

01:01:08:00

J: Um you know as you know the conflict started when the as the Zionist organization started to work toward the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine and basically what that meant was cleansing of the ethnic population my dad as like many other people in 1947 looked for um a ??? to fight this aggression and they created what was called the Salvation army and he along with other men joined the Salvation Army the problem with the SA was it was run by an outside power Syria mostly it sponsored Palestinian powers they were not there own they didn't have their own Palest. Identity in trying to define the land so they were under higher authorities he joined them and he left his family at that time he had just been married for ? years he didn't have any kids until 1947 to be exact During the height of the crisis in 1947 he had a child a baby child he left home to join the army he was the only boy if I could say that in the family my uncle my uncle was a handicap so for my grandfather it was his only boy left home and now they would without I don't want to provide for the support

03:08

As the fighting started they disconnected from the family he was disconnected form his family completely and the family ended up being forced out of their home in what the time was north Palestine and they ended up settling in an area in South Lebanon ? is the name of the area actually my other uncle my aunts husband started looking for my dad was no where to be found he basically started asking question that lead him to a military barrack in Syria and in Syria he looked and asked for him at that military center and they were able to be reintroduced at that military center that's how my dad was able to connect back with family in refugee status now in Lebanon at the time would be in the southeast Lebanon the first area they settled in then from there

04:34

Palestinians were forced into Lebanon around about 200,000 Palestinian's in Lebanon they started settling in different areas they settled in many camps in the case of my family they settled first for a very short period of time in a historical town on Lebanon called Balbat it's a very it has very old ruins Roman ruins and from there um I'm not sure how they settled there and from there I'm talking about a year or two they moved to North Lebanon where I was born in an Palestinian refugee camp that is called NAHR EL-BARED It's named after a river, they settled in a river basically it's called the cold river if you translate it and that's how they called it the NAHR EL-BARED camp and they settled there since 1950 or so until no until today.

Q: Describe family.

PAUSE for light readjustment

06:40

J: My name is Jamal Kanj I was born in a refugee camp called NAHR EL-BARED camp in Lebanon it's located north of Lebanon it's the second largest camp approx. at the time when I was there last time which was over 25-26 years ago was about 15.000 it has expanded since then I was third kid in the family basically we are 6 boys and one girl I

cam to the states back in 1970 December of 1977 to be exact and have been back tot he camp occasionally so I've been in touch with my family there and the overall situation in the camp.

Q: Memories of the camp

08:00

J: You know I have to say growing up in the camp or any poor environment you really don't know the other side you don't know what you are missing so in that sense I didn't feel like I was missing a lot especially when you have the family support around you being your parent and your brothers and your sister and your larger family but I living in the camp going back now since I know the other side um the camp was basically the people in the camp were not allowed to build concrete roofs on their houses it was corrugated metal and asbestos cement actually, corrugated asbestos cement roof cover uh and this was shelter if I could describe it as such and I remember after a very strong storm we lived in the hole and we would stay there during the storms thunder storms and things of that nature. ??? I remember our neighbors actually were asleep and the corrugated metal basically disappeared from the top basically the sky became really the cover it was interesting experience you don't think of it as such these days because this is your life this is what you have to struggle with school was the same thing when it would get really cold they would let us go home because the schools did not have heating devices they didn't have power actually I don't remember any class having power or lights in it so

10:04

there was not heating in the classes and when there was a window that's broken a breeze could come in they would let us go home the classes typically average about 40-50 students 2 or 3 students in a bench and it was this is what I'd have to say schools to Palestinian that were living in the refugee camp were the most important product if I could define it as a product because there is no other option for them to get out of their life, refugee life other than education through learning so parents emphasized on the kids to learn and excel in schools if you look at the product if I could define it as such again the product was one of the highest products in north Lebanon I mean I remember students Palestinian students being the 1<sup>st</sup> in their classes whether it was within the Palestinian refugee camp because you had to be there in the refugee camps and the UNRWA which is the United Nations Relief Work Agency used to run this school so we had to be there until the end of the school and those classes it was all Palestinian s from refugee camps and the high school we would go to was a mixed Palestinian Lebanese school the Lebanese tend to go to French schools and Palestinians tend to go to English schools so even the Lebanese side of the school system the highest in the class would typically be Palestinians just because of the emphasis Palestinian parents had on their kids was the only way out of this misery was through school they don't have any other means of living whether is land manufacturing or business so is was an important emphasis in our life and when you are growing up it's not an easy fun thing to go any study I remember when

12:32

I was growing up I would be sitting and reading or doing homework and it is so noisy from the wind and breeze it really got to me thinking in those day I do remember incidents where I put the book aside and looked up and just thinking what is this life why is this kind of life being imposed on us I really had the lack of what the other option is it was interesting at that time to think if it in those days.

Q: What were the answers to the questions you had as a child in the camp?

13:59

J: You know I was in the I believe in the 4<sup>th</sup> grad or the 5<sup>th</sup> grad so around 10-11 years old and studying and like I say I knew it was my only option out of this life was to study and be good at school I really didn't find any regular available answer the only answer I was able to find was that I was Palestinian born to a Palestinian family that someone though that they deserve our land and imposed on me a life in the refugee camp that is the only explanation I Was able to find of course it came as unjust as it can be for a children to deal with that issue it was a really interesting period in my life.

Q: Sense of yourself as Palestinian not Lebanese?

15:12

J: You know when you're born in a refugee camp really a refugee camp was like a little Palestine by it's own the refugee camp it is a mix of many towns and villages so all you know as you grow up is really being a Palestinian just misplace or displaced into this area so in away you feel like it's little Palestine in a refugee status. In Lebanon it was reinforced everyday by the fact that we were excluded from the overall Lebanese society not because of racist basis or anything but because of life by the refugee camp being run by the UN basically s owe had UN that used run our school system we had UN that provided for our medical clinics we had UN that employed Palestinians to clean garbage to collect garbage from the camp so we were a very distinct identity because of our daily rituals it helped us grown as children to see we were a distinct identity from the Lebanese people and that was reinforced by the official palaces of the Lebanese government Palestinian were not allowed t have a job in Palestine especially a professional job you had t get a permit to work outside the camp and Palestinians were hardly granted those permits the only jobs Palestinians were able to really participate in were jobs with the Un such as teachers at clinic or garbage collectors or work in the fields in the vast fields farming field in north Lebanon basically go can collect fruit and vegetables so all of these activities together gives you the overall picture of how the Palestinian identity was reinforced in you as a child.

Q: 1968 PLO came to camp.

18:07

J: In 1968-69 I believe the summer of 69 I could be 68 I could be off by a little bit I remember the day vividly first I have to say before the PLO or the Palestine Liberation organization when I say PLO it was only small groups that formed the PLO they started to move into clandestine basically into the camp uncover, undercover, underground we

had started to feel the presence of the Palestinian organizations and I remember vividly the day I was at the beach fishing and at that time we fished using dynamite basically it was illegal but us kids we were able to get away with it I can remember standing on the beach looking for fish and a kid came running and said the revolution started I it's a very strong feeling I have to say at that time to you can you stop... I didn't know I was going to get emotional honestly.

I was at the beach and when they said the revolution was coming it's a happy moment because it represented a freedom to the Palestinians to the camps from the Lebanese security forces I went running along the river which became the divide between the camp and the Lebanese army and the first thing I vividly remember was an older guy who was later killed he was entrenched behind the graveyard which was by the river and he was entrenched there with a gun defending the camp (emotional) it was a different feeling because this was the first time...

20:57

It was a tough time really looking back at it how it came from being under the security force and police liberated and being a Palestinian camp not just with an identity, but self run and again it really ?? the Palestinian movement towards the camps exactly soon after that all the camps were cleared out of Lebanese forces and then all of Lebanon and self run by the Palestinians that did not happen easily we had the 4<sup>th</sup> war between the Palestinian and Lebanese forces that was settled with what was called the ?? Accord between 68 and 69 the CC Accord basically regulated the relationship Between the Lebanese forces and the Palestinians in the camp which was basically life in the camp was maintained in the camp the way they were in 1969.

24:48

(Takes a break)

Q: To 1972

25:45

J: Back in 1972 in September the I don't have a good memory we were kids and I wanted to go meet a girl who was from outside the town which was outside of the camp really which was more attractive um and I was as we were going to the place we were going to meet I rented a bike you know we didn't afford bike I rented a bike and go for 1/2 a mile and come back and continue our way to this river besides the river the beach and as I was riding the bike I was just leaving the city on the edge of the camp and then I heard plane humming and it was around 4:15 in the afternoon which was unusual we do have some Lebanese planes fly but usually in the morning so for that time it was kind of unusual I just did this to look over the plane and when I did this on that side of me was the other side of the river and I saw the biggest explosion in my life coming out of the plane and I realized at that time there was an air strike on the camp I turned the bike when I take it back to the place where I rented it and I couldn't ride it I was basically running with it and there were channels in the camp and all I remember is you know the shrapnel falling in the channels and making bubbles and all I thought about was a movie you know as a kids you see movies and you see how they shoot at somebody and how you see bubble but they were really trying to shoot me and it gave me a bigger determination like they

were trying to get me so I kept running and I said he's not going to get me and after running away and forcing me to survive that's really how I looked at it. That was one of the only connections. I was the only kids out of all my brothers that wasn't home and my mom and dad were worried that I may have been in the midst of the air strike that air strike I lost a friends of mine he was with me in a scout actually he was like and also I knew another child who was about 6 years old at the time a brother of a friend of mine who was who never made it we never found him basically rockets were as big as 6 feet tall I still remember the ones that were not exploded that was listening to the BBC that evening and BBC was a major source of news for us I was listening to the BBC and it said there was an air strike at a military base near NAHR EL-BARED camp and I was going to be in the so called military base basically it's an areas where either sea and the river where kids go in the September time its great it's beautiful it's cool and we go and play

30:00

and that was the only really um it was really the only thing in that area so it really gives you a sense of the media of how the media could not telling the truth about thing always have a justification to kill Palestinians either to retaliate or because military bases are too close to civilian I would have to say in my own experience that was mostly more r less the Israeli wanted to terrify Palestinians wanted to basically force Palestinian to give one thing to accept as it is today this is really part of a long term policy that started in 1948 they wanted Palestinians that they are a defeated people and they can't do anything about it and it's part of the personal struggle between the Palestinians and the Israeli's on the other side.

(Adjustments)

Q: Changes from PLO

33:00

J: The Palestinian camps basically they became a more active to the Israelis after they were liberated from the Lebanese and self run entities that basically really reinforced the Palestinian identity and made it a more public identity and that became a threat to the Israeli's of course defeating the presence of the PLOs and the various groups became a priority to the Israeli government so that in a way put he camps in the forefront of the struggle against Israel.

Q: Bombing

34:20

J: You know running away from the bombing basically I have to say one thing I haven't really forgotten was the size of the explosion that I saw it's as big as I can remember the only thing I could compare it to was the size of the bombs in Vietnam at the time I was a kids at 14 years old but IW as really was politically aware I used to follow Vietnam and other places and it was the first Vietnamese experience but in a camp seeing these big planes throwing bombs for a foreign experience for a the time there is no question about

it but something really that goes beyond the entire fight it goes deep into you human identity into you as a human the lust for survival becomes more important than even being scared it really passes the scary part and becomes survival I really don't know unless you've been in that position you know what I am talking about I think it's unless you've been in that position it was really a survival moment more than a scary moment sometimes people would get scared and sit and give up when it reached that level of life and death it goes beyond being too scared to deal with the issue I would have to say running away and trying to be safe from the area was to me my main focus not being scared of terrified or anything it was really being able to survive beyond this incident this is what I want to concentrate on being able to live again.

Q: What was your relationship to Israeli's/ Jews?

37:00

J: You know really it's very important to understand that the Palestinian movement was a secular movement made my the PLO and we as people in the camps were educated really to differentiate between Zionism and Judaism we always though of Zionism as a political movement for the Jews and Judaism is a religion for the Jews and we were educated to see those difference and I think it was important for a secular movement to educate us and to help us to understand those two differences b/c the PLO called for this that the secular Palestine state lives alone basically and I was able to really see the lines between the two groups between the Zionist and Israeli as I great up I educated my self to understand the Zionist movement from the beginning that in the late 18080 with the establishment of the Zionist organization to today you have to understand those two differences and there were many Jews during that period that opposed the creation of the state f Israel the Zionist state at the expense of Palestinians even present day Jewish religious political organizations that are even a part of Israel today they did not recognize even the political side of Zionism until the establishment of Israel in 1947 They refused to accept the Zionist political call for a Jewish stated because they always felt the establishment of the Jewish state would have to come with the coming of the messiah so we really felt and educated our self to be able to distinguish between Jews Zionist and Israelis having said that growing up being at the receiving end of Israeli aggression in Lebanon and of course seeing and observing the Israeli aggression in the west bank and Gaza I have to say I have very strong feelings towards Israeli's as being my enemy and to the point that I would have to say I almost felt toward them the same way Jews would feel toward a Nazi the Nazi would want to eliminate the Jewish identity the Zionist to me as a Palestinian that's exactly what they did they wanted to eliminate the Palestinian identity whether they be Muslim or Christian to me there is a very great similarity between the two the period in history were totally different but I think the Zionist in the 40s and 30s were able to advance their call against Jews the Zionist in today's history would really do the same but the period of time won't accept it the period of time is totally different when the Nazi existed it's different than that period of time.

Q:

41:13

J: Like I said I would look at them through their practices which denied represented the enemy to me as a Palestinian basically they represented the negation to the character I carried as a Palestinian as a human being.

Q: Stealing home

41:50

J: You have to look at Israel as a country that first tried to steal my identity which I tried to preserve they stole my home my homeland they really stole my childhood where I would have been raised like a normal kid so when you look at and take that all into consideration I'm going to look at Israel as that entity that denied me my human existence and therefore it is my enemy.

Q: Doris persuasion into dialog.

42:43

J: You know I'm trying to remember some details my friend of mine name Doris Bittar called me one day and she said if you would like to join this dialog group we call it a Jewish Palestinian dialog group uh and she said that we have had previous experience with dialog by the way with more Lefty Jews and she said these are more mainstream Jewish Americans and these are the ones we need to work with and I have to say two things I was there was some apprehension about this one of the apprehensions was do I really want to do this again so I want to talk about my experience listen to their experience and what is there out of it and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and I would say this was a big influence in me joining the group when you have a friend and a woman it is really hard to turn her down it is a cultural thing and here culture played a big role you know whether I was reluctant or not it becomes a secondary issue I should do it for Doris and do the dialog I have to say there would be a major push especially considering my past experience with a dialog group.

Q: You don't tell everyone you are in the group.

44:45

J: You know it's very hard issue to talk about that you being in a dialog group with Israeli's and Jewish Americans and I want to correct one thing I really don't want to call them Jewish Americans or Israelis or some of them are Israeli's I want to call them Pro-Israel Jews because I really wouldn't want to dialog with a Jew I mean the Japanese or a German to the word Jew is another human being so there is no conflict for me to talk about so I want to call them Pro-Israel Jews, maybe I could call them Zionist and that is it a tricky subject to talk about to talk about other former Palestine it's really an issue you don't want to talk about because they might not understand what the group is about and view it as an accommodation to the Israeli and their policies against the Palestinians which it's not so you would have to start explaining a lot to the Palestinian or those who would oppose the dialog you would have to explain too much (PLANE & Wife comes out)

48:48

J: You know dialog it really has it's own definition in language itself and people when they hear the word dialog and dialog with potential enemies there is no room to dialog with an enemy because they don't look at it as dialog they look at it as if you were negotiating possibly you are trying to accommodate their policies and dialog is really being able to be yourself and being able to present your case and being able to disagree and being able to also and required to listen and that's what's interesting about the dialog it became after awhile it's been about 3 years it's becoming almost really like a social gathering where we are able to exchange ideas and agree and disagree and listen to each other when we don't agree with each other and that's really what dialog is even though the perception can be perceived totally different as though you are accommodating those you may think of as your enemy and I'm sure the same experience from the Zionist the Zionist would experience from fellow Zionist on the other side so it's a struggle between those who want to talk and discuss and those who feel as if it is worth less or there is no need those who disagree with this dialog. For me the most important thing that came out of this dialog was I was able to have pro Israeli Jews see me as a Palestinian not just some abstract object but as a human being with real history and feelings and really explain a lot of the misrepresentation in my history and identity to me that is a great success and even if it was limited to that room to that group of people the same thing I think I was able to see Israeli's not as an abstract enemy as humans too that I really can live with or talk to and frankly if I come up with one thing from this dialog it reinforces my belief as a human being that we are able to live in one entity where we are treated as us as human not as Jews not as Christians not as Muslims but as humans with a human identity and I feel more strongly that if I was able to find that in a small living room I should be able to create that condition in the larger living room and that whatever you want to call it Palestine Israel Pal-Israel call it whatever you want to call it give it any name you want I feel that humans would be able to dominate that conflict and see themselves as such from the small living room to the larger living room.

J: Dialog to me is being able to move it from the small living room to the larger living room which is building the nation so people can be looked at as humans not Jews Muslims or Christians and we are able and would be able to build a nation where we can live peacefully and call it any name that you want Palestine, Israel Pal-Israel just come with a name I think the name become immaterial when people have more in common than they don't have.

53:56

You know I have learned a lot about Jewish life and history not just from the academic side which I think I can claim I had enough of but I really moved it into a smaller setting when I moved to a person the individual and I understand now more than before the sting feelings they have towards their identity as Jews than I did before I've had my own feelings there is no questions about that as to how I define Judaism as a religion and how they define Judaism as a culture and a national identity that would have been the biggest conflict I came up with through those meetings I have a much better appreciation now to the Jewish side of the story when it come to defining their identity.



55:14

J: No we are becoming to a philosophical discussion

55:41

J: Martin is a Jewish refugee from Europe. It's interesting to listen to his story of moving from one place to another I believe from the Czech to France it could be....

56:21

Looking to Martin and his experience moving from one place to another for survival as a human being independent of being Jew Muslim or Christian there are a lot of similarities between myself and someone like Martin really followed his life or drew a map for his survival by moving from one city one town or other country to another where he found survival and was able to settle physically emotionally and all that and I see a lot of commonality from my experience and Martin and I see actually the common enemy between myself and Martin I think nit the common enemy is that entity that wanted to deny his existence as a Jew which is Germany at the time I have the same enemy which is Israel and Zionist to deny my identity and we were are able to define the common entity even though we many not see them as common we found the enemy that created the hardship in our life I have to say about Martin he is one of the few members in our dialog group that we find more we agree more than disagree on and I think his life gave him totally different exposure to himself to value himself as a human being more than the pro-Israel Jews he can see that same type of life with the Palestinian life he is refreshing within the group because he has his own experience he can talk about it where by he can feel with the experiences of others not just an abstract but he has the experience himself.

59:19

Miko is an Israeli and I think he would say a Zionist he embodied within the group he is a defined Israeli Martin is a defined Jew but Miko is an Israeli he embodied the proof to me that we can live as humans and look beyond how we are define whether it be our culture or our religions and he really is that I mean I think my biggest disagreement with Miko is the fact that he is an Israeli and I am a Palestinian I think that would have been the biggest but as a human being he embodies and I hope I would on the Palestinian side our ability to live together as human beings beyond the definition and our really able to experience our kinship beyond the emotions we all bring to the discussion.

02:01:08:00

You know I think it becomes a prioritization in my family and in the case of Martin's family for my wife she can't just sit an talk about her experience and listen to others talk about their experience I really don't know what I have to bring what they have to bring and there isn't much worth taking time away from my family from my kids and just sit there and spend the night talking about politics I think I can say that about my wife her lack of interest in politics is really and influence in the decision not to join dialog she is not interested basically in politics and the way she says it you go and take care of it yourself.

02:22

When the dialog started I remember I don't remember the exact detail there was a discussion I was either going to a meeting or hosting a meeting and my wife was on the phone with her family and she said we have a dialog meeting and the question as what's the dialog and she explained what it was about and basically what why is he doing that why does he want to sit with pro-Israel Jews and talk there is nothing tot talk about. It got to the point where the response was oh we know Jamal and what he is doing ands we trust him basically he is not trying to accommodate the Israeli or negotiate on behalf of us or even speak on behalf of us we know how he stands and where he stands we know his politics there response to that at that time was to be okay.

04:46

Life in the camp being born in 1958 I have to say I have experienced life many have wished to go through such changes in life For example I was born in a camp that did not have any power and electricity and I remember as a child doing homework by candle light I remember when we got electricity going home before it was dark so I could see my father turn on the light switch on so life in the camp is very interesting it has the miserable side of it and I would have to say the fun side of it growing up and seeing the changes but the beef of it I would say growing in an environment the hardship was a part of your daily life living in a room that with in a storm and hearing all the noise and going to a school without and heating or light or power and sit in a class of 50 students experiencing all that in a camp is an experience I value and I appreciate it doesn't matter how hard it was I wouldn't want to change it for a second I would want to change one thing and that is the case of the miserable cause not to exist but as it is I wouldn't want to change one thing because it made me as a person it really built the determination in me and I wash tot thank my parents who entitled education and determination in me to exit your way out of the camp to save your life from political and military conflicts that were among us in the camps.

07:20

I still have my parents actually my both parent and 3 brothers still in the camp my parents are at the age now where they wouldn't want to leave the camp they camp to visit and as much as they love the luxury of life in San Diego they couldn't get accustom tot the daily life in san Diego basically it's a life they don't wan to leave that they want to live until the last moment not they enjoy the camp but they enjoy the people customs and cultures they built in that camp the only way our of that camp is to go back to there home in Palestine they don't wan to live in any other place except the camp.

08:30

A small village called in the suburbs of Akay its very small actually place that they lived in they still know there places they describe the trees they describe the land they describe the experience as if it was yesterday actually when I listen to my dad mostly as a kid as I listened to his stories about Palestine it's like he's talking about yesterday. To add I have an uncle not my fathers brother but an uncle who is married to my aunt when he got old he got dementia and it's interesting when I was visiting 4 years ago they told me my

brother told me they would see him on the road walking and they would say where are you lets go home and he would say I was in Tarsheha Tarsheha was a town that was close to where they lived in 1948 the guys was living his life right before he died he said I was jus tin Tarsheha and I was just going home finished going there and you see that in the camp a lot these old people get to that stage they love their childhood in dementia It is an experience that never left their hearts or minds and they still live it every day and I think they would rather live and die in their homes in their towns.

10:50

I have 2 brothers and sisters here one brother you could say has his complete family here he moved them all the way here they live in San Diego and go to school in San Diego and to him my brother ah really the way he look to it he came to bring his kids to school to have his kids learn and graduate college that's how he sees his life he doesn't see himself as an immigrant he just wants to get himself kids to go through school high school and college and then I'm going back to my camp and live there I can't he is accustomed to his life in the camp of course this may never happen but this is what he wishes for but his presence here he came here so his kids would go to school and have an exit ticket out of the camp that's how they look at it as an exit out of the camp so they can have a real decent life eventually to support them in their surroundings I have a commitment to my mom and dad and I will provide for them until they leave our lives and it's that kind of relationship that they would want to have they look at their kids as that investment that 401k we have basically to educate your kids and have decent jobs.

12:45

You know I don't there would be a place for me to go back to I don't thin I've talked about this a lot with fellow Arab Americans and Palestinians I don't think we belong anywhere it's like a tree that has been taken away from it's soil and transplanted somewhere else Basically we are when we moved to the stated to go to school we were really transplanted so that tree never really got accustomed to its new surroundings the way that I look at it this tree is a sacrificial tree to allow more tree to grow and those smaller trees that grow will really belong in that soil so for me I've been transplanted once and I don't think I can be transplanted again I just need to pass through life and have kids live a life in there new country as far as I'm concerned I really don't think I could love in one place or another I really just don't belong anywhere.

14:25

That was literally true at the time I didn't have a passport and I was moving with documentary papers that said I'm a refugee and Palestinian refugee who lived in Lebanon that allowed me to travel into some countries but many countries would not even recognize that document but I have passed that I am an American citizen and have an American passport I have my own state and political system to participate in but I am still continuing to be a transplanted tree in my new environment as an outsider the environment I live in that's exactly how I felt growing up in Lebanon I am becoming an outsider in the environment I'm not sure exactly what it would take out of that feeling I think alot and honestly having lived in the states more than I have lived in the camps I

have passed the other half I would have to say it's a feeling of non belonging and it could be rooted down to that stateless feeling of my childhood.