring; we had a tutor that would come in three times a week to tutor my brother and I. Besides playing with my brother, we played soccer. Um [short pause] that's it. We didn't watch a lot of TV; I think we were allowed maybe an hour of TV. But no, it was pretty much my brother and I playing around. My grandfather, every time he had a child born in the family he would have a tree planted for them: an apple tree. So, we had a bunch of apple trees and each one had their own, so you had to take care of it. Since I was a girl after so long, my grandfather actually planted a peach tree for me. So, I had to take care of my peach tree. And then, my aunt had left to go to Germany; she got married and she moved to Germany and I had to take care of her apple tree. So, those were our chores, water the plants, water the trees. My brother had his own tree. My uncles had their own tree. It was a tradition that he had, and he kind of just did it for his kids and then his grand kids.
A.S.	That's more of a family tradition, or—?
Narges Maududi	Yeah. It was his tradition, he came up with it. Yeah. Then the other tradition that he had was, all the sidewalks were concrete so, any time a new child was born, on your first birthday he would literally do a hand print. Like, he would make brand new concrete and yeah [child's hand would be placed in wet cement], put date of birth. So, I had one, my brother had one, my uncles had one, but there were no kids after us. One of my cousins was born, but he didn't turn one; that's when we had to leave. So, that was another tradition he had.
USSR INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN & MEMORIES OF THE WAR AT HOME 09:12	
A.S.	So, how old were you when you found out you were going to be moving?
Narges Maududi	I think I was seven. Yeah, I think I was seven years old. But, I remember when I was like, six; that's when the Soviet Union were actually in Afghanistan and that's when they were talking about retreating back to Russia, and things were becoming unstable. Politically, it was pretty bad. You would hear, not where we lived, but you would hear rockets and you would hear on the news that all the

	<p>cities and all the provinces around us and you know, certain villages were completely wiped out and it as just a matter of time before it would come to the capital. So, my grandfather, the first thing he did was, he got all the grown, adult males out of the country first. Because, they would basically capture you. Especially if you worked for the government before the Russian invasion, you were the first to get arrested. So, he tried to get all my uncles out of the country and then we left, we were the last ones. My grandparents, my mom and I were the last ones.</p>
A.S.	<p>So, as a seven year old, how were you feeling? Do you remember what you were going through, emotion wise?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>I don't know, I think for the majority of my emotions I've pretty much suppressed them because, it was really terrifying. Especially towards the end, I remember a lot of the things in school like, before things were unstable, when the environment completely changed and you knew that war was coming and people were dying. As a kid, even as an adult it was terrifying, so I think that's when I started to suppress those kinds of memories. The feelings, as far as memories, are pretty suppressed. But yeah, there were a few incidents that I remember the feelings, like, how scared and terrifying it was; but at the same time I kind of felt safe because I had my family; my mom was there and my grandparents. So, there was always this hope that you know, "We're going to survive this."</p>
<p>RELOCATING TO PAKISTAN 11:54</p>	
A.S.	<p>So, you were twelve when you actually left? Or, how old were you?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>I want to say I was eight years old when we left. Yes, so we were there for a couple years after and things got unstable. The civil wars happened; they kind of broke out in different locations. So yeah, we lived through it for a couple years and then we finally left. We left Afghanistan and we went to Pakistan, and we lived in Pakistan for a few years. So, it took us a few years living in Pakistan and then coming here.</p>
A.S.	<p>Oh, how was it in Pakistan?</p>
Narges Maududi	<p>It was nice, it was good. It was safe. It wasn't like Afghanistan, it wasn't as pretty, it wasn't as comfortable, but it was safe. Being a child, it was sort of easy for me to pick up the language, to make friends. I was going to school for a little bit, I think for a few months here and there, but I don't think we were allowed to go to their regular schools because we were immigrants. As welcoming and as nice as</p>

	they were to us, there were still a lot of regulations and restrictions on Afghans that migrated to Pakistan. Yeah, so I took some English courses and then I took some like, home economic classes, but not a regular school basically. So, it was okay, it was a transitional place for us to be. We knew it wasn't going to be permanent.
A.S.	Your whole family was with you when you went to Pakistan?
Narges Maududi	Yeah, my uncle was there: his wife, she had a baby and another one on the way. My grandparents, my mom, and my brother and I. So, we all reunited in Pakistan and we continued to live together. We rented a single family home in a really nice neighborhood. We weren't able to get any clothes or of course, furniture or anything out so the thing my grandfather made sure we always did was: whatever money he was able to come with we would stuff it on ourselves here and there so we wouldn't get caught. If they caught you with money they would kill you and take your money, there were no questions asked. Because, from the North, I think you had the Northern Alliance and from the South, you had the majority of the Talibans moving in as the Russian soldiers were moving out. It was literally like, they were pushing from the top and from the bottom and whoever got caught in the middle, that's the way [inaudible] from Pakistan, [inaudible] both of the routes. If you were caught in the fire you'd get killed. If the Taliban stopped you, they would take your money, kill you, they would torture people, rape people. People were trying to escape to safety.
COMING TO THE UNITED STATES 15:27	
A.S.	Let's talk about coming to the United States. How was that trip for you?
Narges Maududi	Really exciting. We were all really excited because everybody else in the family like, my dad's side of the family were all in the United States. My aunts, my uncles, their family was already here. I think they came in the early [19]80s, so they had already been established. You know, we were given refugee visas to come to the United States, so it was really exciting. I do remember the flight, it was the first time I had gotten on a plane, so that was really nice. Yeah, and I think I was twelve years old.
A.S.	So, Alexandria was the first place you came?
Narges Maududi	Yes, we landed at Dulles Airport, March of 1991, and my grandparents had actually gotten here a year before us. My uncle had a house in Alexandria and we moved with them when we arrived here.
FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 16:40	

A.S.	So, what were your first impressions when you came to Alexandria?
Narges Maududi	<p>Um, I remember thinking how pretty it was and how green and how clean. Because, in Kabul, that's how it was; that's how I remember it before it got really bad. Pakistan was nice; it was really hot and it was a little dirty. Especially when you got to the city, when you got to the bazaars and markets, it was kind of filthy. So, coming to the United States, especially in Alexandria, we were like, wow! The air smelled and felt so much cleaner. And the trees, since it was the beginning of spring it was really nice weather and the trees were just coming in. And, the cherry blossoms, I remember the smell of them. So, I think Alexandria is always going to be a really special place for me. Because, that was like the first place I had freedom and the family. So, there was a lot of excitement when we first got here.</p>
A.S.	That's great. So, you lived with your grandparents?
Narges Maududi	<p>Yeah, there was no family that lived in Afghanistan; we reunited here again and we lived together for a while and then after a couple years, my uncle and his kids moved out on their own and we stayed with my grandparents. Because, we were still really young; my brother was fourteen, fifteen and he had just started middle school. Did he go to middle school? I can't remember, um, yes. He went to middle school, I went to elementary school and then, I was twelve. He was fifteen I think, and then he went on to high school. So yeah, we still lived with them and my single uncle, both of them actually were single. We all lived together in a single family home in Alexandria. So, that was pretty nice.</p>
A.S.	And I guess, what were some of the easier parts about settling here in Alexandria?
Narges Maududi	<p>Some of the easier things. Let's see, definitely shopping; that was easy, that was nice. Just you know, meeting the family. We talked on the phone when I was little in Afghanistan, and in Pakistan they used to call all the time. So, it was nice to connect with them in person and you know, see how our family got larger. So, that was the exciting and easy thing.</p>
A.S.	What were some of the harder parts about settling?
Narges Maududi	<p>Just getting adjusted to the new system. Like, school—I didn't speak any English, so the hardest part for me was communicating with other people. Um, I picked it up pretty quickly, but the first few months were the hardest because I didn't want to go to school. I didn't understand what anyone was saying when they talked to me, I</p>

	<p>couldn't express to them what I wanted. Just, going through the school system and going through the testing and the placement; that was a little hard. We had to first, because we were refugees, we had to go through the welfare system. Because, that was one of their, not requirements, but that was like, the deal. Like, you're here as a refugee and we're going to support you for a few months, so you can get on your feet. Because, we came with nothing. So, that was a little hard—to go to the social services office. And, my mom didn't drive. Nobody had their license yet, so we had to take the bus and we had to take— yeah, no train, we had to take the buses. It took us a few months and I think, almost a year for my uncle and my aunt and people to get their license, to get a car, so we could get around a little bit easier. But, the good part in Alexandria was that public transportation was awesome. I remember taking the DASH [Alexandria public bus system] everywhere. [laughs]</p>
A.S.	Yeah, me too.
Narges Maududi	Yeah. [laughs] As a kid, we would take it everywhere. So, that was one of the easiest things.
A.S.	That's good. I know in Woodbridge, it's a little more difficult.
Narges Maududi	Yeah. So is Fairfax, it's very limited.
A.S.	So, besides your family welcoming you, was there any other support services that maybe you or your family had?
Narges Maududi	<p>Um, the ones that I can remember— like I said, the social services. The welfare system was a lot better than it is now, especially in Alexandria. I don't know how it is now, but from what I hear, it's actually not as good and they're not as supportive to new immigrants as when we came. They would give us resources and I think there were a couple churches that also did transitional training. Like, they would train you on where to get a bus pass, how to ride the bus, they would help you connect with English classes for adults. Like, I know they did that for my mom and my aunt and my uncles, so they were able to take English courses. I think they had some crafts and arts and things like that. They gave us pamphlets and things like that. So, those were some helpful resources. The other thing that was really helpful I know was— What was it called? The translators. Yeah, I think they still do have translators from all over the world. So, they found somebody that spoke Farsi, I think it was a Persian person that helped translate for my grandparents and for my mom when they went to social services—when they went to church. So, that was pretty helpful.</p>

STARTING SCHOOL IN ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 23:27	
A.S.	So, let's move into education. What was school like for you?
Narges Maududi	Like I said, the first few months were really tough. I didn't have any friends because I couldn't communicate with people to be friends with. So, I kind of felt a little bit alone. There were a few other people that were kind of the same. There were a couple Afghan girls and there was a Pakistani guy who I could communicate with because I had learned how to speak Urdu. So, I started becoming friends with them and then I started to be more comfortable. So, as I picked up the language it started to become a little easier, but the first few months was really hard. Just doing homework or even reading was pretty tough.
A.S.	Do you remember what grade it was when you started?
Narges Maududi	I started at the end of sixth grade.
A.S.	And, what school did you go to?
Narges Maududi	[William] Ramsey Elementary.
A.S.	And so, moving on to middle school, was that easier for you?
Narges Maududi	It was. It was a lot easier because the same cohort moved with me to Francis C. Hammond [Middle School]; it was seventh and eighth grade. Things got a little bit better, I started to make friends. I spoke the language, so it was easier to communicate and do my homework and learn. So, it kind of just, came together.
A.S.	And your brother, was he in the same school with you?
Narges Maududi	He was, but when I got there he actually left to go to high school. Yeah, because he's older than me. He was actually two grades ahead of me.
A.S.	Moving on to high school, what high school did you go to?
Narges Maududi	So, after Francis C. Hammond I went to Minnie Howard for ninth grade. Then, at the end I was supposed to go to T.C. Williams [High School], my brother was in T.C., so were all my cousins. That's when we moved to the other side of Alexandria and I went to West Potomac High School.
A.S.	So, how was your high school experience?
Narges Maududi	It was nice, it was good, yeah. I had to make new friends because I left all my friends in T.C., both my brother and I had to move. It was a little hard because I started there in tenth grade and high school at

	West Potomac started in ninth grade; most of the kids were already friends from childhood or you know, previous grades and I was just coming in. I remember the cliques. It was really hard to kind of, find where I belonged. Yeah, and I'm not a very cliquey person, so I didn't want to be a part of that, that's not me, I don't want to exclude myself from the rest of people. But, I made a lot of friends, it was nice. Typical high school experience.
A.S.	So, did you work at all in high school?
Narges Maududi	I did, I started working. I was really anxious—more curious than anxious to work. My mom worked at McDonalds [restaurant], so I got a special work permit from school because if you were, I think, under sixteen or something at the time, you had to get a special permit. I had to get a permit from my counselor; if you had good grades and you were able to handle it, you could work I think, ten hours a week or something. So, I did that and I worked at McDonalds for a few months. I liked it and I had a couple friends that worked there too, so it was more for fun. And then, when I got to eleventh and twelfth grade I worked at a bank as a teller after school and I had my own car.
A.S.	Wow! [laughs]
Narges Maududi	Yeah, I bought my first car when I was seventeen years old, in the twelfth grade.
A.S.	That's unusual.
Narges Maududi	Yeah, one of my aunt's husband had to co-sign for me. But yeah, I bought a brand new car; it was a little red car, two-door. So, I bought that. I was really happy. [both laugh]
A.S.	Was your family really proud of you too?
Narges Maududi	They were. My grandmother used to always sit outside and wait for me. Every red car she'd see, she'd wave. [both laugh] I was like, no grandma, don't wave. So yeah, they were really proud. I was proud too. I was actually excited that I had a car because all my friends had cars.
A.S.	[speaking at the same time] But, you bought your own.
Narges Maududi	Yeah, I had to buy my own. [both laugh] Yeah, there were no hand-me-down cars in my family. Everyone was just starting out so—. But yeah, it was good because it really taught me a lot of responsibility; as far as paying my payments, my insurance, um, I had a gas card I remember. So yeah, it was a good start. I'm glad I did it.

COLLEGE & WORK 28:56	
A.S.	So, moving out of high school, what were your plans, what did you do?
Narges Maududi	My plan was to go to college and it didn't quite work out that way because we ended up moving out of my grandparents' home. My brother and I, we were older now, so we wanted to have our own privacy. With my mom, all three of us moved, and I think we moved to—. I got a job at a hotel as a front desk agent, so we moved to Herndon to be close to my job, and my brother ended up working at the airport at that time. So I just got kind of busy with working and trying to support myself and support my family, and I just kind of got stuck working. There was no opportunity or free time to go to school. So, I didn't even really think about it. I knew I always wanted to go to school, but just didn't have the opportunity, so I just ended up working full time. Actually, at one point I had two jobs because I refused to be on welfare. I got my mom a job at one of the clothing stores— I don't know if you remember, Frugal Fannies?
A.S.	Yeah.
Narges Maududi	Yeah, it was a big department store. So, she worked there and I worked two jobs and my brother worked, but my brother also went to school. We decided that he should go to school first and when he was done, I would have a job and go to school. So, it was just the way things worked out and yeah, before I knew it years went by and I got promoted; I had more responsibilities at work, so I became a supervisor and then I became a manager. By the time I was nineteen, I was managing the entire hotel and I just kind of got stuck. I liked it, I really did and I was making really good money. I liked the responsibility and it worked out fine.
A.S.	So, you did go to school, how did you eventually get back in?
Narges Maududi	Eventually, I left; we moved back to Alexandria and I got a job in the City and I worked there for a few years, two years I think. So, a couple years I worked there and I just got really tired of the hours. I was doing a lot of hours, working at a hotel. At this hotel, I was a sales manager and I had a lot of accounts, it was really a lot of work. I just decided it would be time to go to school, so I enrolled at NOVA [Northern Virginia Community College] and I did it part-time, like two classes a semester just to get back into it. It's pretty nerve racking to get back to school after so many years. I was out of school for like, five years before I decided to go back. I liked it, I really did. I've

	<p>always liked school, when I went to NOVA I actually liked the whole experience: sitting in a classroom, learning, meeting new people, even the grades, I was just so proud. I was like, yes! I'm going to school and working. So, I did that for a couple years and then I stopped going to school because I got another job and I had a lot of responsibilities.</p> <p>I came back to work in Alexandria for a nonprofit and I was there for ten years, so it took me a couple years of being there to then go back and enroll again. So, I went back to NOVA and this time I did it a little faster because I was earning more, so I didn't need to work two jobs or work as hard. And, they were helping me with tuition, so that was really nice. They were really pushing me, you know, "You have to go to school." I was literally the only person in that organization that didn't have a degree, even our receptionist had a master's degree because they just would not hire anybody with less than that. It's an educational nonprofit for mental health, so they pride themselves on having really educated people in their office. So, my director made an exception. She actually bought my contract because I started there as a temp [temporary employee], and she bought my contract from the temp agency and hired me. I think she got some slack for it because our executive director was like, "You can't hire anybody that doesn't have—" "She was like, "Oh no, she's going to school, she's working on her degree." She would tell me, "you need to go because I'm literally putting myself on the line." I was like, okay, If I want to keep my job I have to go back to school.</p>
A.S.	She saw something in you. [both laugh]
Narges Maududi	<p>Yeah, she did. She said, "I mean, I can hire somebody with their master's degree and they'll do the same thing, but you've proven to me that you do really good work" and she really liked me. So, yeah, she became my mentor. To this day, she's my mentor. So yeah, I decided to go to school, I did it part-time and I got my associate degree from NOVA in social science of psychology. Right after I got that, I transferred to George Mason [University] and in a couple of years I finished my bachelor's degree in psychology and I minored in neuroscience. So, everybody was really proud. It was hard, you know, working full-time and going to school. The last two semesters I did full-time, just to finish and I was working full-time. So, I was pretty excited. I just wanted to finish, I just felt like it took so long, and it did. It took me almost eight years to get a four year degree, but it doesn't matter, I did it. [laughter]</p>
A.S.	Yeah, a lot of people are going down that path.

Narges Maududi	Yeah, It's just hard now, the way the economy is and getting financial support for school. So, my school was paid partly by myself and partly by my job. The organization I worked for was really good about paying a percentage of it. Yeah, I graduated and then a year later I decided to get my masters.
A.S.	Now you're in a master's program, right?
Narges Maududi	Yeah, I actually got into a Ph.D. program, but it would just take so long and I wasn't ready to be in school again for another seven years. So, I decided to break it up. So, I'll get my master's from the current program I'm in at USC and then after that I plan on continuing to get my Ph.D. I'm actually researching different Ph.D. programs right now. So, as soon as I'm done, I think I'm going to go back part-time and work full-time.
A.S.	What are your plans after this?
Narges Maududi	Well, my ultimate long term goal or plan for my career is to have my own private practice as a therapist. So, it's better and more respected and you obviously make more money if you have a Ph.D. rather than, you know, a MSW [master's of social work] or some license that you have to work under another psychologist or psychiatrist. So, I want to have my own private practice, hopefully. [both laugh]
A.S.	Um, USC is University of—?
Narges Maududi	Southern California.
FAMILY TRADITIONS AND CULTURE 37:19	
A.S.	So, I want to know a little more about family life and cultural traditions. If we could back track [laughs] a little bit more into your youth and just talk about how your family was able to stay connected, if you were all in the same area. I know you lived with your family, but were there others in the area?
Narges Maududi	Yes, of course. So, I think if it was a movie you would see the physical change in the family dynamic and how culturally and what is it called [short pause] just, how we all evolved and assimilated to the, so to speak, the American or the Western culture and still keep some of our own culture, our own traditions. So, it's a little bit [inaudible] from what it used to be. I remember in Afghanistan you celebrated all the holidays, you celebrated all the important dates. That was because you had a lot of time on your hands, you know, you had a couple people working in the family and that would support the entire household. We didn't have a mortgage because the house was paid for

	<p>by my great grandfather and passed down to us. A lot of the things that were provided were by the military organization that my grandfather worked for. So, he had his benefits and there were a lot of benefits growing up in Afghanistan. Just, having all those things that you know, people here have passed down through generations and they just have it a little bit easier; It's just easier to transition from one generation to another generation and carry on your traditions and culture. So for us, it was like that, but when we moved here it completely flipped because now, we were the traditional people coming here and blending in with the family that was here. My younger cousins that grew up here, they had their own traditions: they celebrated Christmas, they celebrated Thanksgiving, and those are new holidays for us. They celebrated New Years and they didn't celebrate our New Years, so like, all those things took us a few years to combine. We became like, a blended family. So, we adopted a lot of the Western or American holidays just because it's happening, and we live here and we have to celebrate those things. It's just an excuse to get together and be with family. So, then we started celebrating, not celebrating Christmas for the religious purposes but just for the holiday. And then, we celebrated Thanksgiving; we have full Thanksgiving dinners now. It took us I want to say, five, six years to get to that point. But, it was like a physical change, we could see things getting added and things disappearing, like other Afghan traditions. We do celebrate our religious holidays, which are two of them each year [Eid] and we celebrate our New Years, but we don't celebrate the same way we do the American or the Western New Year. We live here, so it's a more physical thing like, everybody else is doing it so it's a bigger celebration than the Afghan New Year, which is in March. So, we kind of saw the change in that. My grandparents, and then after they passed, my mom and the rest of the family did a really good job at keeping everything on track. Like, this is New Years and this is Afghan New Years. These are the holidays that we're going to celebrate. And even if we didn't do the traditional things, at least we got together as family. Because, there were a lot of different things we did during our holidays; there were certain celebrations and there were parades and all of these things that nobody does here. So, we had the New Year parade, we had the Eid parade, we had other independent parades; things that I actually don't remember anymore. So, there were a lot of celebrations but, I think we've done a good job at combining those and remembering those.</p>
A.S.	So, when you were at home, do you remember any particular things your mom did to keep traditional culture?

<p>Narges Maududi</p>	<p>Well, yeah, I think one of the things that I still try to do is cook. You know, Afghan cooking, those kinds of things. My mom always had dinner ready and every so often, she would have people come over. It was traditionally like, once a week that we would get together. So, those were the things that she did to keep the family together and keep the traditions going. And then, for the holidays we would all plan to go to dinner or get together; that became a tradition and even Thanksgiving became a tradition, it's a pretty big deal. We have turns, everyone has a certain dish they make and every year they make the same dish. They bring the same stuff and despite where we get together, whose house, we always do the same thing. I want to say like, ten years ago that became a tradition of our family. We don't have Thanksgiving like Americans do, but at the same time it's become a part of our tradition. I think it's more a tradition of eating. [both laugh]</p>
<p>A.S.</p>	<p>Yeah.</p>
<p>Narges Maududi</p>	<p>But, that's the thing, a lot of our cultural gatherings and traditional things we do are around food. Food is a major component of every gathering. So, I think that's one of the things that come to mind when you ask how we kept things together. If you provide food, we'll be there. [laughs]</p>
<p>A.S.</p>	<p>What are some of your favorite dishes?</p>
<p>Narges Maududi</p>	<p>My favorite dish that my mom made and I guess this is a part of our tradition or family culture; every person in my family, they are really good at one or two dishes that they make. Like, they know how to make it and it's amazing. For me, my mom's brown rice or white rice, she made it the best out of anybody. And, my aunts have certain things they make and it's so good. So, they're always like, "You make that dish, that's your signature dish." Everybody has a signature dish. So, my favorite was the white rice my mom made and we ate it so much because that's all my brother would eat.</p>
<p>A.S.</p>	<p>Did your mom primarily teach you how to cook or did you learn from other members of the family?</p>
<p>Narges Maududi</p>	<p>No, I think I learned mostly from my mom. But, growing up when I was really young in Afghanistan, we had cooks, so we were never really in the kitchen. But, when we came here I would watch my mom cook, and sometimes when I got married and lived with my husband, I would call her and ask for recipes. So, that's how I learned most of my cooking: just growing up watching her. I didn't remember</p>

	watching her, but, when I wanted to make something I just knew how to make it. It's kind of weird because there's no written recipe, she wasn't like, "Oh, come watch me make this, you have to learn how to make this." I just picked it up by watching her and helping her in the kitchen. My grandmother never cooked so I didn't learn anything from her. She just didn't cook; she didn't want to cook, she didn't want to be in the kitchen. And now that my mom has passed, I'll call my aunts and ask, 'how do you make this again?' And, they'll give me the recipe so I'm learning some things from them that I don't know already. Unfortunately, I don't cook as much as I'd like to, there's just not a lot of time.
A.S.	You mentioned your mom passed, do you mind if I ask how long ago?
Narges Maududi	That was two years ago. So, this August it's going to be two years.
MEETING HER HUSBAND 46:49	
A.S.	And, you mentioned your husband. How long have you been married for?
Narges Maududi	We've been married for five years.
A.S.	How'd you guys meet?
Narges Maududi	We met— [laughs] we met in a chat room. [both laugh] I think it was AOL [America Online internet service], it was eleven years ago. It was a blog or a chat room about cruises. He had just come back from a cruise and I was going on a cruise with one my best friends, and so that's how we got to talking. We started talking about the cruise and he was telling me how their cruise was. We were going on the same cruise line so, that's how we started talking and we were talking for a few months before we met in person. We were friends for a few months after that, like a year, and then we started dating, and yeah, the rest is history. [both laugh]
A.S.	What's his name?
Narges Maududi	Ahmed, A-H-M-E-D, but he goes by Joey. Yeah, he was raised in New York, so he came here from Afghanistan when he was two—three, three years old. He grew up in New York, so they started calling him a Joey because he looked like a Joey, like a little baby kangaroo. [both laugh] Plus, in New York you're either: Joey, Eddie, or Sammie. [both laugh] Those are the nicknames for New Yorkers. Five years, we've been married for five years.
REMINISCENT THOUGHTS ABOUT ALEXANDRIA 48:43	

A.S.	Anything else that you want to mention or talk about?
Narges Maududi	[Pause] I do miss working in Alexandria. I worked in Old Town [Alexandria] for ten years and you know, I told my husband, I told Joey the other day, if we ever decided to buy a house in Virginia, I would like to hopefully buy a house in Old Town. That would be nice; I feel like that's one of the places in Alexandria that hasn't really changed, it has stayed consistent. I know they've done a lot of clean up; there are some streets that they've built new homes and new stores and things like that, but I feel like it's still got that historic feel that I really like, it's a historic town. The rest of Alexandria has changed dramatically over the years. My husband still works in Alexandria, so every time I go see him, I can see the changes. The streets, stores, shopping centers and demographically.
REMINISCENT THOUGHTS ABOUT AFGHANISTAN 50:18	
A.S.	What's the main thing that you really miss about home? Maybe, do you want to go back and visit?
Narges Maududi	Um, until now, no. I've never really thought about even visiting. We don't have a lot of people—home as in Alexandria or home as in Afghanistan?
A.S.	[both laugh] Afghanistan, yeah.
Narges Maududi	No, I don't think so. I mean, I don't have a reason to visit. I've been thinking about it the past couple of weeks because my mother in law went back to visit, she's actually there now. She's sending me pictures and videos so, it looks nice. There are a lot of new buildings and people are coming around to actually enjoy their life and feel a little bit safe. I'm happy for that, but no, I have my aunt- my mom's sister lives there, but I haven't seen her since I was five years old. So, I don't feel any kind of hope to go there. I think my husband, Joey, doesn't remember anything in Afghanistan and he wants to go visit. He has a lot of family there that's actually gone back, flown from the U.S. to work there, reclaim their land and homes. But, I wouldn't mind visiting my old home and you know, roaming the streets to see what it's like now. See, if I can remember anymore, that would be nice because I still have a lot of fond memories. And, I do that in Alexandria because after living there, that's home. I do that, I drive around Alexandria and I'm like, let me see if that home is still there. I still have a dream home; It's right by Alexandria Hospital. You know Seminary Road that goes out towards Old Town? There are those big homes; one of them is my dream home. I want to buy that house one

	day. So, I still like driving around sometimes if I make it out to that area, because my aunt and my cousin, they both live out in Alexandria so, I drive around and see what's changed.
A.S.	So, I just assumed you would associate home with Afghanistan, but you've really grown into Alexandria too. You've spent—.
Narges Maududi	I did! Yeah, the majority of my time in the United States. We first came there so, that was my first home. I think wherever you first land, that's your next home. When we came here, there was no expectation of Afghanistan ever surviving or ever being again. There was no hope to go back. So, it was like, the end. We left and it's behind you and you're never looking back. For a long time, that was the case so, Alexandria became home. And yeah, so when you said home I had to clarify which home. [both laugh]
A.S.	Yeah, I understand.
Narges Maududi	Yeah, people ask me where I'm from and I say Alexandria.
A.S.	Well, thank you so much Narges for sitting down and talking with me today.
Narges Maududi	Thank you for being interested in what I had to say.