

Youssef Joseph

UR: Umar Rashid (name of interviewer)

JY: Joseph Youssef (name of interviewee)

START OF TAPE SIDE A

JY: I'm being interviewed by Umar Rashid. I was born in NY, but my ethnicity is Egyptian male, and I'm a student going to college, and Umar wanted me to talk about stories of culture and childhood. Well, my dad has told me about stories about when he came, when he came, just to go, back and see Egypt for after coming back for so many years and even before he left Egypt about the quote unquote "hicks". They're not necessarily hicks they're just people who really didn't know any better. A lot of farmers, a lot of people who never experienced electricity, um, went to school and so they never knew things like the earth rotated. My, uh, dad was telling me a story about when he rode on the train this one time, and he was sitting next to this guy who was all giddy and all excited, and, um, he was telling my dad, "Do you think we're moving?" And my dad said, "Of course, yeah. " And the guy replied, "Well no we're not moving, see? The earth rotates and we're just staying still. So that as the earth is rotating and we're staying still, we're moving from one point to the other." And that was one of the examples he told of how much education was important when he tried to explain things to me. Things like that. It was not that it was his fault. It was just that he didn't know any better and that was how people were like in Egypt, those poor people. And in Egypt there was no real middle class. You were either extremely poor or you were extremely wealthy. There was very little so-called middle class people. Then, of course, as time went on, he started talking to me about dating. And, of course, you know, dating was a cool thing if you were smart about it. When he was in Egypt early on in this time the people's of the, uh, the parents of the, their parents were really strict on, you know, should, well, boys and girls date. And the answer to a lot of those people was not a chance in hell.

If you wanted to date a girl you would have had to take them outside the city because a lot of their parents, their fathers, or even their brothers, may either kill you or beat you up or force you to marry her. Of course neither was a, uh, option. He just wanted to, you know, enjoy a good time with a woman, not necessarily, you know, anything intimate but have a good conversation with a woman, and that was heavily frowned upon in the Middle East. Another thing that happened would be told me about, um, was in Egypt, you know, stories of women cheating on their husbands. In the culture of Egypt, if you were a Muslim when a, ah, if you were a woman and a girlfriend were to come over, the man would even leave the room or even leave the house because if there wasn't a man accompanying her, of course the man could not converse with her because of, you know, the temptation of whatever. And when this, when a woman would come over, it may or may not be a woman because this person has left the room. The, uh, my dad would tell me stories of people he knew who would, ah, dress up in women's clothing, with the full, you know, coverings and walk in and ah have sex with these men's wives and walk out.

UR: Do you remember anything specifically Joe?

JY: Well he wouldn't give me any specific names because, obviously I wouldn't know who these people were, but, uh, he would tell me stories like that. He also told me stories about how men and women went to the movies.

UR: Ah huh.

JY: They would go into separate doors. The men would drop off the women in there from their cars, they would go and park and they would eventually walk together, and, of course, the women would walk behind the man. Now when they were to go pick up, you know, at the end of the night, the, uh, women would stand in the corner and the man would go get the cars. And the men really pretty much had no idea who their wives were because they were covered up.

UR: [Laugh].

JY: Basically whoever opened the door, that was their wife [laugh] and that's when they drove off. And uh, it was kind of rather interesting. The differences in a culture in the Middle East. Of course, women you know would have to walk behind the man. In the Muslim world not necessarily in the cultural world, not necessarily a cultural, not necessarily Christian --

UR: I'm sorry Joe. How old were you when you started hearing these stories?

JY: Ahh I don't know. I think it was about, well the whole dating thing was around 13, 14 so --

UR: Do you remember any from when you were around six or seven?

JY: Six or seven? Well that was the hick thing.

UR: Oh OK, OK. Sorry [laugh].

JY: Yeah I'm sorry Umar was not paying, he had left the room so I could continue telling the story just so you guys don't know. Now he came back so he's a little out of touch. Um, now we're going to go onto education. And, of course, my dad was, was very strict on education and education was very important for anybody in the Middle East, and of course nowadays anybody in the United States. You had to know your education. You had to go to school. My dad told me a lot of times when he was a TA in college he had to proctor an exam. And a. --

UR: Sorry Joe How old were you when you heard this?

JY: Tst, tst, tst. Well 11. Yeah. And, um, he told me the story of this woman he would not let take this exam because he didn't know if the person taking that exam was that women. You know, I mean because she would, it was very unusual that she would cover up more than was usual. And he wasn't sure if that was the person taking the exam. And so there was a whole commotion about it. The, uh, professor had to come in and the professor had to get a female to come in have her take a look at her and check her ID because in Egypt women didn't have ID's.

You couldn't just, you know, here's an idea of a woman with a face covering, you know. That didn't really work in Egypt. And ah, of course education was very important. He told me stories of the educational system in Egypt. How very different it was in Egypt as opposed to here. One test determines whether what college you got to what profession you go into. There are two exams that you will take in your life in your junior year of high school and then in your senior year. The junior year is pretty much a practice exam and it's not based upon how well you do. It's based upon how well you do overall, everybody else. And what percentile you get determines what college you can get into because college in Egypt is free. So, uh, last time I heard, if you made a 94 or higher on a 100 point, this 100 point exam, you can go into an engineering school. But you couldn't go anything higher than that, not doctorate. You had to make a 97 to go into a doctorate school. Now, of course, you can go below that if you want another profession, but that's why education was very important in Egypt. Because what you know you had to do. In Egypt everyone competed against each other for the better grade, so everyone studied on their own, and, um, and definitely had different study practices and mental practices towards education in the Middle East. You know, stuff the teacher was well respected in the Middle East as opposed to here. You know, in the high school, where they can pretty much considered the baby sitter. This was no joke. You could be asked to leave in Egypt if you were told to. And those are the stories about education, women cheating dating, and the quote-unquote hicks. Thank you. Have a good day.

END OF INTERVIEW

Approx. 8:32 minutes