

SOCI 318
John Kinney
Raven Archer

Interview Project
“Immigrant Harrisonburg”

Raven: Okay, so we just want to start with the beginning but before that can you just state your name for the record?

Patel: Yes. My name is Madiha Patel

Raven: Ok and where are you from?

Patel: I was born in Pakistan

Raven: Ok and when did you immigrant over

Patel: I immigrated in 98. 1998

Raven: OK And what were the reasons for your immigration

Patel: Two main reasons. One being the civil instability taking place in Karachi where I lived and the other reason was my parents were being sponsored by my maternal grandparents so it was just an incentive to kind of escape the civil instability and then move here

John: How did people treat you here

Patel: Really well. Well at least initially. The people would then. So I moved to Ellicott City, Maryland and I was 12? 11, 12. So I started middle school here so my peers were very kind, very inclusive and welcoming. So I had a very good experience transitioning here at that age.

John: Did you have any like major culture shock?

Patel: Yes I did. Oh my gosh um the idea of dating. that was yeah just the fact that people dated in school or just dated for leisure. The idea Um yeah I come from a very or at least back in Karachi, Pakistan around that time, dating was not a thing marriages were arranged. Occasionally people would like you know people would like each other but that was just not a thing so dating was a huge thing. Clothing was a huge culture shock. Food was a huge culture shock so yeah I was very shocked all around.

Raven: Were there any ways in which you would say you assimilated and your parents kind of, not stuck their nose up, but it was just strange to them?

Patel: Oh absolutely, there was a huge push back from my parents because if I wanted to wear certain clothing to them it was me alienating my culture that I was born in so I'll give you an example. So the traditional dress in Pakistan is called shalwar kameez and my dad insisted that I would go to school in shalwar kameez. I didn't want to wear that, I wanted to wear a pair of jeans and a pair of shirt. So my dad one morning he was really upset about it and he was insisting for me to wear a

shalwar kameez so I kind of challenged him and said Ok fine if you wear a shalwar kameez, because there is a male version and a female version. I challenged him that if you wear the male version of the shalwar kameez to work I would wear the female version of shalwar kameez to school and that didn't go to well. But It definitely ended there. You know I got grounded and got punished but he didn't force me to wear it to school so yeah.

John: Who do you identify more with? Like Which Identity?

Patel: Oh my God. Identity to begin with is such so complicated and so difficult and then to have have you know half of my life, back in the day at least. Having my foundation years happen in Pakistan and then to move here and having the second half of my foundation, foundational years to take place here it was very challenging. I definitely I think it just depends depending on my environment so if I'm going to if I'm visiting Pakistan then I can immediately kind of click into it and feel like aww yes. The clothing I'm inclined to wear the traditional clothing and stuff but um it's just I can identify with both identities my Pakistani identity as well as my American identity but then at the same time it's never a hundred percent. You belong but you don't belong it's this strange space I'm constantly in yeah so

Raven: So how do you navigate that? Like do you have friends from back home and then friends here or do you have like a Pakistani community here that you've like identified with or found in Harrisonburg

Patel: So I've tried to ... I've tried to kind of stay in touch with some of the friends from back in Pakistan but I think out of like 30 of them I'm only in touch with one or two and even that it is more of like a Facebook relationship like Oh Ok that's great you know this is what you're doing these days but I think all of my friendships are my close friendships and my acquaintances are all in the US and then yeah I definitely have friends that are Pakistani have Pakistani backgrounds and then I also have friends that don't have any Pakistani roots or anything so

Raven: So how often do you visit?

Patel: It's been a while I haven't been back for 13 years yeah

Raven: Wow, so What's the reason

Patel: I think, there's lots of reasons. One reason, okay I'll list it off. Not laziness but just hesitance I think that's the right term. Most of my all of my family and extended relatives are here so my uncles and aunts from both my mom's side and my dad's side are here with the exception of one my paternal uncles he still lives in Karachi Pakistan but as much as I want to go back just the idea of going back into that environment um it's not scary I'm just hesitant to do it and because I have a choice I choose not to to some extent. I will say this I did about 4 years ago my grandfather, my paternal grandfather was still alive who I used to be very close to. I wanted to visit him and he got really sick and passed away immediately while I

was traveling to a different part of the world. When I got back I wanted to go back to Pakistan and kind of pay my respects to him but again there was political instability that was taking place in that area that I belong to so you know my dad immediately put his foot down “you can’t go it’s very dangerous people are being abducted” they were going after specific types of people and I kind of fell into that group of people so my dad was like “do not take that risk” because I have young children so there thing is like you don’t need to right now so that was the last time I really tried. I’d bought my ticket and everything so I couldn’t go then. Since then I just haven’t.

Raven: Wow so you mentioned you have kids

Patel: Yes

Raven: Wow How many

Patel: I have four girls

Raven: Wow and do you see the difference between them and yourself in regard to like your culture and stuff like what they have picked up on and what they haven’t, and stuff like that.

Patel: Absolutely well they love they love the Pakistani and Indian cause the Indian and Pakistani culture is very similar it intersects. They love the clothing they love the food they love the music, the entertainment. The cultural norms traditions when they hear it they are like “what do you mean that just doesn’t make sense why would you do that” I’m like “I don’t know that’s why we don’t value those kind of traditions” and we’ve kind of like moved away from those kind of traditions and norms in my household. But those like food, clothing and music is something that they’ve like grasped and they like hold onto tight. You know like in fact my daughter it was just so funny she came down in a Pakistani outfit like the traditional outfit and that’s how she went where I was fighting to not choose to wear that and she is so comfortable and proud of it and she wanted to wear that and it was just so interesting for me to process that you know the confidence that she had to present or to express her culture and yet I was having such a I was kind of ashamed of it which was I don’t know it made me think so I’m still processing that

Raven: So what was the immigration process like? Like Coming over here. You said you went to Maryland first?

Patel: Yes we moved to Maryland first. It was fairly easy. We did not have much issues because the regulations were not that strict I think it was our laws and our country I think was much more welcoming not as biased I guess in terms of what where the immigrants were coming from so it was a fairly simple. I mean you apply you know you get a response by a certain amount of years then you come you have to make sure you stay here for that period of time then after that you apply once you’ve had your green card for a certain amount of time you apply for citizenship, citizenship date comes if you are I think above 18 you have to take the

exam and anybody that is below 18 doesn't have to take the exam because it's automatic citizenship from your parents so I didn't have to take the exam my parents did. They passed and then and so we became naturalized citizens I think that was, It's been awhile

Raven: So I know you said that it was a rough like political climate in Pakistan when you left so did you what was your status when you came here was it asylee

Patel: No we did not it worked out because we had that sponsorship from my grandparents we didn't have to apply for asylum or we didn't have to run for our lives so

John: How much family would you say you left behind

Patel: In terms of like immediate relationships just my paternal uncle, his wife and three children the one's that I felt the most close to or had a very strong relationship with

John: Was it hard

Patel: Yeah you know my aunt and my uncle they raised me because I lived in a joint family system so it was like three families, my grandparents, my uncle and aunt, their family and then our family in one household so I mean we did everything together like that was your social circle so it was I missed them a lot when I moved here initially and then I guess with time you just kind of move on

Raven: So how did you end up in Harrisonburg? Like from Maryland. Why Harrisonburg?

Patel: I don't know! Man, that is exactly what I asked my husband. So once my husband finished his training. As he was finishing his training. He is a physician by career or profession and he was just finishing up his residency we had decided like Yes we are going to move out to the west coast it's a different vibe it's you know more of our kind of feel and then when you're applying for jobs of course you're not going to apply to one job so he just kind of applied to everywhere and Harrisonburg was one of the places that popped up and he just applied he wasn't serious about it but then when he they offered him a position. And just the position they offered him with the benefits it was just one of those things a no brainer. When you're coming out of training and med school after that long as students you take what you can you know and like I said it was the benefits that really kind of won us over so that's why Harrisonburg

John: If you could tell your past self anything regarding immigration and going through what would you tell you

Patel: Like the process or just the post immigration sort of experience

John: Post

Patel: I think like I said so kind of I never felt unwelcomed by my peers or my cohorts or even my teachers and everything in fact I felt they were very supportive. It could have maybe had something to do with the fact that where I settled. Like I

said I settled in Ellicott City and it's a very diverse area so yeah it was pretty good I think not until high school especially after 9/11. I think everybody will echo that like 9/11 changed everybody's life across the board. And then especially it changed my life because belonging to the group that was kind of blamed for the whole event kind of like blindsided me. It really impacted me because people that otherwise were good friends of mine kind of like created this distance from me and I was only like 9th I was in 10th grade when that happened so you know my peers were kind of like my relationships with certain peers changed I started hearing like really rude and nasty comments about it and then there was definitely a lot of verbal statements that would be made that would just again were just very nasty by people that I never would have thought both those who I knew and those who were random strangers like walking down the street and it was very difficult to process that because I personally lived by this motto that you don't blame a large group for somebody else's doing and I so I had a very challenging time but I can see how you need somebody and something to blame kind of like maybe it is part of the grieving process or, not healing process, but definitely grieving process we need something to blame and that's why so many people kind of went that route.

Raven: Alright so let's talk about Harrisonburg. Do you like it?

Patel: Now I do. So I've been here for 9 years yeah So I'll tell you the context right when I moved from Karachi to Baltimore, the suburbs of Baltimore which is Ellicott City. You guys have been to Brooklyn, I understand like how populated it is in just like the kind of set up of the city is that's like where I grew up essentially so like Karachi in Pakistan is like the Brooklyn of the United States. So moving from there to like the suburbs in Ellicott City was just like "What! What do you mean the people aren't walking around?" Because like the city never shut down right other than when the instability started happening and we started having curfews and it would get quiet in the evening hours but it was always lively so that to Baltimore it was like a culture shock and finally when I got used to it then I had gotten married and then I moved to Harrisonburg which was another culture shock Like what "There is nobody on the road at like 5 pm" Now it's different and because I live closer to campus it's different but so initially I didn't like it only because I was used to living into populated and densely populated cities coming here where you just had lack of uh the cuisine was lacking in diversity I mean the shopping was lacking and then just in general I was not feeling it was the best way to put it. But I think once as my children were getting older and they went to school I made new friends you know through other with other children's parents so it started growing on me just because I finally had but its just yeah there's not enough spaces in Harrisonburg at least when I moved here where you can go and meet people so that kind of hindered me Harrisonburg growing on me but once I

started meeting people and nine years later like I can not imagine moving out of here it's home

Raven: So would you say that Harrisonburg has like adapted since you first got here? Like Are there more restaurants that are like inclusive for you or places for like shopping that you feel like you can go to now

Patel: Oh yeah definitely I mean it's grown immensely in terms of diversity and then this whole initiative to kind of bring the life back into downtown has really helped with that and it also really helps the fact that you have CWS, are you guys familiar that organization, so people are genuinely kind of in support of that so I kind of lost my thought. It's definitely much more inclusive you have so many restaurants that are popping up that are more fusion based so they're introducing several different types of cuisines it just seems much more friendlier and there's like I said there's spaces where I go and I feel comfortable being there and enjoying myself. Does that answer the question?

Raven: It does I'm glad that it's great

John: Is it anything like you'd expected?

Patel: The city or the

John: Yeah or just America in general

Patel: Just America in general. That's a loaded question

Raven: Did you have an idea of what America would be like when you got here then it was like this is not what I thought.

Patel: So I used to like I mentioned most of my mom's side family had completely moved here before I moved here so we would visit occasionally you know to me there is so much hype around going to America and like it is so cool you know like the McDonald's and like the Toys R Us. It was just so appealing and I couldn't wait to move here because my life was going to change drastically like it was going to be cool I get to be the cool kid on the block in that sense at least in my cohort or at least in my peers in my environment back home. But once I moved here just the adapting and then just having the culture shock of how everything different it was not like, nobody told me that it would be so difficult and that it would take forever kind of to get used to.

Raven: So what are your relations like back to Pakistan? Like do you send money back to your family or do you

Patel: I don't I definitely, there is an organization there that I feel very that I love dearly for what it stands for and I know its foundation and I've always I was exposed to that organization since I was like a toddler like once I could understand things I knew about this organization and I knew the guy who ran the organization he was like very approachable guy on the street kind of deal. He has done some amazing work he's passed away since then. So that's one organization it's called the Edhi Foundation they would have issues over there like babies being

abandoned or women being battered or children being abused and assaulted so this guy him and his wife would literally just go around the streets kind of like gathering people and providing that shelter and working in that shelter and working in their organization so they were very transparent with the work they did So that's one organization that I try to support as much as possible just because I know how transparent they are with how they expend their funds with what they are doing. That's about it. I know my parents financially support my uncle and aunt there to some extent because just the job market is very terrible over there is a huge gap, income gap, you have your very you have poverty you don't really have a middle class and that gap has just been widening until you know you have your elite and then you have your impoverished and then there is like a very small group that would be considered the middle class

John: What have been some of your favorite foods since moving here? Like new foods

Patel: Oh man I have so many but have you guys heard of samosas so it's like those like puff not puff pastries. It's like this really thin flat bread like very thin and then you put whatever stuffing you want and the most famous stuffing is like spiced potatoes like spiced mashed potatoes or like minced meat so you like wrap it up in a triangle and then you fry it. Those oh my God I could eat them all day. Biryani that's like you have whatever choice of meats and then you like cook in this stew thick stew and then you have like parboiled rice and you kind of make those two things separately and then you put them together then you steam it together and its just oh my gosh it's just beautiful another one of my favorite dishes again I could just eat it all day long. I have a lot but if I had to be stranded on an Island those are the two things I would like take with me.

John: Do you remember anything special about the trip itself over here?

Patel: Oh man That's a great question. No I just remember being excited and I couldn't wait to get here but I can't I don't have any images in my head of like the plane ride or anything, no. That's crazy. I can't you know I haven't thought about it in years and now that you've brought it up I can't even think of anything. I think the only plane ride I remember coming from Pakistan to the United States was my last time that I had visited back in 2006 no 5, 2005 that's when I was, last time there and I just remember, I hated it and I couldn't wait to get back home. I was..so when we would travel back when we would visit Pakistan we would go for the whole summer so you'd go from like school's closed from June to like August so you're spending your whole summer there. Initially it was fun but as I got older I did not want to be away from home that long. So that's one plane ride I do remember It was the most turbulent plane ride. Over the Atlantic is never fun but it was so turbulent that everybody's food had fallen off and people had gotten their

clothes dirty so that's the one I remember and I was like "I don't want to get on that plane again". So yeah.

Raven: So do you remember like what happened when you got here? You just moved in with your family that was here? And then how long did you stay with them until you guys kind of separated

Patel: Exactly so actually when I moved here to Maryland my mom's sister was the one who kind of supported us. Initially when we moved in my dad was out looking for jobs every single day. He was lucky and blessed in a sense that he was able to find a job right away. As soon as I think we stayed with my aunt for about 2 to 2 ½ months. Both of my parents were very motivated to like we want to be on their own. We don't want to have, excuse me, this um not only like not be a burden on anybody also not like so anybody would ever say that, "oh we did you a favor" kind of a deal. You know like you only welcome for so long.

Raven: like indebted to

Patel: Exactly even if it's family it's just people will only tolerate you for so long. Yeah we moved there we stayed with them for 2 ½ - 3 months then we moved out into our own apartment. And yeah

John: Do you remember your first friend?

Patel: Oh my gosh it was these three girls, Sajel, Ima and Michelle. They were just they introduced me to pop music and bought me my first CD to Backstreet Boys which I loved and worshipped. It was just so awesome. They kind of like helped me like figure out and navigate things "This is what you do, this is what you don't do" so it was really nice. They would always save a spot for me at lunch and make sure I was just kind of getting situated into my new environment really well. So yeah they were awesome yeah. I'm kind of in touch with them but I keep telling myself that I need to make a genuine effort and like, write a personal letter and kind of like "Hey how's life you by the way you were such a, you played such an important role in helping me transition into this new environment. And yeah

Raven: What do you think the transition would have been like if you didn't have like friends that like kind of gravitated towards you from the beginning

Patel: Oh I'm sure it would have been horrible I mean it was so difficult to begin with right even when you have that help it so difficult to get used to the food even the water taste different right like everything taste different it's hard to sleep Every you notice and observe every single thing that's around you so If I would not have had those individuals from teachers to certain friends that I made I think I would have had definitely much of a more challenging time and I know it sounds funny to call it trauma but there's definitely some sort, to some extent, there's trauma involved that takes a very long time for you to heal from because of not only the cultural difference but like even ideologies and just the way people approach things and practice you know basic etiquette it's different. You know so yeah

John: Any problems from like learning the language or before

Patel: Um a little bit. So when the kind of school I went to a private school in Karachi Pakistan and it was a British based system so you were taught English and you had to like speak and do everything in English so it gave me that introduction sort of right but then at the same time when I was going home I wasn't speaking in English I was speaking in Urdu and then another like a not a tribal language but like a specific area where my grandparents had immigrated from so like a couple of generations we were all immigrants in that sense but so I was not doing that English primarily but once I moved here the ESL classes helped a lot back in the day they used to be called ESOL or something or at least in Maryland. So they helped but it's still one thing learning it and just getting really used to it right because you have to learn to think in English and comprehend in English and like navigate in English so it took a while there were definitely times where even like so like the Backstreet Boys CD that actually really helped for me it used to come with the lyrics so I would play it and just read it and learn it you kind of mimic it right and you practice it that way so that was very helpful it took a while but I got it and that program helped and yeah everybody did their part in kind of like

Raven: Do you think you had a easier time learning than like your parents?

Patel: So my parents my dad did not have too difficult of a time other than just like the cultural parts of communicating in English right like certain things imply certain things right like there's literal meaning and then there's like what's implied when you say something like that so he definitely had a challenging time but I think he's learned to we all learned together My mom had very low confidence in communicating with it until this day. She'll, she understands it like the basic communication she understands it and then she'll communicate like with my children right so she'll communicate with her grandkids in it but again it's very basic but when it comes to like being outside and like really taking it she won't communicate it because of just this she's conscience about it she's very self-conscience about it that people will think that what she is saying is not going to make sense and that it is somehow its going to be like aww that poor woman that kind of thing so she avoids situations where she has to put in that position to communicate in English.

John: Was there ever any other like any other country considered for the immigration do you know of that

Patel: No I don't think we would have moved well I don't know how bad it would have gotten for my dad right, at that point for him to stay but I don't think at that point my parents were considering moving to another country they were considering moving to another part of the city which my grandparents were not in favor of at all and if just the way the cultural or the traditions are that you listen it's like you listen to what your elders say so I think that's one of the reasons my

parents my dad didn't push it with my grandparents and his thing was well okay we're going to move out of the country that way my children have better opportunities and we can avoid we can get away from this political instability which was impacting them too but they were able to move past it especially my grandparents because they had already experienced it and they were kind of immune to the instability when they were living in India before Pakistan was created because Pakistan used to be part of India and then in 1947 they separated that's when my grandparents immigrated to Pakistan because they were dealing with discrimination religious discrimination so

John: You ever wonder how it might be if you hadn't immigrated?

Patel: Oh man I don't know I mean I guess I can guess I wouldn't have had the opportunities that I've had here and because I think back there I would have to access certain things or to fight for my rights within internally you know like whether it's like I think my parents I don't have a doubt in my mind that my parents would not have allowed me to go to college or anything but like to work in certain areas or be in certain industries have a career in certain industries I would have to fight that not only with my parents but my grandparents too and again we grew up in a very sheltered household because of my grandparents they their intention was to kind of protect us by keeping us as sheltered as possible not realizing that they were just not allowing us to grow and be successful in our lives or just learn you know protection is not always the way in that sense yeah but I don't think I would have had the opportunities to live my life and pursue my ambitions as much as I've been able to being here

Raven: To your knowledge do you know if it's like a lot of people leaving Pakistan to come here or is it just like a few people when it's unstable they come over or is it like a constant kind of cycle?

Patel: Whoever can afford it to move to immigrate to one of the western countries they are doing it whoever can't afford it are not doing it. Are we at the point of where we have groups of people becoming refugees? No we're not there and I hope we're not going to get to that point because there's definitely a rise of the younger generation where those who went away to get educated in the western countries sorry and then coming back into the country to kind of revive it and really lay the foundation down for a strong country, for it to progress in different ways. So Yeah yeah like if people have the opportunity to move they do it but I mean affordability comes into it because it is very expensive

John: When you say affordability like how hard is it really like as far as money wise. Like you either can or you have absolutely no chance like you don't even think about

Patel: Like let's think about it in terms of like a ticket right it costs one way ticket from Pakistan to here average we're not talking about deals that come up you

know come up some days like about two grand or so one way two grand is geez a lot when you convert it into Pakistan rupees it's a lot of money I'm trying to convert it in my head. I want to say \$100 is about 10,000 rupees give or take so and to also put it into context like these your average Joe in Pakistan is not making even \$10.00 a month that's how difficult it is so you save you save you save and then you get your ticket after like let's say so many years but then you also have to save for when you come here who's going to support you are you know your relatives or friends and stuff so like it's very expensive so my parents had saved a lot of money my dad had saved a lot of money. He had a very nice position um job back in Karachi Pakistan so to leave that you know I mean he saved a lot from that position and to leave that and come here it was definitely a big adjustment

Raven: Would you say that he had been saving for a long time? I don't know was it like a thought in his mind "like alright we're going to leave soon, just give me a second"

Patel: I don't know if and we've never had this conversation it's interesting you bring up that question. We've never had that conversation about like how long he was saving and stuff or even now how much he saves or I know he saves I know he has investments but he doesn't discuss it with me specially and I don't know if its because he just doesn't feel comfortable or that's just him and his personality right like he just finances discussing that with me has never been his thing but I know that just the way he is he is an accountant by nature so he is just frugal. He just likes to save and always worrying about like that rainy day that might take place so I mean I think that's why he was able to help has been able to financially support my uncle and aunt to because he's just really good about saving him and my mom you know if my mom gets like some like monetary present from her dad like you bet will save it she's not going to go spend it and be like "Oh I'm going to go treat myself" like her idea of treating was "I'm going to save and if somebody needs it I'm going give it back" so

John: I know here they have like a lot of festivals. Do you attend a lot of that?

Patel: Like here in the ...

Raven: Like the International Festival

Patel: I have not been able to attend the International Festivals that have taken place here because

Raven: Oh it's amazing

Patel: I've heard! And every time I have something that I had pre-planned and have to leave town for that but I know like a lot of my friends and acquaintances who are help in the organizing and really actively taking part in it. And It makes me so happy to see it take place and that it's such a focal point in this community like people look forward to the international week and all these cultures and all

these communities that live here are being represented which is just cool. So no I haven't attended but I am aware and try to support it in whatever way that I can

Raven: Yeah you should definitely go

Patel: I need to I need to

Do you want me to tell you guys about like the weddings

John & Raven: Yeah Sure

Patel: So the Pakistani weddings are like a fricking week affair. Ok I'm exaggerating. It's definitely at least 3 to 4 days of an affair no joke you've gotta have like your 3 to 4 outfits and everyday you wear a different outfit and you like deck out. Like you're going to some masquerade ball. If you've seen it like you've got to bring on the jewelry you've got to bring on like those heavy embroidered outfits specially for women like they go all out. And then you have all these like traditions so we've definitely held on like we as in like the Pakistani and Indian diaspora community to our like you know like the expressive part the art part of our culture and we I mean we go out expressing it when it comes to our weddings. So like you have a day called mehndi it like essentially like a yellow party and you try to wear colors that are in the yellow family so like yellows and greens and oranges and reds. There's a lot of dancing and not just like free style dancing like friends and family of like the bride and groom they're going to prepare dances and like dances like weeks ahead of time months ahead of time and there's like a competition the girl side dances versus the guy side dances and then there's like a singing party too where you have like the more elderly women of the family will compete the two sides will compete in the songs right and you've got like this it's called a toull it's like a two sided drum and like that's like your instrument and then you have all these voices like just singing the songs and whoever sings the longest the hardest knows the most words it's just so much adrenaline that's happening that day so that's your mehndi. And then the day of your wedding it's traditionally women wear red but then of course you see like now women kind of going away from that but same thing you'll have like somebody will always try to have that kind of like leave a mark you know one of my family members the guy walked in not walked he rode in with a horse like that was his entrance and like family members and friends are dancing around him and he's riding into the horse and it's just like an amazing show except it's happening and it's live and it's right there so that's kind of carried over to this day and even those who my gen kids or individuals who were born and raised here who might not have been back to Pakistan or ever to Pakistan maybe visited once or twice they have held on to that parts like they want to have their weddings in that manner or express themselves in that manner which is really cool so yeah our weddings are kind of awesome

Raven: So how was your wedding? Was your wedding more traditional or how did that go

Patel: So yeah it was really my wedding was extremely interesting. The guy I married so my husband's Indian and if you guys know a little bit about the Indian Pakistani politics or at least how it used to be back in the day and to some extent still today they did not like each other they still don't like each other but I think at least the arts and the humanities people belong are much more welcoming and loving of each more so than those who are more on the politics side. But So my mother in-law and my father in-law they weren't very happy with my husband's decision to kind of marry me so I had a very odd wedding like they were all there but they had like this kind of like strange like face put on just to kind of like "oh we're happy with this and yes we're going to be supportive about this" and even though so the day of the wedding is thrown by the girls side right so I get to call the shots and even though it's my event and I was supposed to call the shots I kept being like pressured into making my mother in-law happy she's very traditional very like you've got to do it this way and the guy and the girl can't sit together until they're you know exchange their vows officially and I was like what to me that was so stupid but then I had to make her happy and more so than making her happy because I didn't really care to I was like well if you want to do things your way then you pay for it but because I'm paying for it I'm going to do it my way. My parents felt like obligated to like have they were our guest and to make them happy so it was really this weird I wanted it to very low key and relaxed and stuff and I had to like do things a certain way to make my mother in-law happy essentially so it was really frustrating if I could redo my wedding I would. Totally would

Raven: You would make it more about you

Patel: It would be more about me exactly! I would have like a Barbeque in some huge park and not like dress up a certain and then just be limited to like a space where I just to sit and perform this like weird identity of a bride what a good bride is supposed to be.

Raven: So in that aspect do you see yourself more, more so like assimilated to American I don't want to say ideas of weddings but it sounds like from what you said it was very traditional and it was kind of like this is extra type stuff

Patel: Yes and I think that's I think more so well it definitely kind of aligns with the Americans sort of way of doing things but also progressive right like you always have had those certain voices progressive voices even in Pakistan yes they've been like kind of like pushed down uh un you're the minority don't don't try to be all whatever but definitely helped to be here because I feel like I've been kind of gotten that like sort of power by being in that and being able to say to put my foot down and say no I think I'm going to do it this way or I don't feel oppressed right because there are different types of oppression and depending on your environment certain oppression is not as oppressive I don't know if that even

if it actually is possible when you compare it to some extent but yeah like I definitely feel assimilated and definitely feel like having the opportunity to like kind of live my way or what I believe in.

John: In sticking with cultural events we talked about weddings what are the funerals like?

Patel: oh man that's a good one I mean nobody likes the idea of dying whatever and stuff but I love the way Muslim funerals are that take place because I'm Muslim as well. And they're very simple they're supposed to really be grounding and they're supposed to remind you of the fact that like you don't take anything back with you like literally nothing back with you. So traditionally as soon as the person passes away you're supposed to bury them within like a day or two. Kind of a deal So if those funerals are taken back in Pakistan you have somebody pass away you take they're at home most likely if they passed you wash the body in your bathroom or whatever kind of thing you, you know there's yeah I mean literally within hours you will have that person's body ready to go and to bury and everybody just comes together. And then there's a way of wrapping for a male body you will have two pieces of white cloth that you wrap them in and then for women you have three pieces of cloth you wrap them in White and that's it. You wash the body. The body is washed by the close family members and if those close family members are not present then the close friends and if not close friends then close relationships so you kind of like go down this like thing. But yeah and so it's similar over here too that tradition has stayed very true in that regard where like My grandmother passed away earlier this year and she passed away in Houston within like a day everybody all the family kind of just like flew out there was there and then we the women because she had all her like daughters and her cousins here and her granddaughters or grandchildren rather we got together we washed the body there's like three to four people who kind of lead it because again there's a like process where you're supposed to wash the body you start with the head that's more like tradition it's not necessarily religious the religious part is to get it done as soon as possible, come together and remind yourself like this is where we're all headed. The tradition part is like Ok well three women are going to head it versus four women are going to head it. Kind of a deal of who's going to be there. And the whole time you're supposed to keep a white sheet over the body. So imagine like this is the sheet this is the body here and you put your hands here you're not supposed to look but you're supposed to the point of that is to maintain as much privacy as possible. To give even though that's a deceased person that they have some respect in that regard they would not like to be kind of like to have their body out in the open in that sense. So yeah we wash the body and wrap it up. And just because the way things work here there's regulations and rules here. We did it we washed her body and prepared it for burial the night before like Sunday evening

then Monday afternoon you did we got together at the mosque prayed together and then immediately head to the cemetery to bury her. It's very It's very simple but it's very like I find it very

Raven: meaningful

Patel: It's very meaningful it's very grounding in that sense. To kind of just like let's get it together

John: Are there any like events for say coming of age like quinceanera, bat mitzvah

Patel: No we don't it's just one of those things like everybody comes of age you know men and women and it's just Ok so that's great

Raven: Still can't date though

Patel: Well there certain things like after a certain age like ok so I'll put it that way this way when I was younger like my parents didn't care when I was like 10 or 9 if I played with my guy cousins but as soon as I was like 13 or 14 developing a little bit, looking a certain way they were like I don't think you need to play with that cousin you can go wherever girls should play separately and the boys should stay so its like these unwritten rules that were kind of there and you just understood you know just have to keep separate so even if you weren't thinking certain ways you have a natural now we split up so that's the only coming of age thing I know it sucked like I can't play with my cousins anymore.

Raven: Do you think you like are different in that aspect with like your children? Because you said you have four daughters right? How is that? Like are you do you think you're more different than your parents? In that aspect of like dating or traditional things for like females.

Patel: That's a great question. I feel like I try to be different consciously knowing how my parents were like "I don't want to be like my parents" but then there are certain things that I as my girls get older I kind of just like from experience Oh that's why my parents did it I just wish they would have explained it instead of just being just like no you can't go here. It wasn't like hey I'm actually worried like if you go and like I'm not going to allow you to have sleepovers because I don't really know that family and even if I knew that family there's a chance of you being hurt emotionally or physically kind of a deal I wish they would have explained that they never explained that just they were like no that's it. What I'm trying to do different with my kids is like have that communication line open all the time. Does that mean they don't question me? Of course they question me that's the point of the kids to question their parents but I think at least they are able to at least my eldest is able to walk away like initially she'll get upset and frustrated like why can't I go on the sleepover then she'll walk away and I'll tell her and then she'll come back oh ok I kind of see your point but you can't always be fearful of everything you know you're going to have to let me go one day I'm like I know

Raven: Just not today

Patel: Just not today when you can pay for your own insurance you go for it girl. So my eldest is 11 she's turning 12 this coming January so we're definitely crossing that line right like this idea of dating. what can I wear? what can I do? I'm definitely I'm not as strict in terms of dressing as my parents were but you know I'll tell her you don't need to wear shorts to middle school you want to wear shorts when we're out together sure. You know after I hear certain stories in school some girl got whatever of course I'm going to be fearful so I'm like even though I want to have that trust that she should be able to fend for herself I find myself doing certain things that are kind of kind of like what my parents did to some extent so never say never.

John: Where'd you get your first job

Patel: Oh my gosh. My first job like actual paid job right not like an internship. My first paid job was at Rite Aid pharmacy and it was like the best day of my life. And I remember getting my first check. Oh man, I spent it on whatever I wanted. My dad was like "you're supposed to save your money not spend everything" I was like "It's my first check" And then my mom was like "You're supposed to donate to a charity as a thankful thing" I was like "I know but It's my first check, I swear I'll do it with the next one" But it was awesome I had to fight for it my parents were not happy with me getting a job. They were like you shouldn't why are gonna get a job can't we support you? I was like it's not about that I just want to learn and have experience. Then the next argument was well why can't you get a job in an office and I was like you know there's just no winning. And again, they have very different idea of what a respectable thing to do is and whatever those are just things you have to fight and I think they'll always exist yeah

John: That's funny Rite Aid was my second job

Patel: Really I worked from the 11th grade into my senior year into my first semester and a half in college. That was a good paying job at that time and my manager was awesome so I was like I'm just going to stick with it

Raven: So what do you do now

Patel: So currently I'm working part time in the office of Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability. I handle the money for that office. Which is not something I trained for but I've learned because it's very different in a like a government institution to say. So I do that part time and then my other part time I'm working on my masters in writing Rhetoric and technical communication so I do that and then when I'm done doing that I love working in just being part of my local community and the non-profit organizations here so I've worked with several different ones but currently I'm working with Faith In Action which is you have about 26 congregations around Harrisonburg come together pick a social justice issue to work on and then use like faith as their driving motivation to work towards

that social justice issue. So our current social justice issue that we are working on is criminal justice reform. We're very passionate about it there definitely needs to be change so it's just our passion our faith kind of drives us to be part of the larger community and doing good and so yeah

John: One last thing. So how is it intertwining the Indian and Pakistani cultures at home like with your kids.

Patel: It's so blurry right because Well first of all like yes there are some differences but you can only tell the difference if you've kind of grown up in the cultures somebody looking from the outside is like well you kind of where the same clothes and you kind of eat the same foods you know little bit of regional differences like its going to the south versus going to the north and the food is a little more flavorful in the south versus the north it's like "what is this" so it's kind of like that with India and Pakistan. But So Riswan, he's my husband, who he grew up here so again he held on to the clothing and the food but not so much the traditions. If anything he hated half the traditions he's like they don't make sense they're irrational we're not going to do this. So at home it's kind of like Indian and Pakistani foods and then clothing on special occasions if there's like a wedding or one of the religious events that we'll go to. And it's funny because I grew up learning mostly Pakistani cooking but then my grandparents and my parents and my aunts they would do certain Indian specialty delicacies but now that I'm here my recipes the little bit of differences between the Indian and the Pakistani cooking are just non-existent now cause like it's just a mix match in my house

John: My family is Haitian and they like to try to wear, they like to try to mix their American clothes with the Haitian clothes I don't really like most of it but do you guys try that?

Patel: Absolutely Oh my Gosh So like A very popular thing to do is to have kameez which is the shirt and it's like, it will come from anywhere, like it will fall anywhere from above your knees to like below your knees and instead of wearing the Shalwar which is the traditional Pakistani or Indian pants they wear it with Jeans. Like that's like the coolest thing to do. That's what my husband does all the time and that's what my daughter did actually today. So she didn't wear the shalwar but she wore the shirt you know the kameez and she's like well "I love the jeans, jeans are comfortable". And then just the top is just like the representative, very colorful piece. So yeah Oh we do that. We even have our music completely at this point. You have your Urdu and English within one song it's like going back and forth and you're like how fascinating is that.

Raven: Is that hard to like process or does your mind like, it's nothing

Patel: When I've had good coffee I'm on it. The day's I've not had good caffeine I'm like what can we slow down like pause! What are you saying and what are you trying to say? But it is pretty cool right? The human capacity and the ability to

especially when you're bilingual or multilingual how you can just switch between your thinking ability and the language even but then it's awesome it's something I still I don't think struggle with is the right word but have my days with like I'm really thinking in Urdu right now how do I translate that into English and actually put that down on the paper so people can understand it. It's fun.

Raven: Yeah it sounds like a challenge. Well, that's it.

John: Yeah, that's all I have

Raven: I think those are all of the questions we have.

Patel: Awesome

Raven: Thank you so much for your time

Patel: Oh of course, my pleasure

John: This was good

Patel: Thank you for this opportunity. I hope my answers made sense to some extent

Raven: Oh they were great