

Interview of Ali Barranghi
By Andriana Mesmer and Colette Toma
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COLETTE:

Where were you born and what was your family dynamic?

ALI:

Okay, I was born in Tabriz, Iran. A long time ago. There's 5 brothers, no sisters. Um family dynamic; poor. I came from a very poor family. So it's like everything we did in life was like hard work to get where we are now. I've been working since I was 14, no, 13. And everybody in the family has been working since then. And now we're here now. After our fourth store.

COLETTE:

Fourth store? Okay, I guess, how long were you in Iran for?

ALI:

I was in Iran till second grade and then we had to leave.

COLETTE:

Okay, and why did you have to leave?

ALI:

My dad was on death row because he was a political figure. And since I'm a Kurd, Kurdish people, we don't have our own country, so he spoke out against the government and they caught him. And then, in Iran, if your on death row in Holidays they let you go back home to visit the family before, you know. And my dad decided just to all run away. And so we left.

ANDRIANA:

Wow, that's intense.

COLETTE:

So it wasn't a hard decision for him to make, it was just like alright, I'm about to die Im coming back to my family, lets get out of here.

ALI:

I mean it was hard. Yeah the thing was him and my older brother ran away first. And then we all had to run away.

ANDRIANA:

So you didn't all go together?

ALI:

No, cause like they found out that they had run away so they came after us. And I was in second grade.

ANDRIANA:

So how old were you?

ALI:

Six/Seven. And then, my little brother who was like three/four. Cause we're all three years apart, so if I was seven, the other one was like four and the other one was one. So it's like, we couldn't take any vehicles with us cause we so we couldn't use a passport to run away. So its like we ran, like running over mountains and shit. And then we were getting chased by the government. And all I remember is running and getting shot at. So that was that. It was fun.

Colette: It was fun..

ANDRIANA:

Like adrenaline rushing you mean?

ALI:

To be honest I don't remember the adrenaline, I was just running. I was running. My mom had to carry my younger brother.

ANDRIANA:

So you were on foot?

ALI:

Oh yeah, we were crossing the mountain, yeah. And then I had to carry my younger brother. I mean, that's too much for a seven year, old you know? And then we went to Turkey. Which was worse. Cause the Turks, Turkey doesn't like the Kurds. So we lived there for two and a half years. I wasn't allowed to go to school cause I was a Kurd. So its like two years of no school. And everywhere we went we were labeled as a Kurd, we couldn't work because we were Kurd. So we couldn't have a job. And working wise, I was shining shoes, like polishing shoes. So that's what I did. Stole gum, stole cigarettes; sold em. So yeah, that was Turkey.

COLETTE:

So did you do that when you were like what, seven; you said you were there for two and a half years so like seven to nine years old.

ALI:

Basically, yeah. Well, ten. Ten and a half.

COLETTE:

Okay, and how were you labeled as Kurd? Was it how you looked?

ALI:

Language. Cause I mean, we didn't know the language. So when we go there...

ANDRIANA:

People automatically know...

ALI:

They would know that your Kurd because Kurdistan is part of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. So it's like when you go to Turkey, they know your a Kurd you speaking. So it's like, they knew who we were. So yeah we couldn't do anything.

COLETTE:

Was your dad and brother there too? Is that where they went?

ALI:

The whole family was there, yeah. They got there before we did, set everything up, and they were working. Just like the same way I was working, but they weren't polishing shoes, there were other Kurdish establishments that were hiring so they were working there. So yeah, so my dad was a translator over there.

COLETTE:

And why did your dad originally go to Turkey? Did you all know other people that went to Turkey?

ALI:

No, no that was the closest. And Iraq during that time, we couldn't go cause Saddam was still in power. So we couldn't run there and Syria was too far so Turkey was the closest place to go.

COLETTE:

Okay and were did you all go after Turkey?

ALI:

We came here. We came in through the UN.

ANDRIANA:

What year? How old were you?

ALI:

Early 2000. 11, yeah I just turned 11. Cause we got here January so December I turned 11.

ANDRIANA:

What was the biggest deciding factor for your family to finally come here?

ALI:

Well we didn't have an option. The UN is like a lottery. We picked it and the US came up.

ANDRIANA:

Did you come straight to Harrisonburg?

ALI:

Yeah, straight to Harrisonburg.

ANDRIANA:

Was it easy?

ALI:

I mean...

ANDRIANA:

How exactly did you guys get here?

ALI:

Well, airplane. The UN send us here. But when we got here it was a lot easier. A lot of weight was off our shoulder.

ANDRIANA:

It felt like relief...

ALI:

Yes. A lot. But the funny thing is that when we got here the year later 9/11 happened. So it was even worse.

ANDRIANA: Timing...

ALI:

Yeah, so it was like, we left Iran, left Turkey, and then got here. It was more segregation because were Muslim during 9/11.

ANDRIANA:

That's when like it all sparked.

ALI:

Yeah and like its not; again for eleven and a half cause I was in seventh grade when it happened. For your teachers and friends to turn around and look at you like, 'why is your people doing this?'

ANDRIANA:

Like they expect you to explain.

ALI:

Yeah, yeah I mean like that's not even me, that's the Talibas. Were over here they're over there. So yeah, fun times.

COLETTE:

Alright, well I guess you said a year after you came is when 9/11 happened; so did you feel welcomed that first year you were here? Was there a large Kurdish community here?

ALI:

Yes. There were at least eighty families, now it's over a thousand and some hundred.

COLETTE:

Dang did you know some of the families when you came here?

ALI:

No, no.

COLETTE:

Okay so it was purely you pulled from the lottery with the UN, came to Harrisonburg. just because they told you too and you didn't know anybody here.

ALI:

No, nobody. When we came here there was a couple families at the airport waiting for us because the UN lets the refugee department here know and they send a Kurdish family, whoever's here to come pick us up at the airport.

ANDRIANA:

Just like any random family?

ALI:

Yeah

COLETTE:

Okay, so did you feel welcomed here the first year?

ALI:

Yes

COLETTE:

Okay and was it because of the Kurdish community or was it because of the entire community in general?

ALI:

I mean overall the life was here different. So it like it was easier to adapt to and there was nothing to be scared of.

COLETTE:

Okay so then 9/11 happened and you felt like there was some backlash; or so you said your friends and people were turning to you being like 'why did this happen?', so how did that affect you?

ALI:

I guess it made me stronger. Well, I guess I was already going through all this stuff so like I was already used to it. Like as a seven year old your running in the mountains and you get shot at, like what else is left. But the thing was, it was harder for my parents.

ANDRIANA:

Were they getting backlash or was it hard to watch you?

ALI:

It was hard for us to watch them go through that process again. Cause that's like almost my whole life they went through it. So it was a new beginning for us to come here and than bam. All over again.

ANDRIANA:

It's happening again in a new country when your trying to like leave it.

ALI:

Yeah. I mean it was tough for my mom. Cause she left her whole family over there and now she's her by herself other than us. And all these people are looking at us everywhere we go because she has a traditional hijab and stuff on. It was like everywhere we went we would hear this aisle camera focus you know, so it was hard.

COLETTE:

So what jobs..

ALI:

McDonalds.

ANDRIANA:

Was that the first job you got?

ALI:

Yeah, McDonalds than Marshalls, Sheetz. I've had a lot of jobs.

COLETTE:

Jobs, so you've said you've had all types of jobs. I guess you worked at a gym.

ALI:

Well, I used to work out, but the thing is I'm an independent personal trainer. So I go to your gym, I don't work at a specific gym. So I do my own pricing, they don't do my pricing for me.

COLETTE:

Okay and when you first got here, what jobs did your parents have?

ALI:

Cargill

COLETTE:

What was it?

ALI:

Cargill, the turkey factory. Cause like to be honest when a foreigner come here, they don't have any options to go anywhere else, as soon as they get here...

ANDRIANA:

Whatever can get you the money

ALI:

Not even that, it's like the people around here, they stay to themselves. So if there's a good job they don't tell them. They take them to the shitty establishment and bam, you work there.

COLETTE:

Do your parents still work there?

ALI:

No, no not anymore. I'm working now so they're relaxing now. Cause they took, what, eighteen years taking care of me so its like my turn now. There's like five brothers, all of us working hard so they just get to relax.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah they get to relax until old age that's what my dad says too. My dads always like make sure you get a good job so you can take care of me.

ALI:

Yeah so that was highschool life. Cause even highschool life wasn't that great.

COLETTE:

Yeah just cause it was high school or like why?

ALI:

No cause when you go from seventh to senior year you have no friends other than the foreigners. That's all we did until senior year i played football. And then I guess I was good so everyone was like 'oh we'll be your friends again'

ANDRIANA:

So did you have trouble making friends in high school? Or your only friends were a specific...?

ALI:

All my friends were African American, Hispanics and the Kurds. I had no caucasian friends. Until like senior year. Because they were all looking at me the same way.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah they didn't warm up to you until...

ALI:

Yeah like they were all my best friends when I go there, sixth through seventh and then as soon as that happened it's like...

ANDRIANA:

Really? They switched up?

ALI:

Oh yeah, yeah.

ANDRIANA:

Wow I thought you just came, wow thats messed up.

ALI: I mean its life, you get used to it. You adapt to the situation. Which we were used to.

COLETTE:

So your used to change now, how do you take change?

ALI: the same way. Like since my whole life I had to change situations, environments, people so like it's easy for me now like *snap" like that I change.

COLETTE:

Okay, dang. So I guess you joined football in high school, where you a part of anything else? It didn't have to be just in school.

ALI:

I was president of the Kurdish Club. I got cut for soccer Freshman, Sophomore...let David know; Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior year got cut.

ANDRIANA:

You got cut, why?

ALI:

The coach wasn't too open to Muslims. So yeah I got cut.

ANDRIANA:

Wow that's insane.

COLETTE:

Were you goalie in high school?

ALI:

Yeah my entire life. And then I got cut but then several years later I had two professional tryouts. Like I'm saying that throws you off. Why?

ANDRIANA:

Yeah...like I got cut from my high school team but now these professional teams want me.

ALI:

Yeah and the funny thing is, is I got injured in both try-outs. So like all I do is now, well, I stopped coaching, I used to coach at EMU. I was assistant coach for men's soccer. So its like maybe I'll take my skills somewhere else. Bigger school maybe.

COLETTE:

Okay. Did you have any expectations before; I guess we're now back tracking; but did you have any expectations before coming to Harrisonburg, to America?

ALI:

The thing was back home, we used to see the movies. So its like you know Wild West, Detroit and the shooting New York and stuff so like when we got here it was the opposite, like whats going on this is not the movies we saw. Cause like back home it was illegal to have American channels. So it's like when the DVDs come everything is censored. Or not DVDs, cassette players, everything is censored. So we'll see like bits and pieces and then we came here and it wasn't the same and it was like uncensored, I guess. So it's different.

ANDRIANA:

So America was like an uncensored movie.

ALI:

Basically, yeah. So yeah, it was different. But it was easy to adapt to.

COLETTE:

Okay yeah cause you're used to all this adaptations and change and stuff. You said back home, so do you still consider Iran home?

ALI: Well all my families there. Everybody in my family is there. I mean I have two homes; here and there. But like I can't really go back and live there anymore because well I can't go back period. Cause my name is on the list.

COLETTE:

Really, so you can never go back?

ALI:

No, the last time I went was before eighteen cause when you turn eighteen in Iran government you have to join the military for two years so if I go back, I have to join the military. And then when I join the military the US would be like why are you joining the Iran military and not the American. So I could lose my citizenship here and my citizenship there.

COLETTE:

So you have Dual Citizenship?

ALI:

Yes.

COLETTE:

Oh wow, okay so you said...before you were eighteen did you go back at all?

ALI:

When I was; 2006. No I lied 2004.

COLETTE:

Okay so you went back once.

ALI:

Yes.

COLETTE:

And what was that experience like?

ALI:

I mean it was very brief. Still had to smuggle myself back and then forth. No really I couldn't go back.

COLETTE:

Smuggle so like you walked there and walked back?

ALI:

No well this time we had like cousins in Iraq who came with us, yeah so it was easier. I mean it was still horses going across the mountain and stuff but there was nobody shooting at us.

COLETTE:

It was still a little risky so what made you go back?

ALI:

Grandparents. My mother wanted to see them because she hadn't seen them since, what, '97 so she had to go see her parents.

COLETTE:

Has you grandparents or family there ever come visit you over here?

ALI:

They cant. They can't cause US and Iran don't get along.

COLETTE:

So they can't leave at all?

ALI:

We can go visit them but they can't come here. And then you have to apply for a bunch of crap for them to come here and it takes, what, its been taking like eighteen/nineteen years.

ANDRIANA:

So it's not worth it.

ALI:

No, no. Cause we applied for it in 2002, no I lied, 2004 we became a citizen. And since then we've been waiting on paperwork.

ANDRIANA:

You're still waiting?

ALI:

Oh yeah, cause US and Iran don't get along. We're not best friends. So they can't come here.

COLETTE:

Okay. You said mostly your mom and her parents, how often does she talk to them like on the phone and stuff?

ALI:

Well, she could go back because she didn't keep my dad's last name she kept her own. So she could go back.

COLETTE:

Oh okay so she has no connection technically to your dad because your dad is the one that was banned.

ALI:

Basically, yeah. Cause I have the same last name. Only my younger brother could go because times have changed so they're not going to take a little kid and put him in jail. So its like those two could go back. But I can't go back. I haven't seen my grandparents since 2004.

COLETTE:

Okay, its 2018 now.

ALI:

Well yeah, '19 almost. Next month.

ANDRIANA:

You just made me think of the New Year.

ALI:

I know Christmas in two weeks.

ANDRIANA:

Okay so digging into, I want to know, do you practice any religion currently? Or did you?

ALI:

The thing is, my family is Muslim, we practice Islam my whole life. The thing is I see myself as just do good to people. Cause I see religion as something to hold you back, to keep you in control.

ANDRIANA:

So you don't have a very specific belief?

ALI:

No, I believe in everything.

ANDRIANA:

I agree, I have like the exact same belief.

ALI:

As long as you have a good heart. I treat people nice. Thats how I see it. And believe in something. So I believe in God. Thats it.

COLETTE:

So you said your whole family is Muslim..

ALI:

Yes.

COLETTE:

So when did you...well, so you don't practice anymore, right?

ALI:

I mean, to be honest nobody in the family really still does, like they don't practice. My parents have been mellow since the beginning, they were never forcing us. Cause the more strict you are the more idiot you become later in life, you know?

ANDRIANA:

Yeah that's true, that's a good mentality to have.

ALI:

So its like my dad was very mellow, he gave us the opportunity to decide what we wanted.

ANDRIANA:

Thats nice.

ALI:

Oh yeah, cause he gave us the option. He's like this, this cause like my dad went to school for religion so like he got his masters and everything.

COLETTE:

Okay, so he's aware of everything, okay.

ALI:

He's aware of everything. He teaches, he was very mellow about it so its like, 'you guys are grown make your own decisions'

ANDRIANA:

And do what you want to do...

ALI:

Yeah. Cause like I'm not forcing you to one thing.

COLETTE:

Okay, and then what about language when you came here? Did you all know any English?

ALI:

No, like all we knew was 'ABC' and then when we came here; I don't know have you heard of Dragon Ball Z?

COLETTE:

No.

ANDRIANA:

I have, yes.

ALI:

That's how I learned my English.

COLETTE:

Dragon Ball Z?

ANDRIANA:

You ever heard of that?

COLETTE:

No...

ANDRIANA:

Did you have the actually ball that you can throw?

ALI:

No, no I didn't but I'm saying like that's how I learned my English.

ANDRIANA:

Did you watch the show?

ALI: Yeah cause like that's how I learned English. The Looney Tunes.

ANDRIANA: That was like your first learning of the language, Dragon Ball Z?

ALI:

Well we used to watch cartoons but not when we got here so like that's all that was on TV cause I was still young and watching cartoons. That's how I learned my English. By watching cartoons.

ANDRIANA:

So did you just base it off that and just used that in the real world?

ALI:

Yeah, yeah and just used that. Cause like we had lots of Kurdish friends and I told them not to speak to me in Kurdish. So it's like, I could break out of my bubble and get comfortable. So like start speaking English. You know, so I got better at that.

COLETTE:

Did the Harrisonburg schools, did they have anything to help you?

ALI:

No, it was shit.

COLETTE:

Okay so you were forced to just use English for like Math and like all these classes you had to take in English.

ALI:

Yeah Harrisonburg schools were stupid. It's like I didn't know I had to take the SAT until like a year after I graduated.

COLETTE:

Oh my gosh, okay.

ALI:

No, yeah cause they weren't telling any foreigners, they don't tell you anything.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah they want you to figure it your on your own.

ALI:

No, not even that. Everybody else knew cause the counselors would tell 'em. But it was the foreigners who had no knowledge of anything. So they didn't tell us anything.

ANDRIANA:

So they subject you basically.

ALI:

Yeah, cause Harrisonburg is a very closed minded city, so everybody in the city..

ANDRIANA:

Yeah, is it still do you think?

ALI:

Some parts.

ANDRIANA:

But do you think it's gotten, is the school system specifically better?

ALI:

It's still shit.

ANDRIANA:

...Still shit, damn.

ALI:

Cause I had to tell my younger brother who is in high school now to take the PSAT. And he took it. Cause the counselor didn't tell him. They still don't. They still see you as an immigrant. Even though, he was born here. So like they still see you as a different person. They don't consider you as one of them. Even though like this whole nation was once where immigrants came and started this country.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah I was about to say, we made this country.

ALI:

It's a melting pot, it's a melting pot of like every other culture around this world. The Asians came for the railroad, the Irish.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah, where would we be..

ALI:

The Italians. For real.

COLETTE:

Well I guess, your family has like businesses and stuff...

ANDRIANA:

Oh yeah...when did that all start up like how did the idea come up?

ALI:

Well my dad first started up with a windshield business when we lived in Oregon.

COLETTE:

So you lived in Oregon?

ALI:

Yeah, Portland. Well, we we lived, we lived around. We lived in Harrisonburg then to Newark New Jersey. We lived in the ghetto for a whole year. Like it was terrible.

COLETTE:

Yeah Newark is terrible.

ALI:

And we lived in the middle of the ghetto. So its like there were shootings, stabbings, crackheads doing business on the stairs in the hallway doing drugs.

COLETTE:

Yeah Newark was a murder capital.

ALI:

So it's like, I was eighth grade. Still another life experience you adapt to, so that was that. And then we, my dad, if we would have stayed there we would have been very wealthy.

ANDRIANA:

If you stayed in Newark.

COLETTE:

Why?

ALI:

Business opportunity. So much, so much. But the thing was my dad moved back because of us so we wouldn't get affiliated with gang members. And that's what all our apartments were. So it's like, it was like one two three. The apartment we lived in was affiliated with the Bloods and then right across the street it was the Crips. So it's like everyday was shooting in the roads and stuff. So it's like you couldn't really go out and do anything and there was no school buses in New Jersey so we had to walk to school. Other than transit bus. But transit bus like you have to pay for it so it's like, we'll just walk. So it was like, what, five miles a day. Back and forth. Walking. And like seeing people get jumped and fights. Normal stuff.

COLETTE:

Normal stuff. Right.

ALI:

Well to me it is.

ANDRIANA:

Do people like, did you get any backlash there?

ALI:

Not really.

ANDRIANA:

Because there's just so much more going on.

ALI:

Not even that cause our parents, like, raised us better. So it's like we had friends who were Kurds as well, but they were getting affiliated with it but we just like step back. So its like you guys do your own thing we're gonna stay home and play video games. And not affiliate with you all.

ANDRIANA:

Good idea, yeah.

ALI:

So yeah, that was life there. We moved back here, we moved back here my Freshman year. High school. Graduated high school and then my dad decided to move to Oregon because we had family there. We lived in Portland. So my dad opened up a windshield business. That did well, but the weather was terrible. Because like what you have two years of no rain. It's all sun. And then the rest is live all freezing rain. So it's like we moved back, my dad opened up his first Hookah bar. It was called Brooklyn's, downtown. We did well. Well we did very good cause we had to sell that place and open up a second place which was a lot bigger; which was Vibe. Vibe was doing well, and then we sold it. And then when we sold it not even a year they had to shut down.

ANDRIANA:

Why?

ALI:

Well the shooting happened, somebody died in there. So the shooting, somebody got killed. The thing I noticed is that every business we had, after we sold it, they just crumbled. I don't know why.

ANDRIANA:

Like any business that started behind you?

ALI:

Yeah, cause like, we sold the business to them so they tried to continue it. I guess because of the culture, cause hookah is part of our culture. So it's like, if you have no knowledge of it..

ANDRIANA:

You're not gonna thrive in it?

ALI:

Yeah, it's like opening a Mexican restaurant, but like, all the cooks are Asian. You know? It's not gonna succeed, because you have no laws of culture, so you're just out there blind.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah.

ALI:

The same thing with Vibe, doing great and then we sold it, bam, dude like less than six months, almost a year, opened, and then closed down.

COLETTE:

Who did you sell it to?

ALI:

It was a Caucasian dude.

COLETTE:

Okay

ALI:

Yeah, and then I opened the one right on Neff besides,

ANDRIANA:

Social?

ALI:

Yeah, Social. I opened that place up, cause my dad wanted nothing to do with it. So I was like, I'll open one up. Just to fix our name, because everybody used to think Vibe was still us. So, I opened the place up to fix our name, and then my dad out of nowhere decided to come out of retirement. He's at the store working too, so it's like, I let everybody think he's the owner so nobody comes to me, he deals with it. I just deal with the paperwork

ANDRIANA:

He does all the dirty work?

ALI:

Well, it's not really dirty work when I do everything else, behind the books, you know what I'm saying?

ANDRIANA:

Yeah, so he just deals with the people in the front?

ALI:

Yes! The needy people

ANDRIANA:

Yeah the people who need everything right then and there.

ALI:

The ones that come in who are very needy, I'm like, "pops go ahead, you got it."

ANDRIANA:

"I'll stay back here"

ALI:

I'll stay behind the bar.

COLETTE:

So you run the bar, and you're also an athletic trainer?

ALI:

Okay, I run the bar, i'm the assistant coach, was doing it together, and on the side I was doing personal training, and I'm also a fitness nutritionist. So it's like three jobs.

COLETTE:

Okay, are you still an EMU assistant coach?

ALI:

No, season's over, and like I said; I'm probably not going back, cause maybe, I don't know, I'll go somewhere else.

ANDRIANA:

Do something else, yeah!

ALI:

Go to a different school, something?

COLETTE:

Go to a different school and leave Harrisonburg? Or go to a different school in this area?

ALI:

In this area, or maybe leave. I don't know, there's still so much to do. I haven't decided. I'm not going to New Jersey, because I'm qualified for the Red Bulls soccer team, youth team. So I can apply to that. I already talked to someone, that said I have an 80% chance of getting hired for the goalkeeper coach. So yeah there's so much to do, I can open up my own second place, I don't know.

ANDRIANA:

So many options!

ALI:

I'm trying to still figure it out

ANDRIANA:

What is the year span of the first business to like...

ALI:

Well from 2009 to 2010 was the first time, and then we sold that in 2011. Six months later, we opened the second place up, but then we took a year and a half break from Vibe to Social.

ANDRIANA:

So in that year in a half break what did you guys do?

ALI:

We hustled; I did Uber I did lyft, I was doing personal training.

COLETTE:

When did you go to Oregon? So you went to Harrisonburg, went back to Newark?

ALI:

2008, we went to Oregon and came back 2009.

COLETTE:

Oh, so you were only there for a year, but you weren't because family was there.

ALI:

Yeah, I know the families here now because they moved here too.

COLETTE:

Oh so you took them back with you?

ALI:

Well 10 years later they decided to move down here. So yeah, that was that.

ANDRIANA:

I wanted to know if the businesses, reflect your culture? Do you think it helped maintain or shows Harrisonburg a little snippit?

ALI:

Well the thing is like it has a culture that people around here, so they know about like Kurds, because like all the stores we opened it up. So they have knowledge of who we are. So it's like it opened up people's eyes because like we have customers from Lexington coming like they have no clue, who are the Kurds? Now they know who we are, but people from Crozat near Charlottesville, they come here and they were like, there were hella backward. Now they're more cultured. They try our food. Yeah. So yeah, it's helped us a lot.

Andriana: Do you think that the Kurdish community is strong in Harrisonburg?

ALI:

Very, very strong. The thing was like anything we do, we're all united. Like anything we do..

ANDRIANA:

Reflects on?

ALI:

Yeah, it's just their image. So it was like anything we do negative look, bam, because that's how the city is. The Kurds are "terrible" people.

ANDRIANA:

So it's like one person could do something bad, and it would be like all of you are bad.

ALI:

It's like that for all of Harrisonburg, like Hispanics do something bad and it's like, oh, they're all bad because one person messed up. The Kurds are the same way. Arabs are the same way.

ANDRIANA:

Probably anyone who isn't Caucasian?

ALI:

Facts, right! Because that's how the city is.

COLETTE:

So does that make you feel like you have to tip toe a little more, or you have to be cautious?

ANDRIANA:

Or are you used to it?

ALI:

I guess both. I'm used to it because I've lived here, but like it's still different in a way because sometimes you gotta be careful. Plus now I'm the owner of a store so I got to be a lot more cautious.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah because then it will reflect on...

ALI:

Everything. Not just the business, my family, because like anywhere you go like, Oh, you're Ali's brother, you have the same last name so we can't really affiliate with you. So. Yeah.

ANDRIANA:

Do you identify with your American culture?

ALI:

Our pride is so high for Kurdish-American not American-Kurdish, so like the Kurd always comes first.

ANDRIANA:

So you identify with one more than the other, definitely?

Ali: Yes, but either way we're still American, but like the Kurd always comes first no matter where we go. Because our people, our pride is so high. So it's like, Kurd always comes first. So even in Iran, we were Kurdish-Iranian. We weren't Iranian-Kurds, we're Kurd-Iranians. Like Iraqi, it's not Iraqi-Kurds, it's Kurdish from Iraq.

ANDRIANA:

Do speak the language at home?

ALI:

Yes.

ANDRIANA:

Do you speak any English at home?

ALI:

No. Because my dad didn't want us to forget our culture.

ANDRIANA:

That's how my mom was, because I'm half Thai. So I would speak only Thai at home.

COLETTE:

So your entire family, like five brothers and your two parents. You all live in the same house?

ALI:

Culture, we all live there, so my brother has his wife and the kid there too, in the basement,

COLETTE:

So it was just going to always be like that?

ALI:

So we built a house next to it, just expanded.

COLETTE:

You had also said that like having a job, you would take care of your parents now even though your dad came out of retirement.

ALI:

Yeah!

COLETTE:

So it's all just part of the culture?

ALI:

Yes it's all part of the culture

COLETTE:

You all are staying together no matter what?

ALI:

Yes, no matter what because the family that eats, they all stay together.

ANDRIANA:

You eat together, you know there's a saying, oh, I forgot the rest of it.

ALI:

The thing is, our culture is like if the family goes hungry, you're hungry. So it's like we all eat together.

ANDRIANA:

And if you're all down, you're all down together?

ALI:

Yeah, and you all come up together. So if you see my dad struggling, I'm struggling too. So it's not just on one person's shoulder, it's all of us.

COLETTE:

So would you say your culture is kind of like a community, because American culture seems to be very individualistic.

ALI:

Yes, ours is not like that.

COLETTE:

So would you say you're more community centered rather than?

ALI:

Yes but it's not really communities, it's more family centered. It's all about the family. Family always comes first.

ANDRIANA:

Well you said that Kurdish community here is very strong too, so would you say your "family" is only your blood related family, or would you say you have family outside of that

ALI:

To be honest, if you dig back to ancient history, we're probably some way related to the Kurds here too. Because like my grandfather and my great grandfather used to go back and forth between Iraq, because the only job you could have had back then, because we were Kurds, they smuggled cigars and cigarettes and stuff. They probably had some kind of relatives there that we have no knowledge of, so it's possible.

ANDRIANA:

So you're ancestry is all connected?

ALI:

But the thing is none of us, like if we try to look into you're not going to find it. Because we don't have records of it.

ANDRIANA:

You'd have to dig so deep.

ALI:

Not even that, there is none. There is none, it's not like here. Over here you could date back to anything back in dinosaur ages, whatever it is. Not like that because there were no records of it. Yeah. Everybody was scared of how many kids they had. So there was no records of it.

ANDRIANA:

So do you plan to stay in Harrisonburg? For like the rest of your life?

ALI:

I don't know yet. I have no clue.

ANDRIANA:

Too Far ahead?

ALI:

Too far ahead. I plan one day ahead because I might not wake up tomorrow.

ANDRIANA:

That's true. Do you like Harrisonburg?

ALI:

I don't mind it, I realized I got to sometimes dumb down, because i'm at the Bar, I've talked to people, had conversations. I realized that like, I need to mellow down. Act like a "bro."

ANDRIANA:

Kinda assimilate to other people?

ALI:

Basically. I gotta get down to their level because they have no knowledge of anything in the world. So I'm like all we can talk about is..

ANDRIANA: It can only go so far.

ALI:

To be honest, it can't really go far, because like they have no knowledge of anything else but America.

ANDRIANA:

So it's like a hey, how are you conversation?

ALI:

Basically, how is your day? Like what do you go through as you do today? So i'm basically a psychiatrist behind the bar. I'll listen to your problems and give you advice because you're not going to listen, but I'm gonna give you advice

COLETTE:

Any more of your story you want to share?

ALI:

Well my parents are open to marriage outside of culture if that's important. Because my brother's wife is Filipino. She's a Filipino, Roman Catholic. So yeah.

COLETTE:

Yeah, I definitely have a few friends who were raised Muslim that it's not okay for them to be like..

ALI:

It depends who the parents are.

COLETTE:

Yeah. I guess that's true. What about not just man and woman marriages and stuff like that. How's your family with that sort of stuff?

ALI:

They're open minded.

COLETTE:

Pretty sweet. Okay, cool.

ALI:

I Mean that's not really my business, like our family's business. So like if you're into it, go for it, whatever you're into.

COLETTE:

What are your political views?

ALI: I really don't have any. Every time I vote it's been liberals, because I didn't care about anybody else. I think the only time I actually voted for somebody was Obama, his first term. And that was it, I don't really pay attention because it brings negativity to my life and the way the world is going, everybody's opinions are irrelevant to somebody else, so I can't really voice my opinion. Someone will be like, oh no, yours was wrong, and then when you say something, I'm like, oh yours is wrong, and then she says, oh yours is wrong. So we can't really agree on something. The way the society is going, it's like everybody's opinion is wrong.

ANDRIANA: Because everyone has such a different opinion.

ALI:

Because like back in the day it was a lot easier, we all agreed on something. Now a days we don't because of the way social medias going, the news, the President, so like we can't really

agree on anything. That's why we left Iran, because it was like that then. Because I think America is 25 years behind everywhere else in the world, but people here think we're so much ahead on everything. We're behind. The stuff I was going through in Iran, is happening here now at this time when we're supposed to be so much more ahead of everyone else in the world.

ANDRIANA:

If you had a choice, would you have come to Harrisonburg? Were you too young to decide or does it not even matter?

ALI:

It doesn't really matter. Everyone we would've went it would have been the same thing. The same 9/11 would have happened. Same thing. If I had the option i'd go to Europe.

ANDRIANA:

To Europe, oh my god that sounds great. Just like no America at all?

ALI:

Because half of my dad's relatives live in Europe. My aunt lives in Finland,Helsinki. My cousin lives in Manchester, I have a cousin that lives in London, I have family in Germany and a family in Italy, which they don't know we exist because like I dated some stuff back that was actually available. We have a bunch of Italian family that are in Italy now and that dated back to Renaissance ages that have the same last name as we did. They were from a very wealthy family in Fiorentino.

COLETTE:

Did you do one of those like "23 and me," is that what you mean by dated back, like heritage.com?

ALI:

Yeah, something like that. I was randomly on there and typed my last name and it was like You have all this family in Italy, and there's a dude on the Italian national team who has a very similar last name to mine and it has the same meaning. So I know we have family around and my grandfather was fluent in Russian, so he could've been Russian. I know we're part German as well, because when that trial came in they went everywhere.

COLETTE:

So you talk a lot about keeping negativity out and bringing positivity in. Sorry, you don't talk a lot about it but it kind of just seems to be a theme of yours.

Ali:

My whole life has been negative so I try to stay positive.

ANDRIANA:

That's good because I feel like in some cases, people would have experiences like yours and be down for the rest of their lives.

ALI:

I realized that I don't even get offended at stuff anymore. Like my friends come and they joke, they make a bunch of terrorist jokes. I just laugh at it.

ANDRIANA:

It doesn't affect you at all?

ALI:

No as long as parents aren't involved, I don't really care. They make a bunch of jokes but it doesn't really hurt anymore. It used to in the beginning, it was tough in seventh grade.

COLETTE:

When you were in seventh grade, did you stand up to those jokes?

ALI:

I mean there was fights. There was not a week that I didn't get in a fight, over some students.

ANDRIANA:

Did you think it was going to get better?

ALI:

At the time, no. Then senior year hit I play football, and I've gotta sword it seems like. It wasn't a full ride, but like if I were to play one more year, I would have had a full ride to Tech.

COLETTE:

For football?

ALI:

Yeah. Well I guess that's when people wanted to start being my friend because people were like, "Oh Ali he's good enough," and I was like, "you all suck, get out of my life I don't affiliate with y'all." Then I turned to my friends over there, my hispanic friends, and i'm like, "Hey!" This was American football, not soccer.

ANDRIANA:

Yeah, I assumed that.

ALI:

I should've played in high school. I could've played my senior year and I was like hmm?

ANDRIANA:

What made you not?

ALI:

Because I was scared I'll get cut again because they didn't give me a specific reason why I got cut. They just cut me. He didn't tell me to work on this for next season.

COLETTE:

Did you keep playing soccer outside though? With friends?

ALI:

Yes, everything I learned about soccer was from Youtube, because I didn't get the training in high school, because I got cut so I was watching Youtube. I haven't missed a Man United game because I'm a big Manchester United fan. I haven't missed a game since '98. I could wake up at like 7:00 AM to watch the games. So it's like everything I learned is from watching tv, again, just like English and watching cartoons.

COLETTE:

I guess you got injured for both your tryouts, but what professional teams did you try out for?

ALI:

Well, one was a Scandinavian team, that was like a tier 4 team. The other one was a division 5 German team. At the division 5 German team, I messed up my shoulder, which is still messed up, and then the Scandinavian team, I tore my meniscus. After that I was like, hmm, I guess professionals not for me. So I started coaching. I was coaching at Fort Defiance high school, and then Broadway high school assistant coaches, and then EMU 2 years later for 2 seasons. By coaching a college I realized I could easily make the teams.

ANDRIANA:

Based off what?

ALI:

The talent of the schools we played. Even like watching some JV games, if I had the proper training I would have made it.

ANDRIANA:

The college team?

ALI:

Oh yeah, definitely.

ANDRIANA:

I thought you were talking about professional.

ALI:

Professional, I can see myself not D1, but D2 maybe D3. Also I didn't get to go to college because I had to work, and I didn't take the SAT.

ANDRIANA:

So after high school you dove straight into work?

ALI:

Yes, Work.

ANDRIANA:

Was that in the first windshield business?

ALI:

Well I graduated in '06. Yeah, 2006 I graduated high school. I went to Blue Ridge and realized school wasn't for me; I didn't want to go to elementary school all over again. That's what it felt like, and then I saw my parents were struggling so we started working. I started working at Marshalls.

ANDRIANA:

Okay. So this is when you start working at Marshall's and Mcdonald's?

ALI:

No, Mcdonald's was junior year of high school, and then, Marshall's, and then Sheetz. Walmart for a year, a year and a half because I went back again, and then I've been working at the restaurant since then.

COLETTE:

What about your brothers, did they go straight into business after high school too?

ALI:

One is at EMU doing business, and I was his coach for soccer because he plays goalie. One just came back from the Philippines with his wife, he got his bachelor's in the Philippines for a biochemist, and his wife has a bachelor's for RN so they could all easily work here. My older brother just graduated for bioengineering at EMU and now he lives in northern Virginia, and he wants to continue school to be a surgeon. Then the younger one is in 10th grade now. So that's everyone.

ANDRIANA:

Well thank you for letting us interview you and sharing your story.

ALI:

You're very welcome.