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REBHI RABIE

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NASH: Today is April 4, 1975. I am speaking to Mr. Rebhi Rabie who was born in Palestine and came to the United States in 1966 at the age of nineteen. Mr. Rabie, what was the name of the place that you came from in Palestine? What was it like?

RABIE: Well I was born in Jerusalem, and Jerusalem as the majority of people knows, it is the holy place for all religions, all the people. The reason I left Jerusalem in 1948, when Palestine was occupied by the Zionists, my family, they were forced to leave Palestine to the East Bank of Jordan as refugees. I was a child, a baby at that time, few months old, and we settle up in Amman, Jordan. My family, it is about the (?) at that time about seven. I have five sisters and brother including myself, my mother and my father. My father used to be a businessman. We used to have our own home, our own land. We were completely happy. Then, as refugees, as I remember as a growing child, we lived in a small room. It was about four by four. It is in lie a stable. It is built from mud. I remember we used to live in a real cold weather in the wintertime,

very hot weather in the summertime. It used to be very difficult life as a growing, very poor child in a poor family. My father was fighting and my mother, very hard for the life, just to survive. Then I remember in my childhood, as a student, we used to be, as I mentioned, very poor. My family, they were looking backwards and their dream for their life to go back to their homeland. Then my father used to travel around Jordan or some of the Arab world, where he try to find work, job. It used to be very hard. Anyway, after I finish high school, I thought to come to the United States and the reason, to study. In that time my father's situation used to be much better. I came to the United States, it's not by my choice. I was forced because of the difficulty of the life. There is no job for me in Jordan, there is no change to go to university. Of course, as a Palestinian, the Arabs country they are offered Palestinians free education, but that is not enough. It means we have to travel from country to country, and we have to pay for our rent, for our clothes, for our food. The school just covered the school expenses. So I came to the United States on May 29, 1966 as a student. Some of my uncles tried to help me to go to school and I went to pilot school to be a pilot.

NASH: Where did you first live when you came here?

RABIE: The first, where I first lived in Brooklyn. I used to have a cousin of mine in Brooklyn, and I lived with him and he helped me.

NASH: What were your first impressions of the United States? What were some of the hardest things to get used to?

RABIE: Well, it is a very difficult life for a stranger and for a young man in my age at that time. It is completely different culture, different customs, I have no friends, it is difficult to make friends and, of course, the language very, very, important. I felt lonely, felt stranger, until I got to know the American people and until I entered the American society.

NASH: Where did you go to school to become a pilot and did you finish school?

RABIE: Well, I went to New Jersey, to he (?) school in New Jersey and I didn't finish. And the reason because of the money shortage. I did not have enough money to continue, then I quite form school. Then I went to Michigan to State University, Michigan State University, and I didn't succeed to continue my education as a psychology liberal art. Then I went to NYU and some accident happened to me in 1972, I was stabbed in my chest—this is important (?)—

NASH: It was an accident that you were stabbed in your chest?

RABIE: That's right. I was walking in the street with my girlfriend in the evening in Times Square, around Times Square, and four strangers attacked me and stabbed me in my chest and the result was three years in the hospital and five operations. Then my original work, I work for the Action Committee on American Arab Relations since 1968 till this time, and I am the second man in the committee. I am the assistant editor for the Action newspaper and the vice president for the committee.

NASH: How did you first get involved with the committee?

RABIE: Well, that's very interesting. From long and long time, and from what I read in the magazine and the newspaper, as a Palestinian I have my own feeling toward my cause, toward my land. My dream, as I mentioned before, to go back to the place where I am belong, to the place where I am born, to Jerusalem. And my land it is occupied, as I mentioned, by the Zionists. I am born over there, I am Palestinian citizen, I am not allowed to visit my own town even as a visitor. I was very, very involved in the cause and one day, I think is was in 1968, I did saw in the news, I watched the news, and it was an Arab spokesman in the TV, and the Arab spokesman tend to be Doctor Emti Medi who is my partner now. Then I decided to call him and for the first time I did hear about the Action Committee on American Arab Relations. And I visited him, I like his idea, I agree with his idea. It seemed to me what he is fighting for exactly as I am fighting for, which is the peace. We are fighting to get the peace. Then we work with each other and we understand each other, we are more like brothers. Then I started to practice my activity, start to meet the American people, to explain to the American people about myself, about my people, what's happened to us as Palestinians, and we are human, we don't hate the Jews. We want peace. As I hear from my family from long and long and long time, my father, his father used to work with the Jews side by side, the used to love each other, there used to be no problem. The only problem that's happened when the Zionists arrived and occupied Palestine and they divide the Palestinian Arab from the Jews who used to live in that area. And I believe both Arabs and Jews, they are victims by the Zionists such as Golda Meir and others like Eban who came form Milwaukee, and she is born in Russia, and Aba Eban who from Africa originally. They live in my place and I am all over the world. I do believe the reason I am here really, I was forced to be here and I am victim, and as other victims in the world, it's no being I hate America or I have anything against

the American people, but I do think the way they look at me, it is in a different sort, they don't understand what's going on. They don't know the truth, they don't know who I am. And they hear from one side, they don't hear from my side. They hear from the Zionists' side, and they didn't hear from my side.

NASH: Why do you think, you think that the press hasn't given a fair treatment to the Arabs, why do you think that is?

RABIE: Well, that is true and I do believe it is because the Zionists, they won, they have strong propaganda. If I say it another way, they have won the TV, the newspapers, even the American congress, they are subservient for the Zionists. To me, as a Palestinian living in New York, I do believe like I am living in Tel Aviv. I believe in New York it is not Tel Aviv, the Zionists have to understand we are here in open society and there is a freedom of speech, but it is not in New York. I don't have, as a Palestinian, I cannot practice my right and my freedom of speech in New York in open society. It seems to me like the Zionists, they own in New York, and this is wrong. I was attacked by Zionists in New York many, many times. I enter the hospitals a few times because of the Zionists attacks. And I will mention one, the last attack by the Zionists in New York. It was in May, 1974. I was on my way with a friend of mine to hold and fuse news conference. We were invited by the media to hold a news conference and we were on our way and some Zionist group who were demonstrating on 42nd street in the Eastside. And they noticed our faces and they attacked us. They were calling for our blood and they were shouting, "Kill the Arabs, kill the Arabs!" And from that, the result of the attack, I was injured in different part of my body. My friend, Dr. Medi, they broke his neck, they broke his spine and he still live with a broken back. And finally the police surround and, of course, we were between more than two hundred people who attacked us. We were knocked down in the ground and the group, they were about fifty thousand people. The police fail to protect us then until a special police force arrived from Queens and took us to the hospital. Before the police manage to take us from their hands and their kicks and they put us in a building and they close the doors. And the building was surrounded by the Zionist people who entered the building from the roof, from the back doors, from every place, and to me this is a tragedy and really this is a shame to happen in the United States. And, of course, as we said as the media, it is the Zionists that spent money for propaganda and they brainwash the American people, and the change their right, their wrong to right, and our right to wrong. They change black to white and white to black.

NASH: Do you see an improvement in anyway or has the situation change in the last few years? Do you feel there's any development towards a fairer treatment in the press?

RABIE: Well, I do see a good improvement, higher percent of improvement after 1973, October of '73, after the October War in the Middle East and after the old embargo, the American people start to realize, they start to study the Arab people in general. They start to ask questions, who are they, what are they, and especially about the Palestinians. The American people start to realize they all have an interest with the Arab more than the Israeli, and this is a good improvement to me. It is a good improvement. And about the American press in general, the American press, they are ignored on our side. Not because they are, I don't know if I say the word or not, not because they are ignorant, but the fact is they are under the Zionists' pressures and they get used to all their life to hear from one side and not the other. And to me this is the fault of the American politicians, the American leaders. The American leaders, they know the facts about the Palestinian rights and the Arab rights in general and the American interests in the Middle East. And the reason they are ignoring it and they are attacking the Arabs and sent an Israeli jet, supplies in Israel with jet and (?) to kill more Arabs and to occupy more Arab lands, not because they hate Arabs or they have anything against Arabs. The reason is selfish reason for their self-interests. It is because if they want the Zionists' votes, not because they hate Arabs. And to me this is wrong and the American people, they don't know this fact.

NASH: Are there many Palestinians living today in the United States?

RABIE: I do believe about one hundred thousand people. And the reason they came to the United States or why they live in the United States, these people, as I mentioned about myself, because of the tragedy, because their land it's occupied. These one hundred thousand people, they used to live before 1948 and 1967, in their homeland in Palestine. And after, they used to have their own homes, their own farms, and regular jobs just like any other countries or other nations. And for them, as being refugees, they were fighting for the life to survive. They have no job. For example, the majority of these people who are here, they came from Jordan or Lebanon, they live in the refugee camps. These people, they have been living over there at least twenty-seven years, almost twenty-seven years, and believe me, it is not pleasant for a human being to live in these refugee camps.

NASH: Could you describe them?

RABIE: Well, their homes, as I said, you found six or seven people or ten or twelve. You found father and mother, their children and also probably their grandfathers, grandmothers, and some parts, they are the family, living in one room. And the small, little room. They are sleeping in the floor, no beds like here or like what there used to be before they were refugees. And there is no electricity, there is not water. It is difficult for them even to get enough good to eat. Difficult for them to get a job. There is no job for them. And the only way to live, to go all over the world, around the world, and the reason to support their family, so each one of these people who came here, they left their wives, they left their children, probably in the beginning, then probably later they will bring their wives and their children. It is demanded to their case, or sending them money.

NASH: How were they able to come here, under what, did they come on a quota with a regular immigrant visa, became permanent residents?

RABIE: Well, this majority they came as immigrants, as refugees, especially after 1948, which is the majority, they arrive a few years after 1948 as refugees, immigrant.

NASH: Were they allowed to come because they were political refugees? Was that a special situation or—

RABIE: A war refugee before, not now, not now, before the 1956, I believe. Not anymore. Now they are allowed to come to the United States. Matter of fact, President Johnson, after the '67 war, he did mention one time he will accept some Palestinians, and the pressures did not work, didn't work. And none of them came as refugees. I believe it was in the early '50s.

NASH: If you could make a generalization about how Palestinians have made out in the United States, what would you say?

RABIE: Well, and some others, they came as myself, as a student. They came as a student, and after they graduate, they'll get their immigrant and they are professionals, for the United States needs them as doctors or as lawyers, as engineers. And more than that also, there are some people with higher education. They came directly through the embassy in a contract for a job as doctors in the hospitals, engineering, and some others.

NASH: Well, in your case, how were you able to change your student visa to, I assume that you were a permanent resident?

RABIE: Yes. Well, myself, the time that I was in the school I met with an American girl and we got married and she is an American citizen and I became an immigrant. And this is what has happened to me.

NASH: Well, for the majority of the Palestinians then, you say that the Palestinians living in this country are professionals and that's how they were able to stay here?

RABIE: The majority, from the earliest as refugees, as an immigrant, and the rest, which is the minority, as professionals, and, of course, some students. We have lots of students in the United States, Palestinian student. And these students really, they are working hard fighting it as they are fighting a war. Some of them who are allowed to work, which is the minority, the majority are not allowed to work. But people who are allowed to work, they are working in real low jobs such as, kitchens, as a factory, a gas station, some other things. Heavy manual work. They accept anything just to get their education. And, matter of fact, the Palestinian people in general, they are the highest percent the educated people from the Arab worlds and also they are not in the United States and all over the Arab worlds.

NASH: Have the Palestinians who have come to the United States been able to build up a sort of a community or different institutions? I mean, have they sort of recreated a kind of a communal situation?

RABIE: Well, some of the Palestinians, they have in their own business, I could say small business, it is not really big business. A few of them who have big business. And some of them, which is the minority who arrive in the earliest in the 19th century, they are the earliest in the 19th century, when the Arab worlds and Palestine used to be under the Turks, the Turkish regime. These people, they are able to pull themselves and to open their own business, but these people are the minority. But the majority, they are having their grocery stores, for example, the kind of business and some of them, they are salesmen, the majority are salesmen. And they work different jobs. They are just like the rest of any other nationality. The Palestinian people, they are really hard working people. They do not believe, for example, in the welfare. They do believe they have to work and to sweat. They felt the money they get, if they didn't sweat, it is not money. As a matter of fact, I remember a family I know, and the man who support the family, he is really, he didn't have enough income and he is really poor. He was ill for a while, and his situation, his case, he need help very badly, and I did say to him, just I wonder what his is going to

answer me, even I didn't mean it, "Why didn't you go, since you are an American citizen?" He is an American citizen, "go and ask the welfare for help?" He said, "No, no, no. No way I'll ever do it if I die of hungry. It doesn't matter how sick I am, how ill I am, I will go and find any work and I work until I die." They don't accept welfare. And the Palestinian people, or the Arab in general, I believe their record as percent, it is the cleanest record in the United States. They do not involve in crimes, they do not steal, just they are by themselves. We have in their own community, and the largest population of the United States, it is in Detroit, and to Detroit, Chicago and New York. And in New York they have in their own community, they have in their own stores, their own areas, their own town. There's an Arabic restaurant in Brooklyn, Atlantic Avenue, for example, Arabic grocery store. They have their own art, their own art. There is Arabic musicians, there is Arabic artists, and there is an Arabic people who are holding higher positions, but they are minority in the United States, such as Ralph Nader. Ralph Nader, his father originally from Lebanon. I know his father. His accent still have an Arabic accent. Such as Tenny Donitomis, such as Omar Moctar. He used to be one of the highest generals in the United States Army. Such as Magee Pelaby, who used to be the head of Pan American, and Senator Aborazic, and Doctor Sabicky, the famous heart surgeon in the world, not only the United States, in the world, he is an Arab. There is Arab community and there is Arabic culture, but the Arab people, they are always afraid to introduce themselves and to let themselves knowing by American people because of the difficulty in the United States, because of the Zionist attacks and the Zionist pressures, as they believe the Zionist control the United States. And that is was proved as what happened to me and to so many others. We were attacked physically. And more than that, I will say it frankly, the Arabs, they are not used to freedom of speech, to speak frankly, as the Arab countries were under regimes form years and years, a long time ago, always used to e under pressures and, of course, this is the fault of the imperialism, the regimes who used to control the Arabs, who are such as the Turkish and the British and the Israeli now. The Palestinians or the Arabs, the never learn how to express themself, otherwise they will be punished, so they still carry some of this fact until this time even in the United States. But this is more or less with the oldest people who arrive in the earliest years, not in the younger generation. As a matter of fact, the young Palestinians and the young Arabs now, they are more active than their fathers, their parents. They are having their own meetings, their own clubs, their own culture—I do really blame for not showing the Arab sides in general, the American companies. The American companies who deal with the Arabs directly and they having business with the

Arabs and getting their monies from the Arabs, such as the oil companies. I believe these companies, they fail to do their duties to tell the American people about the Arab people in general, about the hospitality, about Arabs as human, about the Arab humanity. These companies, they took the Arab (?) and they supplied the Arabs with poisons. They support the Zionists for their interest because of the Zionist control in the United States. But I do have the feeling now, and think I felt that there is improvement, especially after 1973. As I said, people start to realize the truth and the media start to change even there is a heavy Zionist pressures upon the American Christians.

NASH: Well, is there anything else you would like to say about being an immigrant in the United States?

RABIE: Yes. I will be glad when the day it will come, and if the American people realize we are as an Arabs, we have nothing against American people. We don't hate the American, we love the American. The American people they are simple people. They need to know more about us, to read about our history, about our cultures, about our personality in general, and not to think about us as an enemy. And to understand whatever has happened about the oil embargo. It is nothing to do with the American people. It is a political reason and it was directly against the American policy, but not the American people. The American policy who supported Israel to kill and to provide more Arabs' lands. I mean, when the Zionists, shouting and screaming always in the TV's and the newspaper, whatever has happened with any Zionist and any other person who are not Zionists, which I mean Christian, to call the person he is anti-Semitism, we are the Arab Semitic. And I believe that is wrong. This has affect us too when they claim anti-Semitic. That is not true. And I want them to wake up and fight the wrong, I mean to defend us as Arabs, as friends, especially for us being in New York. New York is not Tel Aviv, why the Arabs being attacked by the Zionists in New York. New York is not Tel Aviv, and we felt it is like Tel Aviv, and if this thing is continued, I do believe in the future it is going to be a major problem for the United States in general. It's going to happen to another nationality and probably the whole country is going to be turned into civil war. That is what I think.

NASH: A civil war between who?

RABIE: Between nationalities, as for example, the Zionists being fighting the Arabs in New York or some other state. In the future some others, some other nationality going to fight, exactly is going to

attack some other nationality and this is going to be a damage for the United States, as we have different nationalities in the United States, the Italian, Greek, different European, so on, so on. And I do believe this is a bad thing to happen. And whatever has happened in the other side shouldn't happen in the United States. The United States, it's completely different part and separate from the other side. We have to separate between the United States and the Middle East. It is completely different countries, different size, different areas, different sides, I am sorry, and different areas. We didn't have to bring the problem from the Middle East to the United States, I do believe the United States has enough problems in their own land.

NASH: But still, I mean, obviously if there are Palestinians living in the United States, they are going to, not just Palestinians, any group, Turks or Sephardic or anybody who is involved, who relates strongly to what's going on in another place, they are going to act politically in this country to affect what goes on over there. I mean that seems unavoidable, right?

RABIE: Well, to me even it is not as Palestinian, as an American who born here, I am human and as a human I will think what has happened in Vietnam, I will think what's happened in Greece and Turkey, Greek and Turkey. I will think about what's happened in the Middle East, and I would like to solve the problem. I would like to solve the problem and so say it for peace. I want peace and I don't mean avoid or ignore the human life. No, that's not true. If I say it will be wrong, and I don't believe in it. To me, I do believe we have, as I mentioned before, to express ourselves as human and to have a freedom of speech, and as I mentioned, it is in the United States an open society. So I have right to express myself, freedom of speech, but not to attack others physically. It means when the war started over there, why I should be, as it has happened to me, to be attacked by Zionists here, and this is what has happened to me. When the thing that has happened in Israel in 1974, in May, when the Palestinian Commando hold the Israeli soldiers as hostages in the school and the Israeli soldiers, some other Israeli soldiers destroyed the buildings, stormed into the building and killed the Commando and the students. In Israel the occupied Palestine. I was attacked here in New York, and this is what I mean. They do not have to bring the problem from over there, to here to bring violence to the United States. I mean, I am Palestinian and if I want to attack, I don't believe in fighting, I don't believe in blood. I believe in peace, but if I do, I will go over there. I wouldn't bring the problem to the United States. And this is what the Zionists did. The thing, the fight that's happened over there, and I was attacked

in New York as a Palestinian. I was attacked physically and I entered the hospital, and this tale is what I mean. And if this thing continues, I am sure there are many Arabs, many Palestinians, there are many Americans who support and believe in the Palestinian right. They will attack the Zionists. Then it is going to start as a civil war, and this is what I mean. This is wrong. Maybe they attack me the first time and they get away with it, the second time. I don't think the third time they will get away from it. Maybe it is not from me, I am not an attacker, I still believe in peace and love. And if somebody attack me someday, I will forgive him myself, but there are some others who do not do so, even maybe I don't know them.

NASH: Well, thank you, thank you very much.

RABIE: You are welcome.